ELECAMPANE

In the twenty-fourth of a series of articles on Raasay’s flora, botanist STEPHEN BUNGARD takes a look at Elecampane

Elecampane (*Inula helenium*) is a robust herb that was first recorded on Raasay at Brochel in the 1930s. It is still there today below the castle. A second site was found in 2004, also on the east coast, below Druim an Aonaich.

It has large yellow flowers, large bright green, toothed leaves and can reach a height of over 2 metres, though the Raasay plants are a little shorter.

The plant's specific name, *helenium*, derives from Helen of Troy as it is said to have sprung up from where her tears fell. Alternatively, she was holding elecampane in her hand when she left to live with Paris in Troy.

It was sacred to the ancient Celts, and once had the name "elfwort". Other names include elfdock, marchalan and horse-heal and it is reputed to have the usual bewildering array of medicinal effects. It is not native to Britain and may perhaps have been introduced at Brochel long ago as a medicinal herb.

In France and Switzerland it is used in the manufacture of some varieties of absinthe where it adds an aroma of camphor and a pungent and bitter taste.

Like a lot of plants in the sunflower/daisy family it is a good source of nectar and when in full bloom can be seen covered in bees, hoverflies and other insects.

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