

Narcissus poeticus in its Natural Habitat

By MATTHEW ZANDBERGEN, *Sassenheim, Holland*

The delightful *N. poeticus*, so rightly called a nomad of the narcissus family, can be seen in huge quantities from the Spanish Pyrenees through France, Switzerland, Austria, and the Balkans; flowering dates vary with position and altitude. In the Spanish Pyrenees *N. poeticus* thrives on slopes and pasturages near the Val d'Aran, and on the French side it grows vigorously near a small town called Mont Louis. In the vicinity is a celebrated valley called the Val d'Eyne. From here up to the Spanish border one finds not only the narcissus but all kinds of lovely Alpine flowers in bloom. In this area the flowering time of the narcissus is rather late, usually from mid- to late June.

N. poeticus varies enormously, as do all narcissus when growing wild. *N. poeticus verbanensis* appears in great quantities at 2,000 to 3,000 meters at Lautaret, a pass halfway between Grenoble and Besancon. Sometimes one finds lovely round flowers with overlapping perianth segments; others are just as starry, gappy, and windmill-like as one can imagine. A larger species may be found along the Romanche River some 600 m. lower. In Switzerland *N. poeticus* grows in profusion just north of Lake Geneva; in my early days I often took part in the Narcissus celebrations at Montreux and Lausanne and sometimes travelled in trains lavishly decorated with them. During my apprenticeship in Austria I used to explore the Alpine flora on weekends and was amazed to see the endless stretches of *N. poeticus radiiflorus* (a rather insignificant flower) which turned the slopes and pasturages white, as if with snow. I am now referring to the Ybbstal in lower Austria, places like Waidhofen, along the river Ybbs, Amstetten, Pochlarn, and Lunz am See. I have always wished to go back again during the flowering time and take some colored slides. This opportunity arose when we decided with a small party to attend the Narzissenfest in Ausseerland June 4-7, 1970, a 700-mile drive from Amsterdam. At Bad Aussee the festivities started with an International Dance Tournament at which the Narcissus Queen 1970 was chosen, together with a competition for the Silver Narcissus.

The next day we enjoyed a procession of boats decorated with narcissus, on the lakes Grundlsee and Altsee. In Bad Aussee the following day young and old participated in the narcissus procession in which about 80 cars were involved. The flowers had been gathered in the valleys by some 600 schoolchildren and made available to anyone, including guests, who wished to participate with a decorated car. Together with some other guests from various countries, Rodney Ward from the Isles of Scilly and I were asked to help with the judging. When the procession got into motion, helicopters made a peaceful and exciting gesture by dropping a rain of *poeticus* posies on the watching crowds.

The 1971 festival dates will be June 3-6. The floral boat procession on the Grundlsee takes place on the 5th and the floral procession of cars decorated with the wild Alpine *poeticus* on the 6th. Accommodation can be booked with the Kurverwaltung, Bad Aussee, Austria.

Don't miss this opportunity if you happen to be in Europe, and don't forget to bring your gumboots! Happy narcissus hunting!