The end of another wildflower season brings a sense of sadness but one of hope for the next that we may find our quests undiscovered this year in the next. The adventure will always continue as we discover new flowers and new knowledge of our old friends. The end of this summer happened to be quite ‘duddy’...

Resting in the shade on the other side of the clearing, we watched as Bob came huffing and puffing toward us from his nonstop charge up the hill. By that time, Flower (the dog) was too tired to greet him with the usual barking she directed at non-dog people. And even Bob seemed touched when he learned she was carrying a surprise for him. Was a truce developing? A short hike up to the saddle and we could see forever... Union and Utica Reservoirs, the Dardanelles near Sonora Pass and beyond.

Immediately to the east rose a wall of elongated rock faces, carved over the centuries by countless storms. On hands and knees we climbed up the exposed roots of a lone Jeffrey Pine (Pinus jeffreyi) and through the brushlike huckleberry oak (Quercus vaccinifolia) until we were atop the sentinel faces.

Then, slipping in volcanic scree, we made our way to a final rock wall and climbed the last six feet to the mountaintop. An inspiration rivaling that of the view greeted us. There were myriads of mariposa lilies (Calochortus leichtlinii) growing bravely in the dry, volcanic gravel. They were spaced on the mountaintop like stars in the constellations, tempting us to make “dippers” and “horses” of them all. Frequent thunderstorms were undoubtedly their secret to survival.

From the end of Inspiration Point, we could look down on Duck Lake, hundreds of feet below, our destination earlier in the summer.

Bob thanked Flower for his chocolate milk and began capturing on film the composites, paintbrush and that graced the mountaintop. There were also a few western white pines (Pinus monticola), lodgepoles and hemlocks (Tsuga mertensiana) for David’s delight.

... cont’d page 2
As we headed back down, Flower adamantly refused to climb down the steep wall to get off the top. Possibly mellowed by her gift, Bob backed up to the wall, and gripping her paws on his shoulders, lifted her down piggyback onto the ground. Oh, for a picture of that! Was a friendship developing?

We descended slowly, listening for forest fauna as the shadows of the setting sun climbed up the mountain toward us. Bob went his way to Lake Tahoe. David, Flower and I headed back to Stockton after another inspiring day.

Duck Lake
by Grover Bethards

The Stockton Chapter of the CNPS went on a field trip to Duck Lake on July 5, 2004. We were supposed to go on Friday, the 2nd, but weather reports of rain and lightning changed our minds.

Duck Lake is located just past Lake Alpine off Highway 4 in Alpine County.

Martha, David and I picked a most beautiful day to go. As we drove up to the mountains, we left the dry, golden-brown grass for more lush mountain meadows.

We parked on the east end of Lake Alpine and walked to Duck Lake, approximately 2 miles, after Martha drew a map for some other hikers.

The trail to the lake is easy walking - - first up over the hill, then down to the lake. As we strolled up the trail, we saw numerous flowers: wandering daisies, lupine, violets, butterweed, mustang clover, monkey-flower, spotted coralroot, some composites and, of course, many different “Bob” flowers (ultrasmall). On the ridge were beautiful white Mariposa lilies with their center markings of brown and yellow. One can almost see the faces of animals in them.

On both sides of the trail were more colors - - gooseberries in bloom, some with berries.

We stopped on “Inspiration Rock” and took in the breathtaking scenery. The Dardanelles loomed in the distance with small amounts of snow here and there. Blue skies with small white clouds were forming in the backdrop.

Near the bottom of the trail under the dense red fir forest canopy was a profusion of snow plants, some in groups of 20 or more!

When you round the corner, the lake comes into full view. A sea of flowers - - penstemon, lupine and lilies. Three old cabins were nestled among the myriads of flowers. One cabin, in such a state of disrepair, had fallen.

The lake is shallow and clear with catfish swimming near the shore. And a profusion of dragonflies darted here and there.

We stopped for lunch near a grove of old quaking aspen - - marred by initials of new and old passersby. The moist, swampy area around the lake was white with flowers - - western bistort. Martha said that we might spy a Newberry’s gentian but to no avail.

There was a helicopter flying to the lake for water that would come back again and again. Later we heard it was putting out small fires started by lightning.

As Martha and David wandered and enjoyed the clean air and sights, I walked down to the Stanislaus River. The hike was mostly under a canopy of trees following a small creek for awhile. There were several small ponds with water bugs and some minnows, with
all sorts of insects flying about. As I dropped down toward the river you could hear the water before you could see it. Along its bank was an array of bushes and trees. Some large groups of Sierra tiger lilies lined the water, with nodding crimson columbine and lush lupine growing side by side.

Returning to the lake, I didn’t see Martha or David, so thinking they had gone back to the truck, I returned to the truck. However, no one was there. So I headed back to the lake where I saw them coming up the trail. I hid and decided to give them a fright. Well, it worked. When I growled and raked the tree, Martha yelled out and David said “Oh, sh*t!” Not wanting to scare them further, I tossed a small stick toward them and they immediately knew who it was.

We saw many wonderful flowers that day. I’m sorry we didn’t see the gentian, but maybe next time?

Achillea millefolium - yarrow
Allium sp. - wild onion
Aquilegia formosa - crimson columbine
Calochortus leichitlini - mariposa lily, Leichtlin’s mariposa tulip
Cornus canadensis - bunchberry
Dodecatheon sp. - shooting star
Erigeron peregrinus - wandering daisy
Eriogonum sp. - wild buckwheat
Lilium parvum - alpine lily, sierra tiger lily
Linanthus montanus - mustang clover
Mimulus bicolor - yellow and white monkeyflower
Polygonum bistortoides - western bistort
Potentilla sp. - cinquefoil
Pyrola picta - white-veined wintergreen
Ranunculus sp. - buttercup
Sarcodes sanguinea - snow plant
Senecio sp. - butterweed
Silene sp. - catchfly
Smilacina sp. - false Solomon’s seal
Triteleia ixioides ssp. anilina - pretty face
Veratrum californicum - corn lily
Viola adunca - western dog violet
Viola macloskeyi - Macloskey’s violet
Viola nuttallii - Nuttall’s violet

Alpine gentian
Editor’s Note:
Well, as the season wore on, we made yet another trip to Duck Lake and lo and behold found our long sought-after Alpine Gentian (Gentiana newberryi). At the same time Bob found a fungal gem around the lake, a large white puffball covered with pyramidal white plates. The weather was perfect for our last visit to the lake and after finding our prey we were able to move on to other conquests.
California Native Plant Society

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