

Flowers of the St. Elias Region

Alaska Highway, Y.T., from Mile 1156 to 1206

By Eva Mudiman, Whitehorse.

THE flower-hunting season down this picturesque part of the Highway is from mid-May to the end of August. It is farewell to the short colorful Yukon summer when the flame-like Fireweed and the Golden Rod nod again by the wayside.

One favorite flower spot is by the foot of a small glacier where a little spring meanders through the moss and rocks down the side of Mount Pickhandle. There in mid-May grow the mauve Crocus and white Plume Anemone. The purple Valerian has invaded the muskeg and the shin-leaf and star-shaped Pyrola bloom in the shade. Later on, the small Ladies' Slippers in shades of orchid, delicate pink and salmon will be blooming there. June's first week brings the Labrador Tea, Virginia Bluebells, Roses, Northern Bed-Straw and Arctic Lupine. These latter mentioned flowers line the Highway too, and few Marsh Buttercups grow in the ditch. To the westward, further down the mountain grow blue and white Columbines and little pink Twin Flowers. On moist hillsides and above timberline grows the Monks-hood. Campanula, purple spikes of bell-like flowers, grows on sandy ridges; it too climbs above the tree-line where one may wander through waving blue meadows of these last two mentioned flowers.

We've passed a Repeater Station and left Pickhandle Mountain behind. At Mile 1168 we catch a glimpse, through the trees, of two big red dispensing fuel tanks. There deeper in the woods, on either side of the road grow the beautiful white Orchids, common to the Yukon. Proceeding Northwards we come to Onion Lake, about Mile 1172. In mid-July we find the tall blue Iris blooming there and if lucky we might spy a few heads of the rare wild Heliotrope peeping through the tall wet grasses. The wild Onions are purple-headed for they have gone to seed.

As we near the White River area, about Mile 1180, we find beautiful wild Primula growing by the roadside. They are a faithful replica of the blooms on a well-known house plant. We pass by wild Sunflowers, Rough Fruited Cinq-foil and a few Arctic Poppies. The White River meanders around its gravel bars in many narrow streamlets before it becomes a milky white torrent as it rushes under the bridge. On its gravel bars grow large clumps of brilliant Vetch, spiked heads of small sweet-pea-like flowers in all their glorious shades. Their sweet scent, wafted on the sunny breezes, attracts myriads of bees.

On the way to Dry Creek Lodge and up to Mile 1206 we find pink Corydalis, and in later July Fireweed, Wild Asters and Golden Rod. At Mile 1206 the night-flowering Catchfly opens its sticky white flowers during the long twilight hours. The northern species of many familiar flowers differ slightly from their more southern counterparts. For instance, the Labrador Tea has much larger blossoms here; while the lemon-colored flowers of the Indian Paint Brush are hard to recognize. The Hare-bell hugs the mountain side with its shorter, stubbier stem and its bell is larger and bluer than ever. Another member of the Willow Herb family grows along the margin of many lakes and streams; its spray of flowers has larger richer-hued blossoms and has lost the conical spiked shape of the Greater Willow Herb or better known Fireweed. Driving down the Highway in August you will see patches of magenta and purple Fireweed going up the mountain to vie with the red and gold fall colors of the Birches and Poplars and making a vivid contrast against the sombre background of the Spruces.



Photos by
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