

## New England Botanical Club – Millennium Field Trip to GASPÉ

July 8-16 2000 Prepared by Lisa Standley, President

**George Newman**, *Botaniste Extraordinaire*, led a party of 21 New England Botanical Club members and family around the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, from Mont Albert in the central mountains to Grand Riviere on the southeast coast. George has botanized the Gaspé since 1965, seeking to locate all of the rare and endemic species described by Fernald, and knows the precise coordinates of every rare or endemic plant in the region. His knowledge, gained from decades of field work and research, and his tireless enthusiasm were astounding.

Fernald botanized the Gaspé from 1902 to 1934. During this period, 143 of the 200 new taxa that he named were based on populations on the Gaspé. Many of the taxa Fernald named are no longer recognized as distinct species or varieties, but are thought to be disjunct populations of variable western or circumboreal taxa. The area also provided much of the support of his "nunatak" hypothesis to explain the presence of western and arctic disjuncts. Fernald was followed on the Gaspé by a series of remarkable Canadian botanists, including Fr. Marie-Victorin, Jacques Rousseau, Ernest Lepage, and A. E. Porsild, among others.

This was not a trip for the acrophobic! Most of the unique plants of the Gaspé occur on the steep, sparsely vegetated summits, high ledges, cliffs, or talus slopes of the calcareous or serpentine outcrops of the Gaspé. Reaching these treasures often required "a bit of a scramble" up or over talus, scree, or ledges with "a little exposure". The group sampled most of the range of habitats of the Gaspé: serpentine barrens, *Thuja* bogs and valleys, beaches, sea-cliffs, scree summits, talus slopes, limestone cliffs, coastal spruce-fir forest, and wide gravel rivers.

Unusual ferns were abundant: *Polystichum scopulinum* (a western serpentine endemic), *Aspidotis densa*, *Cystopteris montana*, *Dryopteris fragrans* and *Adiantum aleuticum* at Mont Albert; *Polystichum lonchitis* at Cap Bon Ami in Forillon National Park; *Dryopteris filix-mas* at many locations; *Cryptogramma stelleri* on limestone; and tiny *Botrychium lunaria*. Orchids were also frequently observed: abundantly blooming *Orchis rotundifolia* in a *Thuja* bog in the Parc de la Gaspésie; at other locations, particularly on Bonaventure Island, we saw *Platanthera dilatata*, *P. hyperborea*, *P. obtusata*, *P. orbiculata*; *Listera cordata*, *L. convallarioides*; *Corallorhiza maculata* and *C. striata*; *Goodyera repens*; and, amazingly, *Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *parviflorum* growing on the dry limestone cliffs and talus at Cap Bon Ami.

The dry scree summits and ledges of Devonian sandstone and conglomerates yielded a western montane/alpine flora that included *Arnica chionopappa* (aka *A. lonchophylla*) *Saxifraga cernua*, *S. caespitosa*, *S. aizoon*, *Anemone multifida*, *Erigeron compositus*, *Hedysarum alpinum*, *Shepherdia canadensis*, *Eleagnus commutata*, *Senecio multiradiata*, *Oxytropis*, and *Astragalus scrupulicola* (aka *A. aboriginum*). The wet, mossy sea-cliffs along the north coast harbored *Pinguicula vulgaris*, *Saxifraga aizoides*, *Parnassia parviflora*, *Malaxis brachypoda*, *Polygonum viviparum*, and *Primula laurentiana*. Shale and cobble sea-beaches contained *Mertensia*

*maritima*, *Senecio pseudo-arnica*, *Iris hookeri*, *Anemone canadensis*, and *Zygadenus glauca*. The serpentine barrens of Mont Albert were one of the highlights of the trip, both visually and botanically, with *Lychnis alpina*, *Armeria labradorica*, *Artemesia borealis*, various *Salix* species, and *Eriophorum russeolum* (*E. chamissonis*). In total, the group recorded 415 species of vascular plants in 65 families, with 48 species of ferns and fern allies and 34 species of *Carex*.

In addition to the unique and wonderful flora, the trip included other unexpected highlights: the seabird and gannet colonies of Percé and Bonaventure Island, seen by boat and at close-range on the cliff-tops; the spectacular cliffs of the Forillon Peninsula and the north coast of the Gaspé; birds-eye views of hang-gliders; the vast, 9-square mile, serpentine tableland at the summit of Mont Albert; an old-growth sugar maple stand in Forillon National Park; woodland caribou on Mont Albert; whales at Percé; and exceptional food everywhere.