

Orchids of Newfoundland. An Orchid Conservation Alliance Ecotour

July 13-21, 2024.

Participants: Heidi Arno (Modesto CA), Todd Boland (Guide, St. Johns Newfoundland), Mary Gerritsen (OCA rep, San Mateo, CA), Kay Klumb (San Francisco, CA), Tom Parks (San Mateo, CA), Ron Parsons (South San Francisco, CA), Ben and Catherine Rostron (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada).

The naturalist/guide for our trip was Todd Boland, Research Horticulturist at the Memorial University Botanic Garden in St. John's Newfoundland. He is the author of a number of books including the *Wildflowers and Ferns of Newfoundland; Trees and Shrubs of Newfoundland and Labrador; Trees and Shrubs of the Maritimes; Wildflowers of Nova Scotia; Wildflowers of New Brunswick;* and *Wildflowers of Fogo Island and Change Islands.*

We were also fortunate to have Ben Rostron on the trip. Ben is a well-known expert on the Native Orchids of North America, as well as a past-president of the Native Orchid Conference and is often asked for his opinion regarding North American orchid species identification. His wife Catherine is an orchid expert in her own right. Ron Parsons is a renowned orchid and flower photographer, with an encyclopedic knowledge of both flora and fauna. Ron is a co-author (with Mary Gerritsen, the OCA tour leader) of a number of orchid and wildflower books including *Masdevallias, Gems of the Orchid World, A Compendium of Miniature Orchid Species* (1st and 2nd editions), *American Orchid Society Guide to Orchids and their Culture*, and *Calochortus, Mariposa Lilies and their Relatives*. I should also mention that Ben is a geologist, and his explanations of the rock formations, fossils, etc. added significantly to our enjoyment of Newfoundland. The rest of us (Kay, Heidi and myself) were lucky to have so much expertise along on the journey!

July 13: All of the Californians set out for Newfoundland, arriving at various times in Deer Lake, CA. Ron, Tom, Heidi and Mary all arrived on the same flight from Toronto, landing at approximately 2 am on July 14. Kay had planned to arrive in the early afternoon, but flight snags resulted in a much later arrival time (sans luggage, of course!). Ben and Catherine started off on the trip much earlier, driving across Canada from Alberta, with various stops en route for Native Orchids.

July 14. Everyone (most of us still quite sleepy) met in the breakfast room of the Holiday Inn Express in Deer Lake. After a short delay (retrieving Kay's misdirected luggage which fortunately had appeared at the airport), the group set out for Gros Morne National Park in a convoy of three vehicles. Our first stop was a small park on the Humber River, very close to the Deer Lake Airport. Hiking a short distance along the Humber River Trail we soon encountered our first orchids: *Corallorhiza maculata* and a very impressive specimen of *Platanthera orbiculata*. We also found a few other interesting plants including the one-sided wintergreen (*Orthilia secunda*).

We then entered Gros Morne National Park, heading for an area known as the Table Lands. However, before reaching this surreal barren landscape featuring a close-up view of the earth's

mantle, we stopped at small parking lot for the Lomond River Trail. Within a radius of 100 yards of the lot, we found many orchids: *Platanthera dilatata*, *P. huronensis*, *P. aquilonis*, as well as *Corallorhiza striata* var. *vreelandii* and *Spiranthes romanzoffiana*. We then made our way along a boardwalk into a bog, featuring carnivorous plants (*Utricularia minor*, *Drosera rotundifolia* and *Drosera intermedia* as well as *Sarracenia purpurea*) and two more *Platanthera* species, i.e. *P. clavellata* and *P. psychodes*. Unfortunately, due to a “heat dome” the previous week, the hundreds of *Cypripedium reginae* in the bog were finished. It was truly a shame; there were magnificent, large plants in the bog; we did find one lingering flower. This species was to have been one of the featured species of our trip! Oh well, we have no control of the weather!

We stopped in Woody Cove for a seafood lunch. The café also had a gift shop with lots of local handicrafts: knitted socks, hats and mitts, quilts, paintings, carvings and home-made fudge.

After lunch we made our way to the Tablelands, an area famous for its geologic features of a green, forested slope on one side of the valley, and a vast, treeless, almost plant less massif of mantle (serpentine) on the other. In the valley between was a large area of depauperate soil. Here we found a few more orchids, and many carnivorous plants (*Sarracenia purpurea*, *Drosera rotundifolia*, *Drosera intermedia*, *Utricularia cornuta*, *Pinguicula vulgaris*). After our walk amongst the serpentine area, we drove to the end of the road, reaching Trout River.

We turned around, and headed back to the main highway, then north to a place called Cow Head (named for a large rock visible from the sea) where we stayed at the Shallow Bay Motel and Cabins. The views from our rooms were lovely. All of us had ocean facing rooms, just a few steps from the ocean. The bay, as advertised, was very shallow, only a few inches to a few feet deep for the most part. It featured lots of bird life (mergansers, sea gulls, gannets, black ducks, eider ducks) and gorgeous sunsets over the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with the low hills of Québec off in the distance. We had two committed knitters on our trip, and apparently Cow Head was well known for a local yarn shop. Both ladies purchased an ample supply of yarn, looking forward to a future hand made craft featuring yard dyed with the natural colors of Newfoundland. The restaurant featured what was to be a pretty standard seafood fare in Newfoundland: cod fish burgers, fish and chips, seafood chowder, and deep-fried cod tongues (yes, tongues!).

July 15. Today we had planned a boat trip on the famous Western Brook Pond. The morning was drizzly, foggy, and the visibility minimal. However, on the off chance the fog would lift, we drove to the Western Brook Pond parking lot, and started off on the 3 km trek to the pond and the tour boats. Along the way we admired the various bog plants. Again, lots of orchids (*Platanthera aquilonis*, *P. clavellata*, *P. dilatata*, *P. huronensis*, *P. orbiculata*) were evident. Apparently this was also a good place to see *Arethusa bulbosa*, but the heat dome of the previous week had finished these off. The bog also featured more of the carnivorous plants, and in some more grassy areas, many *Iris versicolor*. Two rose species were particularly attractive, *Rosa nitida* and *Rosa virginiana*. Other prevalent plants in the bog area included the small dwarf conifers (white fir and larch). When we finally reached the boat area, there was a fairly large crowd, all hoping for the fog to lift. It didn't and about a half hour after we arrived, the tour was cancelled.

Fortunately, our money was refunded almost immediately. We walked back to the parking lot, taking lots of photographs along the way, then travelled to Rocky Harbor for lunch at the Sunset Café. After lunch we made our way to an area called Berry Head Pond. The pond had a boardwalk surrounding the pond, so we went for another hike. Here we found many impressive specimens of *Platanthera orbiculata* in the mossy woods surrounding the pond, as well as *P. dilatata* and *P. clavellata*, as well as a new *Platanthera* species, *P. obtusata*. We also found one plant of an interesting mycoheterotroph, commonly known as Indian pipes (*Monotropa uniflora*). We also found two species of *Lobelia* (*L. dortmanna* and *L. kalmii*). We even spotted *Cypripedium acaule* here, although the flowers were long past. The pond had a covering of the pond lily *Nuphar variegata*, with characteristic small yellow flowers. In an open area, Ben spotted some plants of the incredibly tiny orchid, *Malaxis unifolia*. It's still a mystery how he spotted them; even when you knew they were there it was hard to spot them!

Next we did the coastal trail nearby. Here we found quite a few plants of *Platanthera psychodes*, as well as more of the *Iris versicolor*, and a second native iris species, *I. hookeri*. We found many of the hemiparasitic lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, the cute common eyebrights (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) as well as two species of *Scutellaria*, *S. galericulata* and *S. lateriflora*. A locally common species, known as Giesecke's harebell (*Campanula gieseckiana*) was found growing in amongst the rocks and grasses near the shore. Two species of dogwood, *Cornus canadensis* (bunchberry) and *C. suecica* were also locally common. Many carnivorous plants of the genus *Drosera* (*D. anglica*, *intermedia* and *rotundifolia*) as well as the butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) were highly abundant in the crevices between the rocks. The beach pea (*Lathyrus palustris*) was also found here. Overnight in Shallow Bay.

July 16. Today we left Shallow Bay/Cow Head, and traveled north on the peninsula. We drove over to a coastal area just north of Belburns with some picturesque fishing shacks. Almost immediately upon exiting our vehicle, we found several plants of *Malaxis monophyllos*, as well as a few *Platanthera hookeri* and *Cypripedium parviflorum* although these were long past blooming. This area also had lots of *Platanthera dilatata*, *P. aquilonis* and *P. huronensis*, as well as a profusion of harebells, gentianopsis (closed up because it was not sunny) *Gentianopsis detonsa* ssp. *nesophila* and many delicious native strawberries.

The next stop was a limestone barrens at Point Riche Peninsula, next to the interpretative center. This bizzare landscape had lots of interesting plants, one of which was the rare orchid, *Pseudorchis straminea* (locally known as the vanilla-scented orchid). This region, i.e. Newfoundland, is the only place in North America where this species occurs. More faded *Cypripedium parviflorum* were found in amongst some of the greener vegetation, but the flowers were finished. Other orchids in the area included *Platanthera dilatata* and *P. aquilonis*. Other unusual plants included a prostate willow species, and a saxifrage. We found numerous *Iris versicolor* at this spot as well.

After lunch at the Anchor Café in Port-aux-Choix, we traveled further up the limestone barrens to the lighthouse at the end of the road. Although we found no new orchids, we did find more of the *Iris hookeri* (close to the ocean) and *Iris versicolor* (towards the road). Most of the plants

here were highly adapted to the continuous winds, and were prostrate in form. One interesting species here was *Gentianopsis detonsa* ssp. *nesophila*. The rocks here were full of fossils, and there was an ancient Dorset Eskimo village site as well. Apparently the Eskimo village site was a summer camp, and sited here because of the continuous winds, which reduced the issue with biting flies. These ancient people lived off the sea, catching fish and hunting seals, which at that time were very numerous here.

Our accommodation for the next two nights was the Plum Point Motel and Cottages. Everyone enjoyed their comfortable, two-bedroom cottage with a well equipped kitchen and sitting area. The onsite restaurant had the usual fare of local seafood, as well as the “turkey, pork and beef” fare for the tour buses that frequently visit this area. Several of the group tried the local Newfoundland rum, “Screech” , which I’m told is the sound one makes after tasting it!

July 17. Today we headed north to the Ferry Terminal at St. Barbe. The ferry here runs twice a day, crossing the Gulf of St. Lawrence and heading north to Blanc Sablon on the southernmost coast of Québec, immediately adjacent to the border with Labrador. A trail led from the parking lot around the rocky point. Our goal here was to find *Malaxis monophyllos* var. *brachypoda*, several plants of which were soon spotted. Also found here were more of the *Pedicularis palustris*, *Pinguicula vulgaris*, and *Iris hookeri*. Further up the coast we stopped at Flowers Cove, driving over to the light house. This area had lots of prostrate-growing alpine flowers, as well as the most abundant display of *Iris hookeri* seen on the trip. We also found some color variants of this iris species, with some light blue forms as well as one that was pink!

We had lunch at the GNP Diner in Flowers Cove. We traveled up the coast a bit to a site near Eddies cove where Todd thought we might find *Neottia borealis*, but after bush-wacking for an hour or so, we gave up. The rest of the group continued back to the Plum Point motel, but Ron, who was driving the vehicle I was in, spotted more *Iris versicolor* growing in a bog, so we stopped for the photo opportunity.

July 18. Today we head north to the far end of Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. Despite lots of warning signs about moose (apparently the population of mouse in Newfoundland is over 100,000!) and caribou, no animals were spotted. We drove into the town of St. Anthony to check into our hotel, the Grenfell Heritage, then headed to Cape Norman, a desolate rocky limestone barren. This area had lots of orchids. Earlier in the season we would have found lots of *Galearis rotundifolia* and the yellow ladyslipper, *Cypripedium parviflorum*. However, all of the cypripediums were finished, and we only found one very tired looking *Galearis rotundifolia*. We did however find lots of the *Pseudorchis straminea* (in much better shape) and *Dactylorhiza viridis*, and a half dozen or so *Neottia convallarioides*. Other flowering plants included *Iris hookeri*, and a fireweed relative, *Chamerion latifolium*. There were lots of plants of the moss campion, *Silene acaulis*, a few of which were still in flower.

After wandering around the barrens for quite a while, we climbed back into our vehicles and headed to one of the most famous sights in this part of Newfoundland, L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park. This UNESCO World Heritage site houses the remains of an 11th century

Viking settlement, the first evidence of European presence in North America. The visitor center displayed some of the artifacts found here, and a guided tour explained the mounds, the iron forge, and the reconstructed settlement at the end. Our visit here was complicated by a torrential downpour, complete with thunder and lightning! We were all soaked by the time we finished the tour, but it was a fascinating visit to the past. We had dinner at a seafood place (Northern Delight) nearby, the most memorable aspect of which (at least for Todd) was the dessert-fried ice cream.

July 19. We had pre-purchased tickets for the Dark Tickle Boat Tour, which left St. Anthony at 9 am. It was our first sunny day of the trip, and we set out on tour boat for the outer harbor region. We were lucky to spot 2 Harbor porpoises, 5 Atlantic white-beaked dolphins and one Humpback whale. The dolphins followed the boat for some distance, diving in and around the boat and playing around. The whale also stayed near the boat for some time, surfacing, and repeatedly diving giving us quite the display of the tail fluke. It's quite common for whales to be spotted in the outer harbor area. We also learned what a "tickle" is! In Newfoundland, it is the word used for a geographical feature of a narrow, salt water strait, such as an entrance to a harbor, or between islands or other land masses.

After lunch at Tim Hortons (a Canadian fast food chain with mediocre food, but excellent donuts and coffee), we headed off to another limestone barrens, Burnt Cape. On the way we stopped briefly at the entrance to Pistolet Bay Provincial Park, where we found a few plants of *Corallorhiza trifida* (in fruit) in the woods near the entrance gate. We would have probably had to have come in June to see them in flower. From Burnt Cape we could see Cape Norman to the west, across Cape Norman Bay. The landscape here was also stark and rocky, with many low growing alpine-like plants. We hiked along a trail beneath a tall escarpment where we found more orchids, including dozens of the *Dactylorhiza viridis*. Other species included *Platanthera dilatata*, *P. obtusata*, *P. aquilonis* and *Pseudorchis straminea*.

We topped off the day with dinner at the "Daily Catch" in St. Lunaire, which featured fresh caught halibut and cod. This was probably the best seafood meal we had on the trip.

July 20. We headed back to Cow Head, with a few interesting stops along the way. One was to see the thrombolite formations at Flowers Cove. Thrombolites are clotted accretionary structures that form in shallow water. These are made by the trapping, binding and cementation of sediment by biofilms formed by cyanobacteria. These are found only in a few places in the world, and this site in Newfoundland is quite famous with the geologists. We had lunch at the Viking 430 (*excellent seafood chowder, best of the trip!*). We stopped at the Arches Provincial Park, which featured three large natural rock arches created by tidal action. We also stopped at a boggy site where *Platanthera unalascensis* had once been found, but we did not find any. We stayed overnight at the Shallow Bay Motel.

July 21. Todd, Kay and Heidi headed back to Deer Lake to catch early flights. Ron, Tom, Ben, Catherine and I decided we would chance the Western Brook Pond boat tour, and we were in luck. We were able to get tickets for the 11 am tour. This time we took a shuttle (a large golf

cart) over to the boats, and we on board shortly after 11 am. This is one of the most iconic scenes of Gros Morne national park, featuring a spectacular glacier-carved land-locked fjord, waterfalls, and steep rocky cliffs. Sometimes moose and caribou are also spotted, but we did not see any. So glad we were able to see this this Canadian signature experience! Ben and Catherine continued on their native orchid exploration of Newfoundland, whereas Ron, Tom and I traveled south to Deer Lake, stopping for some photos of the rocky shores along the way. Soon we were at the airport. Todd's flight back to St. John's had been delayed and we were able to have a short visit before boarding our respective flights and heading homeward.

Definitely an experience that I would like to do again, perhaps earlier in the season when we could spot some of the orchids that we missed on this trip due to the unexpected early hot weather, e.g. *Arethusa bulbosa*, *Galearis rotundifolia*, *Cypripedium acaule*, *Cypripedium parviflorum*, and *Cypripedium reginae*. However, I think we all viewed the trip as a resounding success. One of the most visual memories of the trip were the literally millions of *Platanthera dilatata* and fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*) that grew almost everywhere. We saw 21 different orchid species (just over half of the 40 species known to occur in Newfoundland), 18 of which were in bloom. The geology was spectacular, and the many alpine plants, picturesque fishing villages and lighthouses made for wonderful scenic memories of our adventure.