



RETURN TO MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Muscari racemosa



Alkanna pamphylica



Colutea melanocarpa

From our balcony on the edge of the city we can see the snow streaked heights of Ziyaret Dag, an important plant area just a one hour drive from us. It's one of those handily positioned places straddling the Mediterranean and Inner Anatolia, supporting a superb jumble of plants from both north-west and south-west Turkey. My last visit here had been twenty years ago and I was keen to refresh my memory. It turned out to be even better than I remembered. My plan had been to race up to the pass and explore the roads beyond. I had barely gone twenty minutes when a big clump of *Alkanna pamphylica* stopped me. This rather fun little borage was just the start of a borage-filled day. Big bushes of *Colutea melanocarpa* were hanging over the road and there were both pink and red forms of *Papaver lacerum* too. As I gained height the landscape became increasingly flowery, with drifts of white daisies, pink champions and rocks clothed in purple aubrieta.

One particularly flowery gully led onto bare, greenish serpentine slopes, where I first found lovely *Onosma tauricum* with its unfurling snow drops. I then realised I was in the middle of a big colony of *Muscari racemosum*, all be it well past its best. However, I was on the south slope and wondered how it was on the other side. Sure enough, there bursting from raw inhospitable rock were dream clumps of sweet-scented *Muscari racemosum*, the

Onosma tauricum





Tulipa armena



Ziyaret Mountain



Adonis flammea



Androsace maxima

largest I'd ever seen. Each big spike held whorls of dozens of inflated ivory flowers, suffused with soft lilac on top.

I finally made it to the pass and trotted off towards an interesting looking limestone knoll. Here were countless perfect clumps of *Onosma tauricum*, pretty *Pedicularis cadmea*, the crystalline daisies of *Cyanus bourgaei*, hundreds of *Muscari bourgaei* and pretty tufts of *Hesperis kotschyi*, easily missed among the abundant mauve *Aubrieta deltoidea*.

Well satisfied I drove down the north slope, grinding to a halt at the sight of glowing red goblets of *Tulipa armena* scattered across the slopes. They were in good condition and some had wonderfully curly leaves. But, it is sometimes the subtler, little things that bring the greatest pleasure. Until now I had rather dismissed *Androsace maxima*, a rather sparse and slender annual. Yet, seen here among the tulips their drifts en masse created an enchanting carpet of coarse reddish calyces bearing little white flowers.

Lower down the fiery colours of more tulips combined with patches of the even more intense *Adonis flammea* and abundant



Hesperis kotschyi



Onosma tauricum blue form



Onobrychis cornuta



Fritillaria crassifolia

yellow-green *Cruciata taurica*. And, there was just time to look at one more limestone slope and what a good decision that was - plant of the day was waiting for me there. On a scree slope I caught sight of *Fritillaria crassifolia* growing with another colony of *Muscari racemosum* and when I investigated further there were hundreds of both mingled together. Sadly, their chosen slope was also a quarry and gradually the colony was getting smaller!

Crossing the slope I looked for more, but rather than bulbs my eyes alighted on a gorgeous soft-blue form of *Onosma tauricum*. They looked even better alongside the vivid carmine of *Onobrychis cornuta*, one of those spiny, graze-proof classics of Inner Anatolia. It's not the photographers friend though especially when the best clump of *Onosma* sits between big spiky hummocks, but sometimes one has to suffer for one's art and lay among them I did to capture these lovely unfurling cymes.

I'm still picking odd the spine out from where I'd rather not.

Onosma tauricum blue form

