

PENSTEMONS AND THEIR PHOTOS FROM THE SISKIYOU, 2011

By Ginny Maffitt

Despite the late-to-leave, but welcome, snow pack in the Siskiyou Mts. this year, the attendees of the 2011 Annual Meeting (#66 in years!) found a nice collection of penstemons blooming away.

One of the two trips began south of Ashland along the entry road to Mt. Ashland ski area. Only 2 miles up the road, we stopped for a double treat of **P. speciosus** and **P. deustus var. suffrutescens** nearby. **P. speciosus** (Subgenus Habroanthus) isn't usually found at this elevation (about 4000') but is fairly common in east-side WA, OR, CA and ID. The guides had scouted for it lower down at the California border town of Hilt, but the plants were bloomed out. Well-deserving it's common name of 'showy', the flowers are a blend of colors, from bright blue to purplish at the base of the tube with lighter violet lower lips, bluish upper lips and white inside. Flowers are secund (one-sided) on the stem. Leaves are somewhat glaucous, narrow and often channeled (rolled) upward. Plants tend to be 8-16" tall. We saw last them in Oregon on the 2004 trip, growing to a stunning 3' tall near Dufur, 13 miles south of the Columbia Gorge.

A somewhat-rare endemic to Josephine and Jackson counties was growing within a few feet of **P. speciosus**. It is the unusual pink, **P. deustus var. suffrutescens** (Subgenus Penstemon), with many tiny flowers less than ½" long. The leaves are a bright limey green with sharp toothed edges. Typically, **P. deustus** (the 'hot rocks' pent) is seen in cracks of cliffs; these had found a good habitat in the crushed lava roadsides left behind by years of sanding this road to the ski area.

P. anguineus (Subgenus Penstemon) is another common sight along this road, but it's blooming was late due to the cool weather. Folks in the last car stopping to view the **P. deustus** looked uphill into a shady area and found a uncommon blue one blooming on Saturday. Jay Lunn (Hillsboro, OR) did find several just open on Sunday (pictured below). This species is just plain sticky with glandular hairs on upper parts, although glabrous on lower stems and leaves. It is robust, reaching 12-32" tall, with several un-branching stems. The lower opposite leaves are

lanceolate, from 2-6" long, on long stems and dark green. Corollas are usually deep purple to $\frac{3}{4}$ " long; their anthers are opposite as they belong to Subgenus Penstemon.

A few miles up the road, we found penstemons massed on the roadsides.

Penstemon parvulus meaning small-flowered, is 6-14" tall with narrow somewhat bluish leaves. The corollas are smaller than its larger cousin, *P. azureus*, at 1.4-2 cm (9/16-3/4") long. Some authorities still include it as a variety of *azureus*. Azure-blue to violet flowers appear on racemes of smaller plants to panicles (small branches) on larger ones. The tell-tale-for-identification anthers are double sacks (from Subgenus *Saccanthera*) in deep purple, while those of *P. azureus* are generally white. They do hybridize as we saw later in the day about 10 miles away at the Pilot Rock gravel quarry.

Folks spent a lot of time hiking the hillsides at the base of Mt. Ashland admiring the views south to Mt. Shasta and the phlox, corn lilies and buckwheats among other wildflowers near the spring seeps. Stephen Love and various buddies bushwhacked to the top of Mt. Ashland and found **P. davidsonii var. davidsonii** (Subgenus *Dasanthera*) in bloom there. The larger groups didn't try the road up, which was blocked lower down by a snowbank, plus a squishy road just above it.

Moving on toward Pilot Rock by way of the old Siskiyou Summit road, we saw **P. deustus var. deustus**, the white form on the rocky cliffs, along with billowing *Eriogonum compositum*. About 3 miles south of Pilot Rock on the former road bed, our guide Jim Duncan had found **P. laetus var. sagittatus** (Subgenus *Saccanthera*), the 'cheerful penstemon'. *Sagittatus* means arrowhead-shaped, referring to the pointy-tipped anthers which define the variety. It is a gangling, sprawling species 8-32" tall, with glandular hairs that little insects and seeds stick to it—very messy looking! Flowers can be pink to blue-violet or purple (see photo in Strickler's book). It is only found in Oregon in Josephine to Klamath counties.

Driving back to the Pilot Rock entrance road (which was luckily only 2 teeth-clattering miles long) we saw **P. roezlii** (Subgenus *Saccanthera*) in the grassy meadows. It is so slender with narrow leaves barely to 2 cm, that it was hard to spot. Recently removed from inclusion as a variety of **P. laetus**, its purple anthers

are simply rounded at the tips, but still saccate with spiny or white hairs at their tops. Corollas are bright-blue to violet and $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{7}{8}$ " long.

At the quarry/parking area at Pilot Rock were mounds and mounds of *P. parvulus* or ***P. azureus*** (Subgenus *saccanthera*) or their hybrids! To repeat, some botanists still include *P. parvulus* as a variety of *P. azureus* and moving from plant to plant, we could understand why. There were ground-huggers and upright plants, some with fairly narrow leaves to those with wider ones, colors also varied—it was a stunning visual display spread all over the open, former quarry area. The qualifier in Strickler's key is size of corolla and color. Corollas of *P. azureus* are darker purple or deep blue with 2-3.5mm lengths while *P. parvulus*' flower are more blue or violet and 1.4-2 cm.

The second tour proceeded down Hiway 199 going southwest from Grant's Pass, with forays up 2 roads to the north. This was our back-up tour when the late snow delayed flowered up the higher Bear Camp area; plus the road partially washed out! Fewer penstemons grow in this lower area, but oh my, did we see orchids, lilies and fragrant azaleas! The scouts went up Onion Mt. where a huge patch of ***P. parvulus*** was found; the ***P. rupicolas*** further uphill weren't blooming yet. On Lone Mt. Road, which follows Whiskey Creek, we saw ***P. roezlii*** again at a stop which featured calachortus (cat's ear lily), *Lilium bolanderi*, the rare white bleeding heart, plus the famed miniaturized evergreen oaks, California myrtles and yerba santo with its healing leaves.

From one stop here and then on Eight Dollar Mt. road, we found a smaller version of ***P. roezlii*** that I thought could be ***P. filiformis*** (Subgenus *Saccanthera*). It measures smaller in all respects: calyx, corolla, leaves, height, but is reputed to only grow in the Trinity Alps and E. Klamath Mts. of California. It has a purplish blue corolla only 13-16 mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") long with glandular hairs; its leaves are about .5mm wide and roll inward with a leafy basal rosette, while *P. roezlii*'s leaves are mainly on the floral stems. It was numerous around the rest area roadsides and then down the trail to the Illinois River waterfall. A sample was sent to the Oregon State University herbarium and was pronounced as *P. roezlii*, due to wider leaves than *P. filiformis*.



P. speciosus



P. deustus var. *suffrutescens*



P. anguineus, Jay Lunn



P. parvulus



P. azureus, white anthers



P. deustus var. *deustus*



P. davidsonii



P. roezlii



P. laetus var. *saggitatus*, yellow bud



P. roezlii thought to be *P.*

filiformis