

KOU E BOKKEVELD SPRING BREAK

Angela Smitheman,

a member of the Kogelberg Branch of the Botanical Society, goes walkabout through the Koue Bokkeveld with a group of like-minded friends, and her paints.

The first week in September was stormy at the Cape; the clouds were low and the long-awaited rain poured down; it had been a very dry winter. Half a dozen of us seniors left for a few days' holiday up the West Coast. This conjures up visions of carpets of spring wild flowers and an abundance of daisies and bulbs, but our trip took us inland, up into the high mountains of the Koue Bokkeveld and a very different kind of vegetation.

At the coast everything was lush: green growth, deeply spotted with great clumps of

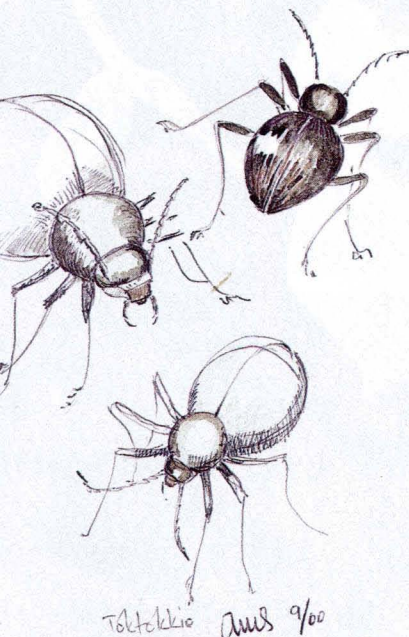
white arum lilies standing happily in every wet ditch and field. There was snow on the mountain peaks, just visible when the clouds parted.

The road wound through the valleys and climbed up Michell's Pass to Ceres, where we stopped for a drippy and freezing picnic; thence up the Gydo Pass. The early peach blossoms were showing bravely on this high plateau, and we saw the first red, orange and yellow leuca-dendrons, which are found here.

On to the dirt road, mercifully bone dry, and finally up the Katbakkies Pass to a yet higher



plateau, dotted with scattered rock outcrops, weathered into fantastic dinosaur shapes. We were now at about 1100 m – as high as Table Mountain – when we reached our destination. Here everything has adjusted to a very harsh



Nylandtia

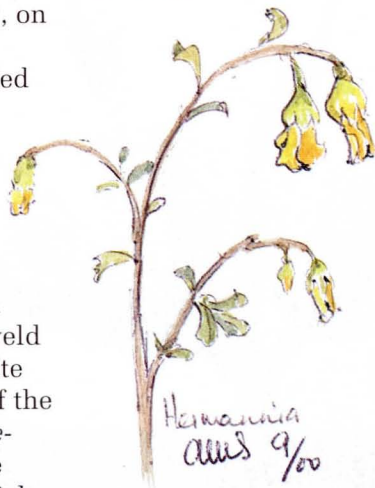




Gnidia
AUS 9/00

red-gold sand between the bushes was, in fact, a mass of vygies (depicted below) and daisies, as they opened only after one o'clock, all facing resolutely into the sun, to where the Cederberg's Tafelberg dominated the northern horizon.

A wildlife visitor was a large tapping beetle (toktokkie, *Psammodes*), tapping away and perhaps signalling to a girl friend that spring had sprung after all.



Hermannia
AUS 9/00

A close look at each plant made one realise that here are many old friends of the gentler south-western Cape climate, adapted to this place. Many had much-reduced leaves (as in the case of skilpadbessie, *Nylandtia spinosa*, where they were scarcely visible knobs). Some were leathery, some packed closely around the stem, and some just plain sparse and small, as the *Gnidia*, *Lobostemon*, *Leucadendron* and *Hermannia* demonstrate.

Many plants grow symbiotically, in company with each other, giving each other mutual support. This often means the using of shade and moisture, as in the case of the gazanias clustering in and round the bases of the bigger plants like this *Lobostemon* (below). There were also many pink, parasitic *Hyobanche* just breaking through the surface of the sand, always on the northern side of the bushes. Lichens proliferated on all the rocks, each spreading in a circular form in a rich variety of colours, giving a special colour and texture to the fantastic rock formations. Many of these have formed shelters, and, over the millennia, have been used by the San

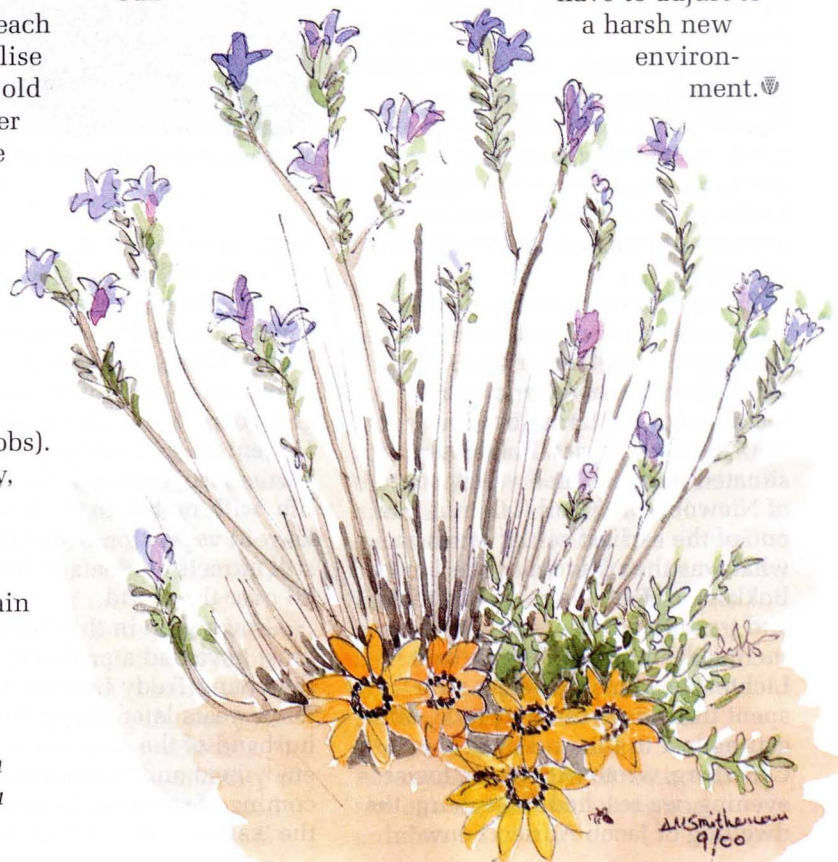


Leucadendron
AUS 9/00

peoples, who have left many examples of their paintings for us to appreciate.

On our return, a few warmer days had melted all the snow, and spring had truly reached the Cape. There were indeed carpets of many-coloured flowers to be admired in the Worcester, Tulbagh and Malmesbury valleys. Reluctantly, we returned to the Big Smoke. Polluting fumes hung heavily over the Cape Peninsula. We, too,

have to adjust to a harsh new environment. ☹



AUS 9/00

climate, extremes of temperature, winds and constant exposure.

In the early morning there was a crust of frost on the lee side of every bush and, as an icing, on our cars. As the day warmed up we crawled like lizards into the sun and out of the icy wind. Walking through the bush revealed a wealth of plants, all struggling into blossom in their own way. The veld was starred with white bunches of flowers of the wild rosemary *Eriocephalus africanus*, the bruised leaves of which, together with the agosthosmas, create the nostalgic scent associated with mountain rambling and, they say, give the inimitable flavour to Karoo lamb.

Not until lunch time did we realise that the



Nylandtia spinosa
9/00