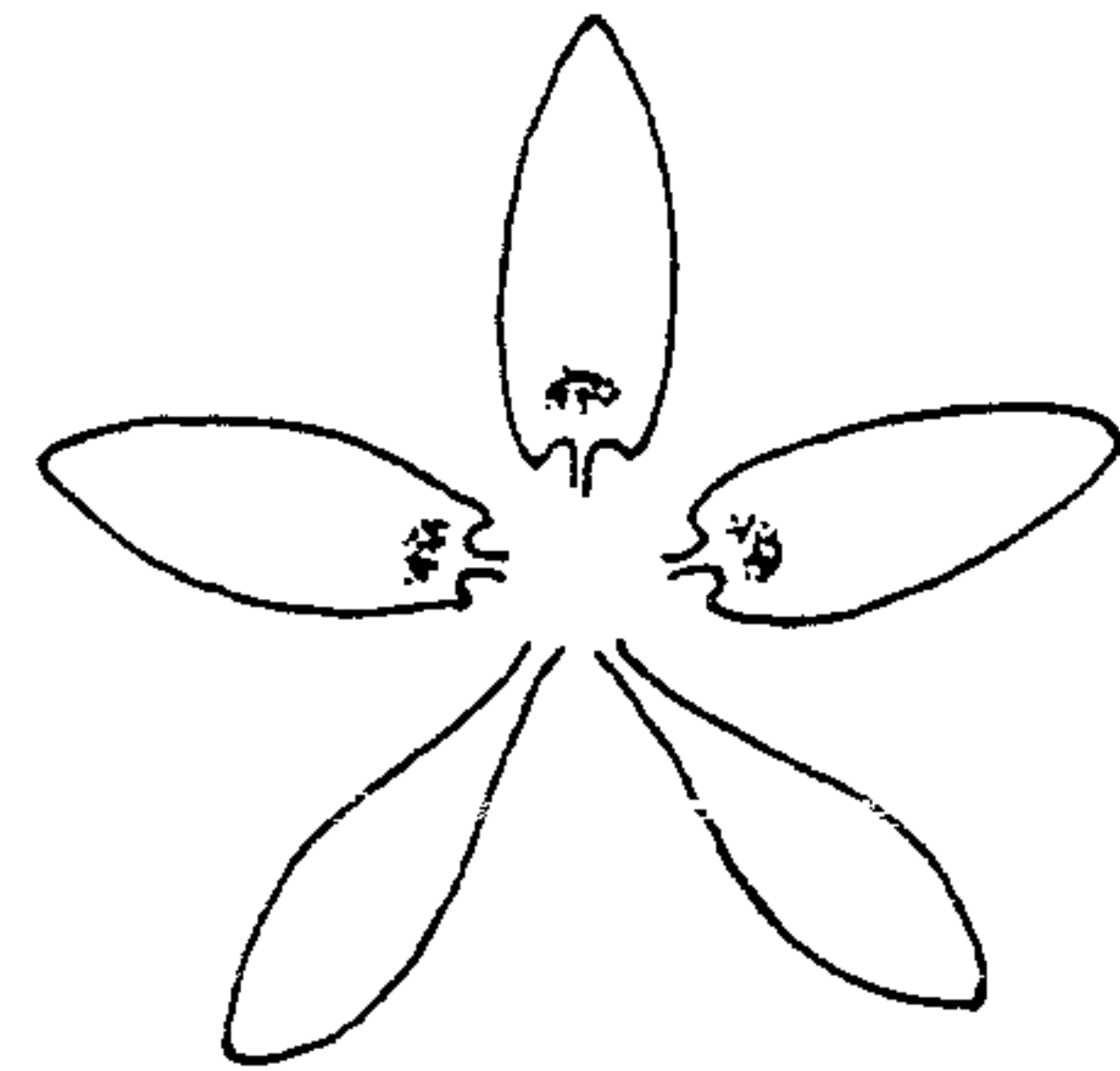


# LOOK AGAIN !

Numbering about 300 species, the Saxifrages encircle the northern hemisphere inhabiting for the most part cold and mountainous regions. Here in the Southern Appalachians we can lay exclusive claim to a couple of handsome members of the genus.

• Mountain Saxifrage (Saxifraga michauxii) is probably the more familiar of the two. It grows from cracks in rocky ledges and on seepage slopes, but also spreads profusely on some grassy balds. Each plant emerges from a rosette of coarsely-toothed basal leaves which often assume a rich crimson hue. The myriad flowers, borne in a large diffuse panicle, form a cloud of misty white when seen from a little distance. They must, however, be examined closely with a hand lens to be fully appreciated--and to be distinguished from our other species. As shown by this diagram, they are zygomorphic (irregular) in form: the upper three petals are clawed and bear a yellowish gland near the base, whereas the lower two are spatulate and unmarked. The delicate beauty of these blossoms is enhanced by the ten stamens radiating from the center, each of which is tipped with a brick-red ball-shaped anther.



The other species is S. micranthidifolia, called Brook Saxifrage because it is so often found near running water. One of its favorite stances is on a moss-covered boulder in the middle of a tumbling mountain stream, another is among spray-drenched rocks at the base of a waterfall. Brook Saxifrage is a somewhat taller plant with more elongated leaves. The flowers are similar to those of S. michauxii but with the diagnostically importance of being actinomorphic, or regular, having all five petals clawed, yellow-spotted, and of the same shape.

Much more rare in the western North Carolina mountains are S. careyana (another southern endemic) and Early Saxifrage (S. virginensis), which is common throughout most of the piedmont province.

*Dick Smith*