

The copper flower

This day in mid-august, I'm on a hike inside the Godthaabs fiord at Nuuk. It's a beautiful summer day. The sun shines and the mosquitoes are swarming about me.

I am making a pause on the banks of a turbulent river. First I enjoy the scenery with the dramatic shaped mountains and the blue surface of the fiord. Then I begin to explore the vegetation and the fauna around me.

Spiders are sitting in their webs waiting for prey. There on the edge of the cliff side by side with the dense grass and surrounded by the omnipresent lichen stood a pink-coloured small flower; the Alpine Chamion or Alpine catchfly (*Viscaria alpina*).

This little plant can be seen everywhere along the coast of the fiord. Its height is often only ten centimetres, but this little flower is often growing, so it reaches higher than the surrounding flora.

Maybe I'm sitting on the top of a new adventure of the mining industry in Greenland? The Alpine Chamion is used for the prospecting of minerals!

The technique has been used in China since in the 5th century BC. People in the region noticed a connection between vegetation and the minerals located underground. There were particular plants that thrived on and indicated areas rich in copper, nickel, zinc, and allegedly gold though the latter has not been confirmed.

This technique is still used. In Kiruna in northern Sweden is a mine named The Viscaria Mine, because the flower was used to detect a large deposit of copper. For that reason the *Viscaria alpina* is often called *the copper flower*.



*The Alpina Chamion,
"The copper flower", August 2011*

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