

This summer, Anne and I have booked a botanical trip with the ISU. Why? Plants! Always plants! We see thousands of plants every day and now, when we have ten days off, it is again about plants! We go looking for plants in the tiring mountains. And they are not for sale, no, on the contrary, it is prohibited to even touch the plants. Only to look at, like women if you are married.

We take a plane to Milano. What a rush in this city! Because of the workload in the nursery we had asked a travel agency to organize our trip. Because of the rush in the travel agency, they delegated it to the apprentice. After landing, we had to take three trains. Three trains! With all that luggage and the heavy mountaineering boots. We haven't seen a mountain yet and we are tired already.

After the plane and the three trains, we arrive at Rovereto. Riiiiing... "It's Andres". "pppffff we are in the station now". "In half an hour I will be there". Opposite to the station we find a café. "Uuuf, good, fresh beer". RRRiiiiing: Andres at the other end: "Jan, Peter van Reckum, an American participant arrived some minutes ago in the station. Go to him and stay together." "An American?! Fifteen people are waiting before the railway station, with bag and baggage.. . Who is the American? I go to a man with BMI of 26. That must be our friend. "Are you American?" "No, I'm Italian" the man answers with a friendly face and Italian accent. "Excuse me sir". I go to another man, stylishly clothed and BMI of 29. That must be our friend, for sure. "Are you American?". "Perdone?" answers the strong man a little bit annoyed with a strange look in his eyes. "Perdone signore, moltissimo perdone." Leaning against the front of the station, I remark him for the first time, in the burning sun, is a rather slim man, tireless, big moustache. He forgot his cowboy hat and horse, very informal. "That 's him!" He looks like a perennial grower has to look. Tough, trained, strong hands that can tear into small pieces a 3 year old *Miscanthus floridulus*. He has a confident look in his blue eyes that betrays his assurance that he will be picked up soon and that this trip will be unforgettable. "Are you American?", I ask it with some hesitation, looking at his strong arms and hands. "Ah ISU? Yes, I'm American, Andres phoned me that someone would welcome me." "OK, follow me please, we are drinking a good beer over there in that bar." After half an hour, indeed, Andres appears with his forever young better half Margrith and our sportsmanlike botanist guide, Irene Senfter, who jumps very elegantly out of the car. They say that there is no place in the car for three more people, even if our American friend's BMI is only 22. We take a taxi to the mountain hotel. The nature and the atmosphere changes every one hundred meter that we rise higher in the mountains and at the end we arrive in a unique place with a unique panorama. Mountain Hotel Rifugio Graziani shows off in Brentonico, showing 360° of beauty. The tiredness disappears ... I am sitting in the sun, breathing the thin air at 1500 meter above the Mediterranean ... full of overload boats

Regina and Andreas welcome us and the other participants seep in, one after the other. "We are with 15" says our president Andres. "Coming from 6 countries". Regina and Andreas go home and will join us again at Wednesday for a hike in the Monte Stivo 2000m.



In the small region of Monte Baldo in the Italian pre-alps, in regio Veneto, you can find 40% of the total alpine flora! The glaciers didn't cover the highest points of this place. That's the reason that the flora here is so abundant.



We start our botanist tour in the Corna Piana nature reserve, which starts at the front door of the Refugio. At about 1600 meter average height walking to San Valentino and back we find *Thalictrum*, *Leucanthemum*, *Pulsatilla alpina* =limestone, *Campanula barbata*, *Rhododendron hirsutum* (limestone), *Vulneraria*, *Pzedicularis tuberosa*, *Hepatica*, *Alchemilla alpine*, *Plantago atrata*, *Pederota bonarota*, *Valeriana saxatilis*, *Physoplexis comosa*!, *Globularia montana*, *Valeriana officinalis* (Pink), *Nigritella nigra*= men's troth=very rare, *Plantago media*. We go very slowly because of the mass of plants we discover. *Rhinanthus* (parasite on grass), *Laserpitium latifolium*, the orchid *Traumsteinera globosa*, *Centaurea pseudophygia* syn. *Nervosa*. The group is very enthusiastic looking for nice plants, Irene looks it up in a heavy book that she carries with her. *Lilium martagon* doesn't miss, *Senecio doricum*, *Hippogaris uniflora*, *Festuca spectabilis* ssp *spectabilis*, *Adenoostyles alliariae*, *Rhododendron ferruginum* (acid soil), *Doronicum austyriacum*, *orobanche gracilis*, *Lilium bulbiferum*, *Bupleurum ranunculoides*, *Veronica fruticulosa*, *Petasites paradoxus*, *Stachys alopecurus*, *Knautia baldensis* (endemic), *Senecio alpinum*. Together with a well deserved meal we flush all these plants with a good glass of wine in a nice atmosphere.



The next day we will climb the so called highest peak of the Monte Baldo ridge: the Monte Altissimo di Nago, that isn't the highest. The top will give us after 400 height meters an unforgettable panoramic view over lake Garda and his small villages along the border. Some places are extremely abundantly flowering with the same plants as yesterday, embellished by *Tanacetum rupestre*, *Globularia cordifolia*, *Saxifraga paniculata*, *Hieracium villosum*, *Peucedanum rablense* (ex austriaca), *Cerastium arvense*, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and an immense field of thousands *Gentiana lutea*.



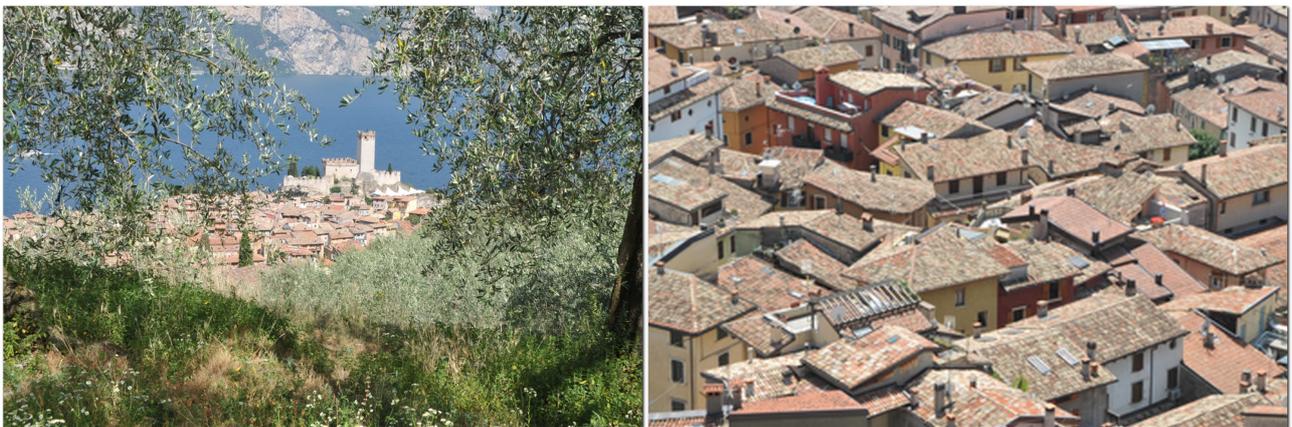
During these years we remember the first world war. Here in this beautiful place soldiers of Austria-Hungary and their enemy Italy cut trenches in the limestone rocks as witnesses of a worse time. Anne, Wil, Margrith and Jan went the same way back. The others take a longer way with bright views. Back in our guesthouse Peter Heutinck 's anniversary is celebrated with a fresh beer.

Now it's Wednesday and we will change our accommodation. We descend to the beautiful Garda Lake. But first the fittest will climb the Monte Stivo (2000m, coming from 1150m) with our professionals Andreas and Reginae. In this place we first meet many vegetable cultures. New alpine plants are: *Cyclamen purpurascens*, *Rosa glauca*, *Rhinanthes alecterolophus*, *Stachys alpine*, *Geranium purenaicum*, *phaeum* and *robertianum* on the same square meter, *Cruciata glabra*, *Tanacetum corymbosum*, *Listeria ovata*, *Betonica alopecurus*, *Veronica chamaedrys*, *Gentiana*

utriculosa and and and. Before we check in at our new accommodation the organizer and President of this fantastic organization ISU, Andres and Margrith, must leave as they have other obligations. Many thanks Andres for the good job.



In the late afternoon we check in in the Panorama Residence hotel. What a view we have from the hotel at the Via Panoramica in Malcesine, while the European Union is going through the heaviest political crisis ever! Descending from the mountains, now our skins feel the agreeable warmth and we forget a possible Grexit.



Thursday morning we take the cable car from the town of Malcesine to the mountain station at 1750 m above sea level. Our path takes us along the Monte Baldo ridge along the Cima delle Pozette and to the Cima Longino (2200m). Andreas, Regina and Peter (USA) are never tired and reach the more demanding Cima Valdritta peak. We walk slowly and find *Horminum pyrenaicum*, *Aconitum napellus*, *Acinos alpinus*, *Leontopodium alpinum*, *Geum montanum*, *Cirsium montanum*, *Anthyllis vulneraria ssp baldensis*, *Poa alpine ssp vivipara*, *Chenopodium bonus-henricus* that we some days before ate in mountain hotel, *Pedicularis nudicaule*, *Tofieldia caliculata*, *Saxifraga caesia*, *Callianthemum kernerianum*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Polygala comosa*. In the afternoon, again we descend to the lake and enjoy the warmth. In the hotel we continue talking, enjoying a big fresh "Weissenbier". Friday is the last day for the group. We take it somewhat easier and take the boat from Malcesine to Limone. Once Limone was the center of lemon production. The stone constructions that were built as a protection for the lemon trees are converted into hotels, the lemon trees converted into ornamental plants. Now lemons come from Sicily. It is 30-35°C, most of us are a little bit tired and stay in the touristic city, enjoying the touristic atmosphere and the rest. Peter Van Reckum, Peter Heutinck, Irene our sportsmanlike guide and the undersigned go again for a 800 height meters walk, partly in the wood on steep small paths. With water from a spring, tired legs and no food we do an intensive walk up and down the mountain. No time to look for plants nor writing down the names we have a fantastic trip looking at many butterflies and beautiful views over the lake. Even the name of that place I forget. One plant we will remember: the beautiful leaves of some big *Helleborus niger*: patent-patent! We have very nice weather except during our boot trip back to the hotel. Black air and stormy wind tell us that the beautiful trip is over. Most of

us go home tomorrow, back to business. Anne and I will stay three days longer and so does the sun.



We have had again a very enjoyable group. It was top! Good food, good organizer, good guide, good hotels, good position. Our president Andres spoke about Kirgistan as the next excursion. Or Turkey. Nice place of course that hopefully will attract also younger people.



And Anne and I after all, we are very happy that we have chosen for this plants trip!



Thanks to Jan Spruyt for the above text and pictures !