

On Wednesday, March 20th, approximately thirty members of the Plants and Gardens Group made their various ways to Steyning, where the garden we were visiting - La Roche - is owned by Lynne Broome. La Roche/The Rock is aptly named because the property is built on an incline and the rear garden is dominated by a steep and imposing hill.

When I mentioned to a friend that I would be visiting a garden, she immediately asked why, as there was "very little happening" in the garden at this time of year. How wrong she was! As we walked up the steep driveway towards the house, the borders were full of colour: yellow narcissi; pink, white and blue hyacinths; blue chionodoxa or glory-of-the-snow plus striking deep red and violet blue anemones.

Once past the house, the garden is revealed gradually. The eye is drawn round a curving sweep of lawn to a staggered rock garden, up and up and up to the summit of the hill that is barely visible through the trees and shrubs. There are more colourful flower beds and a large variety of shrubs all of which create a verdant, lush and atmospheric impact. For me, the highlights of this part of the garden were the numerous hellebores, especially the double varieties. One particular shrub caught my eye for its deep purple dense foliage: *Pittosporum tenuifolium*, 'Tom Thumb'.

This inspiring garden is the result of over thirty years' hard and back breaking work. The difficulty of gardening on such a steep incline has been approached and overcome with creative imagination and mind boggling effort. Huge blocks of Portland Stone were manoeuvred into place by four men over four days. It's reminiscent of a primary school maths problem!

Once the lower half of the garden was beginning to take shape, Lynne turned her attention to the upper part of the 'Rock'. This time, forty tons of Yorkshire granite were used in the building of dry stone walls that provided the framework for a path that zig zags its way up the hill to the summit. The path ends with a wooden verandah across the top of the garden and a small patio with space for a table and chairs. There are far reaching views over the South Downs, across the Weald to the North Downs on the distant horizon. Fortunately, we were blessed with a clear day.

One of the intrepid souls who made it up to the seating area suggested that it would be lovely to sit with a coffee, looking out over the garden below and to the views beyond. I think by the time it arrived at the top, the coffee would be cold - so perhaps a glass of wine or Pimms?