

THE REDISCOVERY OF ARISAEMA CANDIDISSIMUM IN THE WILD

Jill Cowley

Summary. *Arisaema candidissimum* W.W.Sm (Araceae) was last recorded in its native China in 1932, but in 1993 and 1994 it was again observed in Yunnan Province. The colour variation, history and rediscovery of the species are discussed.

One of the aspirations of the plant specialist when in the field is of encountering a species long thought to be very rare, or even extinct, in the wild. It was during the Alpine Garden Society's expedition to China (acronym ACE) in June 1991, on a particularly long section of the journey in Yunnan from Dali to Zhongdien (Chungtien) via the Yangtze River crossing near the Yulong Shan Mountains, that Dr. Christopher Grey-Wilson spotted a flash of pink and white.

The pink and white form

To the delight of the expedition members it was discovered that we had chanced upon the pink and white variant of the popular garden plant, *Arisaema candidissimum* W.W.Sm. The individual plants were found growing on a dangerously steep shaley slope above the road. As far as is known, this variant of the plant, which is often grown in gardens and which received a First Class Certificate from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1970 (Saunders & Gorer, 1970), is derived from a collection by George Forrest. A very fine painting of this by Joanna Langhorne appeared in 1982 in *The Plantsman* (Mayo, 1982). The plant found in 1994 is in a new location and has a form somewhat different from that of the original clone, having a much longer spathe limb extension, or cauda.

When Sir William Wright Smith described *A. candidissimum* in 1917, from a George Forrest collection (no. 12724) made in 1914, he thought it a very beautiful species and commented that Forrest had believed it to be rare in Yunnan: Forrest described the colour as white, flushed with rose. This collection came from the Fengkow valley in the north-west of the province, growing in open, dry rocky situations and on ledges of slate cliffs, similar to that of the latest find. From herbarium specimens available it would seem that the known localities centre on areas of west China in north-west Yunnan, especially around Lijiang and the Chien-chuan-Mekong divide, and south-west Sichuan, around Muli. The species has been found at altitudes between 2400 m and 3400 m by the collectors Forrest, Kingdon Ward, Rock and Schneider.

The recent 'find' is particularly interesting because all of these collections were made between 1911 and 1932, with no further recorded sightings of the pink form, as far as is known. Within the small population seen on this occasion there was variation in the coloration of the spathes, some being pale, and others with more intense stripes. Earlier collectors had also noted variation, some pure white and others marked with green and white stripes. The flowering period also varies in the wild, between April and July, but in cultivation in Europe the flowers do not appear much before June.

The green and white form

The green and white variant, also collected by Forrest, was given an Award of Merit in 1924 at the Chelsea Show (Anon, 1924), having been shown by Mr. A.K. Bulley of Neston. According to J.W. Besant (1928) from Glasnevin, writing in the *Gardener's Chronicle*, it appears that this was the only form in cultivation

at that time.

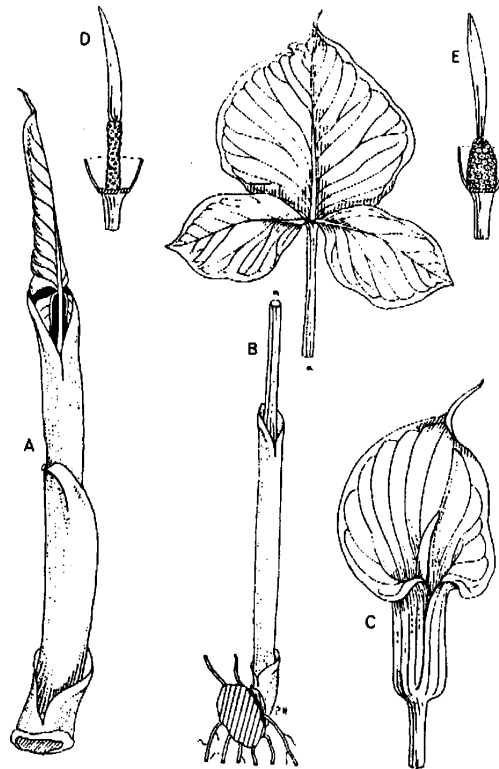
Previous to the collection of the pink form made on the Alpine Garden Society's expedition, the green and white striped form had been rediscovered in early June 1993 by a group of plant explorers, which included the British plantsman Roy Lancaster and his botanical colleague and friend Mikinori Ogisu from Japan. According to Roy Lancaster (pers. Comm. 1995), the arisaemas were found in two valleys to the north of the town of Muli in Sichuan province. At the first location the single inflorescences were scattered on the south-west and west facing slopes at altitudes between 2300 and 2400 m. growing on dry stony slopes above the road, and were fairly well distributed in the area. The species was also seen commonly on east and north-east facing slopes across the river, the distribution being fairly limited but the plants abundant where they did occur, despite the presence of sheep and goats. In this form, the spathe was held on a pinkish or lilac-pink stem but the spathe itself was striped pale green and white in the lower portion with a white expanded limb; the cauda was long-pointed and the spadix green. Other variants were all white or green. Associated plants included *Pteridium aquilinum*, *Daphne* sp., *Leptodermis* sp., *Corylus yunnanensis*, *Pinus yunnanensis*, *Rhododendron decorum* and *Arisaema erubescens*. Other populations were seen at 2800-3000 m. growing with *Roscoe cautleoides*, *Paeonia delavayi*, *Allium wallichii* and *Pleione bulbocodioides*. Seed of *A. candidissimum* has since been collected from some of these populations and is being cultivated in Japan.

Frank Kingdon Ward collected his specimens of the *Arisaema* near Yungning growing with species of *Nomocharis*, *Cypripedium*, *Toscoa*, *Hemerocallis*, *Morina*, *Lilium* and *Stellera*, a form of *Androsace spinulifera*, *Pleione yunnanse* and other species of *Arisaema*.

Enthusiasts can look forward to seeing this new collection of the pink variant of *A. candidissimum*, introduced by the ACE expedition, in cultivation in the future.

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Arisaema candidissimum

A. immature plant in early stages of growth: B. plant at later stage of development: C. inflorescence: D. male spadix: E. female spadix.

Drawn by Pat Halliday