

Borealis

the newsletter of the



May 1994

P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514

Anchorage Chapter May Meeting

The Key to Plant Identification *with Garry Davies*

Monday, May 2 1994 at 7:30 p.m.

This month's meeting will be held at the
**Science Building of the
University of Alaska - Anchorage,
Room 248**

See map on page 4 for directions.

Do you wish to find out how Verna can tell one plant from another without looking at her books? We will explore the world of keys and how to key out plants using taxonomic texts. No mystery, just plain fun! *Garry Davies*, from the UAA Biology Department, will lead this hands-on program, and help us all get ready for the coming field season.

A short board meeting will be held beforehand, beginning at 7.15 p.m.

The Mini Botany Program will be given by Trevor Ricketts. He will discuss some of the survival strategies adopted by alpine plants.

The Plant Family Program this month will feature the Plantaginaceae (Plantain family), and will be given by Julia Ricketts. See page 2.

Mystery Plant

This prostrate, dwarf shrub albeit usually inconspicuous and largely overlooked as it blends in with mosses and other low vegetation, absolutely explodes and garners much attention with its bright pink, 4-6 mm wide, star-shaped, pedicellate (stalked) flowers in mid-summer.



It is one of at least five similar-looking, but unrelated, matted species that occur in the alpine and arctic tundra regions. Can you name any of the others? This species can be distinguished by its much-branched, woody stem, that gives the appearance of an ancient trained bonsai. Its thick, leathery, evergreen leaves are 4-6 mm long and 2-3 mm wide, and are positioned opposite each other on the stem.

Answer on Page 3.

Anchorage Chapter News

The May meeting will be the last before the summer recess, but there will be plenty of field trips to keep us busy. The next membership meeting will be the traditional pot-luck supper on October 3, so plan to bring your favorite plant slides from the summer. When we reconvene we will have a new meeting place. **From October we will meet at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum, at 4721 Aircraft Dr., near Lake Hood.** We are looking forward to our cooperation with the museum. In return for the meeting space we will be helping with the landscaping around the museum - using native plants of course. Last year the museum attracted 31 000 visitors, so there'll be plenty of people to admire the plantings. Volunteers are needed to help with this project, which is scheduled to begin in late May. If you wish to help contact Jean Poor at

Field Trip Schedule

The summer field trip schedule is shaping up promising a great season of native plant exploring. The detailed schedule will be mailed to ANPS members in early May describing the trips, the difficulty of the terrain, and the location of the car-pool meeting places. Here's to a great season!

Sunday, May 15, 9 a.m.	Wishbone Hill
Sunday, May 29, 9 a.m.	Bird Ridge
Monday, May 30, 9 a.m.	Nancy Lakes
Saturday, June 4, 9 a.m.	Lazy Mountain
Wednesday, June 8, 7 p.m.	Hillside Park
Sat. & Sun., June 11, 12, 10 a.m. Sat.	
Tern Lake Campground and Upper Lake Trail	
Monday, June 13, 7 p.m.	John's Park
Friday, June 17, 6:30 p.m.	Kincaid Park
Saturday, June 18, 9 a.m.	Wallace Mountain
Saturday, July 9, 9 a.m.	Wolverine Peak
Sunday, July 10, 9 a.m.	Crow Pass
Fri., Sat. & Sun., July 15, 16, 17, 7 p.m. Fri.	Devil Lake
Sunday, July 31, 10 a.m.	Bird Creek Park
Saturday, August 13, 9 a.m.	Hatcher Pass & Willow
Saturday, August 27, 9:30 a.m.	Edmonds Lake

The Plantain Family: Plantaginaceae

In Alaska this family is represented by just one genus, *Plantago*. The name can be translated as "Sole of the Foot". There are six species, one with two sub-species. Plants in this family could easily be mistaken for monocots at first glance, as the leaves of most species are long and narrow, and the veins appear to be parallel or palmate. The tiny flowers are borne on a leafless spike, and are four-parted. The fruit is a nut.

Many species are weedy, and at least two have been introduced to Alaska. The most widespread is Common Plantain (*Plantago major* var. *major*). This plant is common along trails and was called White Man's Foot by the Indians. Apparently the seeds were brought to this country from Europe, possibly as a grain source as the tiny nuts can be used as a cereal or in breads.

Alaska has one native, dryland species, *Plantago canescens* that is common in S. Central Alaska, and is quite obvious in bloom. There are three native, wetland species found in coastal areas. *Plantago maritima* (Goosetongue) is the most common.



Plantago maritima (Goosetongue)

The leaves of Common Plantain and Goosetongue may be eaten in salads or cooked, although care should be taken in distinguishing Goosetongue from the toxic Arrow Grass. The fresh leaves of Common Plantain can be pounded into a paste and used to stop bleeding.

What's in a Name?

Echinopanax horridum (Devil's Club)

A translation from Latin of the scientific name for this plant would be Horrible Weapon. It is also known as *Oplopanax horridus*. "Oplon" is derived from a Greek word, 'Hoplon', also meaning weapon. 'Echino' is Greek for hedgehog - a small, spiny mammal found in Europe. Echinoderms (sea urchins) are literally 'spiny skins'. 'Panax' can be translated as panacea. Many members of the Ginseng family, to which this genus belongs, are revered by herbalists for their medicinal properties.



The species and common names are highly appropriate, as anyone who likes to venture into the moist woodlands where this plant grows will already know. The club at the end of the stalk is totally spine-covered, and stems, leaf stalks, and even the underside of the leaves are all well armed. A careless brush against this plant can result in the spines penetrating the skin and breaking off, and if they are not removed immediately they may fester for days. One reason for all the heavy armory may be the highly nutritious leaves. Without their spines they would be defenseless against hungry herbivores.

Thanks to volunteers at Garden Week at the Sears Mall

Many thanks to Chuck Adsit, Garry Davies, Ginny Moran, Jean and Jim Poor, and Verna Pratt for helping to staff tables for the ANPS on April 9, at the Garden Week at the Sears Mall Show. The event was a great way for us to become better known in the community, and many visitors admired our educational exhibits. Well done.

T-Shirt Competition

The ANPS needs some free advertising in the form of a T-Shirt, but what to put on it? As of this month we are announcing a T-Shirt design competition. Tell all your creative friends! For anyone with artistic inclinations this is the chance of a lifetime. In addition to the artist winning a mystery prize, limitless prestige will follow for years to come.

Submissions will be taken until November 7, and judging will take place by the Anchorage Chapter December meeting. To submit your entry either mail it to Ginny Moran, C/O ANPS, P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514, or bring it to the October or November Anchorage Chapter meetings. Call Ginny Moran for more details at w() or h().

Mystery Plant Answer



Alpine Azalea (*Loiseleuria procumbens*), a member of the heath family, the Ericaceae. Other species it somewhat resembles are: *Silene acaulis* (Caryophyllaceae), *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (Saxifragaceae), and both *Douglasia arctica*, and *D. gormani* (Primulaceae).

A Short Tail of Spring by Trevor Ricketts

Last year was our first spring in Alaska. We had arrived in Anchorage in October '92 and had never seen our yard without snow. Imagine then, our eager anticipation as the snow melted! What would be revealed? The landscaping that the owner of our house had proudly told us about slowly appeared - two well-designed raised beds bounded by rocks. We watched excitedly as shoots slowly appeared, only to find that many turned into short, rather strange-looking plants - *Equisetum arvense* or Horsetail. This pernicious little weed was everywhere, and as it turned out, was here to stay. At first, short, hollow, segmented stems appeared, growing from extensive creeping underground rhizomes. The stems looked a little like asparagus, and were topped by a spore-bearing cone-like head. Later on, barren, segmented stems appeared bearing whorls of narrow-jointed branches, giving the appearance of small evergreen trees, or a horse's tail. Horsetail may be a backyard weed, but, I have discovered that even if I can't learn to love it, it does deserve respect and even has some value.



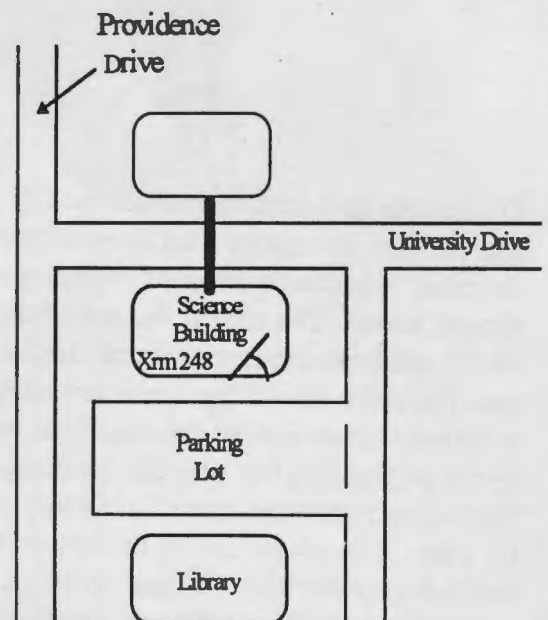
Horsetail is a member of an ancient family, some members of which grew to the size of trees in Paleozoic times (approximately 350 million years ago). It is widely distributed, occurring in most parts of the northern hemisphere. As an edible

plant caution might be advisable. Some authors say it should be boiled and never eaten raw as it contains toxins; others say that new shoots can be eaten in spring. All seem to agree that the brushy stalk phase should never be eaten.

The plant has had a long history of medicinal use. It contains silicic acid, and is mildly diuretic and astringent. Some reported uses include: as a soothing eye compress, as a skin tonic or face pack, to reduce water retention, to cure dandruff, to strengthen brittle nails, in a foot bath, to help mend scar tissue or heal wounds, to treat and cure arthritis, and as a greenish-yellow dye.

So, this year when it starts appearing all over my yard, I'll think of it not just as a weed, but as a valuable medicinal plant and an evolutionary survivor, and then I'll walk into the garage and pick up the "weed-eater".....

Map to Location of May Meeting



ALASKA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY SONG

Did you know that we have a society song?? Former Anchorage Chapter President, Lynn Catlin, is now living in Seattle and studying for her Ph.D. in paleontology. While President she submitted this song. It was written by Dr. John Baxter, who was one of her college professors in mycology. The song was inspired by a 3-week visit to our state one summer, that included ANPS field trips. It is sung to the tune of America the Beautiful.

ALASKA THE BEAUTIFUL

1. Oh, beautiful for rainy skies,
For amber waves of bears,
For purple mountain saxifrage
Among the snowshoe hares,
Alas-kuh-huh,
Alas-kuh-huh,
Where grouchy grizzlies growl,
and bush planes buzz the mice and moose
Through clouds of waterfowl.
2. Oh, beautiful for sourdough,
That rises in the yeast,
For heavenly hot cakes made with it -
A great Alaskan feast!
Alas-kuh-huh,
Alas-kuh-huh,
I long to see you scenes,
I'd even stay at Prudhoe Bay
And live on pinto beans.
3. Up north where they have permafrost
And raging Arctic gales,
Where Eskimos in furry clothes
Hunt walrus, seal and whales,
I'd like to join the blanket toss
As tosser or tossee,
And chomp on muktuk with my friends
Beside the Bering Sea.
4. Oh, beautiful for ptarmigans
Whose ptocs withstand the cold,
For wild and wily wolverines,
And gravel full of gold,
Alas-kuh-huh,
Alas-kuh-huh,
I just can't stay away,
I yearn to see that old pipeline
And Matanuska hay (hey, hey!)
I just can't stay away (No way!)
I'm a-comin' home today.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL

The Alaska Native Plant Society was organized in 1982 by an enthusiastic group of amateur and professional botanists. It is a non-profit educational organization with the aim of uniting all persons interested in the flora of Alaska.

Membership is open to any interested individual or organization. If you wish to join us, please indicate the category of membership you desire, then clip and mail this application with the appropriate remittance to: Alaska Native Plant Society, P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514

Select the membership category you desire:

Full Time Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$5	Name:	_____
Individual	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10	Address:	_____
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$15	City:	_____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$25		

ANPS State Officers

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Vice-President Jean Poor
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Secretary Andrea Woods
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Anchorage Chapter Program Coordinators

Main Program Garry Davies
Plant Family Verna Pratt
Mini Botany Julia Ricketts
Field Trips Sarah McClellan

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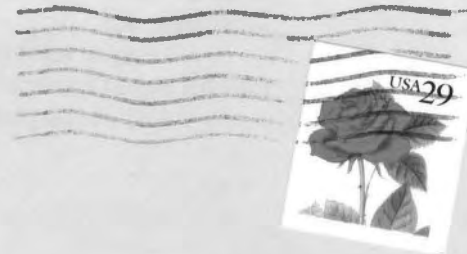
The newsletter of the ANPS is published monthly except for June, July, August and September. Contributions for the next issue should be mailed to: Julia and Trevor Ricketts, Anchorage AK 99516 to arrive by September 16. Thanks to everybody who has made contributions to the newsletter this year.



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