

WILDFLOWER watch

BY DAVID KISH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CB WILDFLOWER FESTIVAL

An Alpine Celebration of Independence

As the calendar turns to July and our legs move us to higher elevations, one wildflower stands out among the alpine awakening: Parry's primrose (*Primula parryi*). Saturated in vibrant fuchsia and rising in clusters from soggy meadows, this striking wildflower boldly announces its presence. As we celebrate the Fourth of July in the high country, Parry's primrose offers a natural complement to the holiday. It is a botanical firework that is vivid, celebratory, resilient and deeply rooted in the history of American exploration.

This showy wildflower takes its name from Dr. Charles Parry, a 19th-century botanist, mountaineer and explorer. Born in England on July 28, 1823, Parry's family moved to the United States in 1832. He studied medicine and botany at Columbia University and was part of a generation shaped by the ideals of exploration and scientific curiosity in a young, expanding nation. He served as the first botanist for the U.S. Department of



Parry's primrose

PHOTO BY DAVID KISH

Agriculture and made extensive surveys of the American West, including the Colorado Rockies. Parry documented countless plant species, many of which now bear his name, including Parry's lily, Parry's penstemon and Parry's primrose.

A perennial native in the high elevations of the Rocky Mountains, Parry's primrose typically blooms from late June to early August. It thrives in sub-alpine and alpine environments, often along seeps, bogs and snowmelt-fed creeks. The plant forms lush, bright green basal rosettes of oblong leaves. A tall, slender, leafless stalk holds loose clusters of intensely colored, five-petaled magenta flowers.

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The blooms release a sweet odor at first and then a spicy, musky fragrance in warm, moist air. The bright yellow center seems to attract a variety of pollinators, including native bees and flies, and guides them to the nectar source.

Like a small botanical firework, Parry's primrose splashes its vivid hues across alpine meadows. A blooming primrose marks a

triumph after long trials, a declaration of independence from the snowy grip of winter. And woven into every petal is the legacy of Dr. Charles Parry, whose boundless curiosity ignited our botanical knowledge and sparked our sense of wonder. Parry's primrose is, in every way, a living celebration of color, freedom and the restless spirit that drives us to explore.