SPANISH FIELD COURSES

Professor Vernon Heywood was appointed to the Chair of Botany in 1968, and following his research interests in the Spanish flora, instituted a Part 3 field course at Easter 1969 to S Spain, based at Gibraltar and Sevilla through the kind agency of his Spanish friends, Professors Emilio Fernández Galiano and Benito Valdés. This was repeated in 1970 (though with difficulty: the Spanish authorities closed the border with Gibraltar whilst the party was on the rock and they found they could only reach Spain via Morocco!) The following year only, a Mediterranean field course was based at the University of Nice. However, 1972 saw a return to Madrid and Sevilla (with additional help from Professor Rivas Martínez), before moving to the Canary Islands for six years,1973—1978. After Professor Manorlo Costa was installed in the Chair of Botany in Valencia, our field course moved north to study the vegetation in Valencia, Murcia, Teruel and Castellón provinces, from 1979 to1989. After Professor Heywood's retirement, Doctors Ross and Jury moved the field course to Almería and Granada in 1990, where it has gone every year since. Thus, this year's course will be the 20th to eastern Andalucía and the 40th to S Spain or the Canary Islands.

Over the last 20 years, we have been fortunate in having important contributions from friends at the Universities of Valencia, Murcia and Almería, who have often been able to join us in the field or help with the provision of material for our student projects.

For three years, 1991—1993, students on a United Nations Environment Programme short course at the University joined this field course, and since numbers were increased, this necessitated dividing the group into two and running the course over three weeks.

In 1993, students on the MSc in Conservation at the University of Birmingham accompanied us, as well as five staff and two Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The following year, 1994, three Kew staff came with 13 students on the Kew Diploma in Scientific Horticulture on the field course on a voluntary basis, a practise repeated for some years until 1998 when it became a formal part of the Kew Diploma Course.

1996 saw the addition of Reading MSc students in Vegetation Survey and Assessment join in and the Taxonomy MSc shortly after, though these Masters' students have been taught separately in the field by additional staff.

Since the start of the course in Almería and Granada, a number of enthusiastic amateur botanists have participated, including a group of ten Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, a welcome addition to the field course.

The course follows a regular pattern being based in the pueblo of Las Negras for eleven days followed by three days working from a hotel in the foothills of the Alpujarras, the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range.

During the first part we visit and study a very wide range of habitats, including semi-arid vegetation, thermomediterranean garrigue, salt pans, sand dunes, limestone, oak forests and the only true desert in Europe. The last, known as the Badlands, has extensive regions of gypsum soils. Landscapes, including that at the archaeological site of El Barranquete, are examined. The ecophysiology of the vegetation is also an important topic discussed. After these visits, the students carry out a three-day project and contribute to a seminar. The field course then travels up to the mountains (Sierra de la Contraviesa) to spend time in an extensive cork oak forest before settling into our wonderful hotel in Lanjaron. Thereafter, we visit the Sierra Nevada, usually reaching the snowline to see *Crocus nevadensis* flowering around the snow patches. In some years, we have also included a trip into Granada to visit the Moorish gardens of the Alhambra and Generalife Palaces.

The course is not only an important part of the scientific education of our students and those of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, but gives them a glimpse of the very different culture of the Mediterranean. Naturally, there are a couple of social highlights, including a last-night paella feast in Las Negras and a final dinner in Lanjaron.

An incredible number of participants have told us that this module was the highlight of their time as a student, many revisiting the area with family and friends.

View of Las Negras from the south taken from the coast path to Castillo de San Ramón.

Dr J.D. Ross with students in *Macrochloa tenacissima* community surveying *Caralluma europaea*, south of Las Negras, Almería.

Sarcocornia fruticosa and salt-tolerant plants, north of Salinas de Cabo de Gata, Almería.

El Pozo de los Frailes, a restored donkey-operated well with terracotta pots tied on with *Stipa* ropes. Sadly, the main ropes are synthetic, but the woods are local with *Tamarix* for the gears and chestnut.

Pallenis maritima, a spectacular species restricted to maritime locations.

Paellas chez El Cacho with Paco Fernández (left), his staff and family.

Part of the group above Capileira on the Sierra Nevada, Granada.

Crocus nevadensis by late snow patch.