



# WHITE MOUNTAIN

*Tragopogon dubius* & *Papaver rhoeas*



*Tragopogon dubius* hybrids



A full week of total lockdown (bayram at the end of ramazan) was looming and I needed a plant fix to tide me over. Some little gems require some extra effort to reach on top of which they can be rather scattered and localised, so it's helpful to have some idea of where to look. So, for my next outing I teamed up with another encumbent in Turkey who was also obliged to remain here, Ian Green. We lived about three hours apart but roughly in the middle lays Ak Dag or White Mountain. It had been unseasonably hot this week and I didn't manage much sleep before I was off on the two hour drive - initially propped up with a pint of strong coffee. But, as is so often the case with plant hunting, something exciting turns up and the adrenaline does the rest.

Now the big yellow daisies of *Tragopogon dubius* don't normally get the pulse racing that fast, lovely though they are. However, today I found a simply wonderful population along the roadside. For the most part they were the typical yellow, but suddenly I had a whole range of colours from white to peach, bronze of plum-stained pink. They were perfect in the early morning light, especially backlit mixed with that ubiquitous red delight *Papaver rhoeas*. In fact after some investigation it would seem these are a hybrid population (possibly with *T. pterodes*). It was just what I needed to blow away the remaining cobwebs.





*Omphalodes luciliae* on Ak Dag



*Omphalodes luciliae*

Meeting up and then driving higher, passed stands of orange *Glaucium corniculatum*, yellow verbascums and bushy plants of white *Alkanna orientalis*. The landscape became grander with high cliffs, snows and tantalising rocky slopes (if you like that sort of thing). The harshness was punctuated by occasional vivid green pastures, marsh fringed lakes and a rushing stream tore threw the valley, fuelled by the fast melting snow.

Setting off towards a good-looking set of cliffs we were after a choice little delight that preferred rock crevices and shady nooks. The purple of *Aubrieta deltoidea* was everywhere, but careful searching also revealed the pretty sky-blue saucers of *Omphalodes luciliae*, the very plant I was hoping to find in flower. They were lovely, sprouting from the rocks with a superb backdrop of mountains behind, even if getting into position did involve balancing on narrow rock ledges. The rocks were perfect for clambering among, grippy and with plenty of hand holds.

At the top of the ridge the ground 'flattened' and there was *Lamium cariense* and the interesting bicoloured *Astragalus pelliger*, whose flowers opened soft yellow and matured wine red. The delicate chequered bells of *Fritillaria whittallii* also appeared and then on the slope below was a fabulous garden of alpine plants with big clumps of *Geranium cinereum* subsp. *subcaulescens* crowding the limestone pavement with aubrieta, the gnarled spreading stems of *Prunus prostratus* and metallic



*Fritillaria whittallii*



*Astragalus pelliger*



*Geranium cinereum subsp. subcaulescens*



*Muscari neglectum*

silver clumps of emerging *Papaver pilosum*. The landscape was magnificent and the plants kept coming with the cliff gardens a feast of colour with many more fritillaries appearing amidst abundant aubrieta. Around snow patches were *Anemone blanda*, a few *Scilla bifolia* too and I found tidy domes of another plant I was after - *Saponaria pumilio*. Though not in flower these and the big clumps of *Papaver pilosum* were reason enough to plan a return visit in a couple of weeks. The foliage of the latter had been a pleasant surprise as was a reworking of rather ignored classic. *Muscari neglectum* is not the most glamorous of its genus, even if it is the most widespread. Even its name seems to suggest we ignore it. Yet, on this exposed, heavily insolated ridge this ubiquitous bulb had had a makeover. The leaves had curled in attractive reddish tumbles, which combined effectively with the tight little spikes of purple-blue flowers.

These together with the dazzling daisies of the early morning taught me never to underestimate such familiar plants. Given a chance they can match their showier cousins. Such beauty can also be brief. Driving back all of the *Tragopogon* had closed (as they do by midday) and their rich display rendered invisible.



*Papaver pilosum*