

French Botanists at Casa Fontanalba in 1910

By Graham Avery

In 1910 the *Société Botanique de France* met in the Maritime Alps, first at Saint Martin Vésubie (from 24 July to 1 August) and then at Tende (from 2 to 5 August). From Tende some members made an excursion to Val Casterino, where they were received by Clarence Bicknell at Casa Fontanalba. Later, a report of their meetings and excursions, including a list of the plants collected, was published in the Society's Bulletin¹.

In this note I summarise that report, describe the visit to Casa Fontanalba, and provide information on the members of the Society who signed Clarence Bicknell's Visitors' Book on 4 August 1910.

For its 'special session' in the Maritime Alps in 1910, twenty members of the Society gathered in Saint Martin Vésubie, where they were joined by about forty other participants.

In his speech of welcome the Maire said 'Gentlemen, you would not forgive me if, as a layman, I tried to list all the interesting plants that you can collect here. But you will not hold it against me if, for love of my homeland, I mention *Saxifraga florulenta*, first described in 1824 by Moretti, but considered to be a fabulous plant until it was rediscovered by the botanist Lisa, and gathered in abundance by him and others in several places around here'.

He added 'When we consider the contribution which has been made to our flora by M. Emile Burnat, the eminent author of *Flore des Alpes Maritimes*, we have great hope for the future'. The Swiss Botanist Emile Burnat, who in 1892-1906 had published the first four volumes of his magnum opus *Flore des Alpes Maritimes*, was elected *Président d'honneur* of the session, though he did not attend the event (he was now 81 years old).

From 24 July to 1 August, meetings were held at Saint Martin Vésubie and excursions were made to Madone des Fenêtres, Boréon, Venanson, and Col de Salèses. On 27 July *Saxifraga florulenta* was duly found at Lac de Tre Colpas (2,100 m.) and Passo del Ladro (2,450 m.).

On 2 August eighteen members of the Society travelled from Saint Martin Vésubie to Tende for the rest of the session: Mme Arbost, MM. Arbost, Corbière, Coupeau, Dumée, Durand (G.), Fenoul, Hibon, Jahandiez (Émile), Jahandiez (Albert), Knoche, Lhomme, des Ligneris, Lutz, Madiot, Roux (N.), Rouy, Souèges.

On arrival at the Hôtel Nazionale in Tende they were 'greeted by Dr. Fritz Mader, whose active and dedicated assistance greatly helped us, for which we thank him warmly'. Mader, whose summer home was in Tende, was a member of the Society's organising committee, together with a number of local personalities such as Chevalier Victor de Cessole

¹ *Session extraordinaire tenue dans les Alpes-Maritimes pendant les mois de juillet-août 1910* in *Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France*, 1910, pages i to x and lxxvii to cxiv, accessible online at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/273002#page/759/mode/1up>

(alpinist and botanist), Commandant Alfred Saint-Yves (botanist and associate of Burnat), and Robert Roland-Gosselin (collector of exotic plants). Mader, who had known Clarence Bicknell since 1897, had planned the botanical excursions to be made from Tende in the next two days, and probably accompanied them.

On 3 August the group botanised in the valley of the Rio Freddo, visited the old town of Tende, and in the afternoon went up to the entrance of the road tunnel under Col de Tende, where they looked for plants. Then they drove through the tunnel (3 kilometres) and ‘when the light of day appeared, we saw that the landscape had completely changed: we had passed from the sunny south to the foggy north’.

‘On 4 August at five in the morning, two cars took us from Tende to Saint Dalmas de Tende. We went up on foot beside the torrent on a mule track which, when we used the shortcuts, was sometimes very hard. Around ten in the morning, we arrived at the Minière de Tende, a former zinc mine, still in operation, where a well-earned rest and a snack in the canteen give us strength to complete our walk. We followed a path through rocks and scree in the valley of Casterino, and at noon arrived at a small hotel in Casterino, where a comforting lunch awaited us.

We could not leave this charming alpine station without greeting the venerable philanthropist and botanist of Bordighera, Mr. Clarence Bicknell, who received us in his chalet with his usual affability. He had taken the trouble, in advance of our arrival, to have picked for us some rare species which we could not have found in the short time at our disposal. He generously distributed to us freshly picked specimens of plants found in Val Fontanalba: *Phyteuma Balbisii* D C., *Hieracium Delasoiei* Lagg. and *Papaver alpinum* L. After taking leave of our kind host, we returned to Saint Dalmas, where we arrived around five in the afternoon and were picked up by our cars’.

At Villa Fontanalba nine members of the Society signed Clarence Bicknell’s Visitors’ Book. In the Annex of this note is information on each of these persons: they included the *Secrétaire Général* of the Society (a Professor at the University of Paris), a publisher of books on natural history from Paris, a horticulturalist from Nice, a pharmacist from Haute-Saône, the proprietor of a vineyard in Saint Emilion, and an American botanist who specialised in the Mediterranean flora.

It is interesting that the British botanist Reginald Farrer, during his tour of the Maritime Alps in 1910, also found *Saxifraga florulenta* at Lac de Tre Colpas and Passo del Ladro (on 15 July), and visited Clarence Bicknell at Casa Fontanalba (on 19 July)².

On 5 August the group left Tende to visit the gardens at La Mortola, and then went on to Nice. From there on 6-7 August four members of the Society made an excursion to Mont Mounier (2,818 m.) where they botanised and stayed overnight in the *Observatoire de Nice*.

April 2022

² For their encounter see my article ‘Clarence Bicknell and Reginald Farrer, 19 July 1910’ at https://www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/avery_bicknell_and_farrer.pdf

Persons who signed the Visitors' Book at Casa Fontanalba on 4 August 1910

(Members of the *Société Botanique de France*)

Louis Lutz

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'Prof. L. Lutz, secrétaire général de la société botanique de France, et ses confrères'

Louis-Charles Lutz (1871-1952) was Professor of Microbiology and Cryptogamy in the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Paris (*École Supérieure de Pharmacie*). He was *Secrétaire Général de la Société Botanique de France* (of which he was President in 1925) and a member of the *Société Mycologique de France*. Author of numerous works on the anatomy of phanerogams and mycology (enzymes, metabolism of fungi, etc.).

Source https://archive.org/stream/mobot31753002245295/mobot31753002245295_djvu.txt
<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/louis-charles-lutz/>

Joseph Arbost

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'Jos Arbost de Nice'

Joseph Arbost (1859-1941) studied at the *Ecole Supérieure de Pharmacie* in Paris. He practised as a pharmacist in Thiers until 1900, and then moved to Nice to work as a horticulturalist. Author of a number of reports on plant-collecting in the *Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France*, and in *Riviera Scientifique* (the bulletin of the *Association des Naturalistes de Nice et des Alpes-Maritimes*).

Source <https://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=2254>

Georges Hibon

Entry in Visitors' Book : G. Hibon, juge suppléant au Tribunal de la Seine

Georges Hibon (1868-1951), who lived in Paris, was President of the *Société Botanique de France* in 1935.

Source https://cths.fr/an/societe.php?id=349&proso=y&soc_liees=#H

Herman Knoche

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'L.H. Knoche'

Edward Louis Herman Knoche (1870-1945), Docteur ès Sciences, was an American botanist who spent many years exploring the botany of the Mediterranean. Born in California, he studied botany at Stanford University in 1895-1899, and then at universities in Germany, France, and Spain. He was at the *Institut Botanique de Montpellier* in 1910, and again in 1922. Author of *Flora Balearica, étude phytogéographique sur les Iles Baléares* (1921).

Source https://web.stanford.edu/dept/JRBP/plants/PDF/Knoche_Also%20Pioneers.pdf

Léon Lhomme

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'Lhomme, Editeur de livres de sciences naturelles, successeur de Paul Klincksieck'

Léon Lhomme (1867-1949) studied at the *Institut Industriel du Nord* in Lille and was a director of sugar factories until 1909, when he took over the management of the *Librairie des Sciences Naturelles* (founded by Paul Klincksieck in Paris in 1891) which published books on natural history such as the series *Bibliothèque de poche du naturaliste*. He was a member of the *Société Entomologique de France*, and author of *Catalogue des Lepidoptera de France et de Belgique* (1923) and *Guide de l'amateur de papillons* (1932).

Source https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A9on_Lhomme

Michel des Ligneris

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'M. des Ligneris, Ingénieur agronome'

Michel des Ligneris (1882-1967) was the proprietor of a vineyard in Saint Emilion (Château Soutard).

Source <https://ligneris.blog/category/michel-des-ligneris/>

Victor Madiot

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'V. Madiot'

Victor Madiot (1850-1942) was a pharmacist and herbalist who had a pharmacy in Jussey (Haute-Saône). His herbarium, compiled between 1880 and 1933, is now in the Cuvier Museum, Montbéliard.

Source https://www.tela-botanica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/herbier_madiot.pdf?langue=fr

Nisius Roux

Entry in Visitors' Book 'N. Roux, Lyon'

Nisius Roux (1854-1923), a silk producer in Lyon, was particularly interested in the flora of the Alps of south-eastern France, where he made many botanical excursions. He was a member of the *Club Alpin Français* and the *Association Horticole Lyonnaise*.

Source https://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/linly_1160-6436_1924_num_43_1_15647.pdf

René Souèges

Entry in Visitors' Book : 'René Souèges, Docteur ès sciences, Chef de travaux pratiques de micrographie à l'Ecole supérieure de pharmacologie de Paris'

Étienne Charles René Souèges (1876-1967) studied at the University of Paris and became Head of Practical Micrography at the *Ecole Supérieure de Pharmacologie*, where he was a colleague of Louis Lutz. He was a horticulturalist, author of *La Vie végétale, la dynamique de la vie* (1949), and President of the *Société Botanique de France* in 1938.

Source

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89tienne_Charles_Ren%C3%A9_Sou%C3%A8ges