Notes R.B.G. Edinb. 38(2):258 (1980)

BOOK REVIEW

More on David Douglas. My initial reaction that yet another book about the botanist and plant collector David Douglas* could scarcely be justified proved unfounded for, although much abridged and edited, this is very much Douglas talking in 1824 and so, unlike the main biographies, not written with the hindsight of well over a hundred years. The romance of the contemporaneous word is hard to equal: 'Both [two 35 lb salmon] were purchased for two inches of tobacco (½ oz) value two pence, or one penny each. . . . They [Chenook Indians] think there are good and bad spirits and that I belong to the latter class, lighting my pipe with my lens and the sun, and they call me Olla-piska which signifies fire.' In the wake of the recent eruptions how exciting in May 1980 to read 'My track was along the foot of Mount St Helens.' The journals were first published by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1914 in what John Davies claims to be a poorly edited fashion, difficult to read. I have always found them thoroughly readable and absorbing but he has the advantage of having studied the originals and obviously feels that a better result could have been attained. Long since out of print, they would still be essential reading for a serious student. However the present volume with the abridged extracts woven together in an easy style makes pleasant reading and the author's aim to bring these fascinating jounals to a wider public should certainly be achieved.

After an introductory chapter giving the background to Douglas' life and expeditions the bulk of the book is devoted to extracts from the journals of his second expedition, when from 1824 to 1827 he traversed much of present day Oregon, Washington and southern British Columbia, culminating in a trek from Fort Vancouver to York Factory on Hudson Bay, a journey of nearly three thousand miles. Packed with observations on all aspects of natural history, Douglas' journals also give us an unconscious insignt into human behaviour, that of the Indians, of his companions and indeed his own. During the third expedition all journals and collections were lost in an accident on the Fraser river: the final chapter sums up the remaining years of his life which, after two years in London, were spent entirely in the field in western North America and eventually in the Hawaiian Islands where he met an untimely and unpleasant death in July 1834. Almost all that is known of these years is found in his letters, extracts of which are given in the appendices. Here also are included short biographies of Douglas' friends and contemporaries, a welcome addition helping to place his journeys in the tapestry of concurrent exploration and scientific research. Lists of his plant introductions and his own notes on some conifers are also given and there is a comprehensive index and bibliography. A central bunch of black and white photographs, some modern, some taken from prints of the time, illustrates the work and four adequate maps are provided.

The book is clearly set out and printed. Mr Davies has adhered to the original format giving each entry day and date, omitting month and year, a source perhaps of slight irritation. A few insignificant errors have slipped past the proof readers: for instance George Simpson dies in 1860 and 1870 on the same page; the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, is singular; and whatever one thinks of William Morwood's rather fanciful recent biography of Douglas his name should be spelt with an M, not an N. There are a few errors in the index and it is unfortunate that the splendid pendant cone of the Douglas fir on the dust cover should have been printed upside down!

However this is a book which will please naturalists, historians and all lovers of adventure stories and one which certainly will be added to many bookshelves.

J. M. LAMOND

* *Douglas of the Forests* by John Davies. 192 pp. Plates, 4 maps. 1979. Paul Harris Publishing, 25 London Street, Edinburgh, Scotland. [ISBN 0-904505-37-5]. Price £7.50.

Notes R.B.G. Edinb. 38(2):282 (1980)

BOOK REVIEW

Umbells for Everyman. It is appropriate that the Umbelliferae, so much in evidence in the British countryside, yet a somewhat neglected family, should be the subject of the second handbook in this series published by the BSBI.* The first, *British Sedges*, appeared in 1968 and there has been little alteration to the clear and concise format adopted then. The handbook remains the same useful pocket-size (c. 12 × 18 cm) with soft but robust covers.

The book begins with a brief introduction to the family, followed by an outline of classification and relationships. A short list of species grouped under their most common habitats is useful to the student, and those with culinary aspirations will be pleased to find immediately following, a 'Cook's Guide to the Umbelliferae': an interesting addition although one that I felt merited a reminder to the lay reader of the toxicity of some members of this family. There should, however, be little danger of a fatal misidentification occurring as the author has clearly taken a great deal of care to help the reader from making mistakes.

A most useful explanatory note prefaces the keys. Two types are included: the first an indented dichotomous key and the second a multi-access one similar in construction to that first used in the *Flora of Turkey* (1972) for the same family. These not only offer the user a choice for identification, but, in the case of the latter, allows incomplete material to be run down very satisfactorily.

The species descriptions are very concise and the terminology used is covered in a short but sufficiently comprehensive glossary at the end. They often include interesting pieces of information about the plants which serve to reflect the author's long standing knowledge of this family. All 73 British species, excluding a few casual aliens, are illustrated by full-page line-drawings of habit and fruit structure; the quality of printing served to enhance further the fine drawings by Ann Davies.

The positioning of the description to face the illustration is particularly useful—a layout that gives the reader easy access to all relevant information. The book ends with a short bibliography and an index of Latin and common names.

This is a most valuable and attractive handbook which should encourage all British naturalists to take a real interest in the family. One can only hope that £5 for a 200 page paperback won't deter the potential buyer and that it reaches the readership it deserves.

ROSE A. KING

* *Umbellifers of the British Isles* by T. G. Tutin. 197 pp. incl. 73 full-page illustr. Botanical Soc. of the British Isles, London. 1980. Price £5.00.