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Penstemon davidsonii

[Synonyms : *Penstemon menziesii*, *Penstemon menziesii* subsp. *davidsonii*]

DAVIDSON'S PENSTEMON is a creeping prostrate evergreen shrub. Native to western North America it has snapdragon-like, blue-violet or deep pink flowers.

It is also known as Alpine penstemon, Blue color mat, Large purple beardtongue, Shrubby penstemon, Shrubby pentstemon, and Timberline beardtongue.

Davidsonii commemorates an English-born American geographer and astronomer, George Davidson (1825-1911), who, apart from his work with the US Coast and Geodetic Survey, was made at California an Honorary Professor of Geodesy and Astronomy, as well as from 1877-1885 Professor of Geography. While employed by the US Coast and Geodetic Survey from 1845 to 1895 he travelled worldwide, charted the American Pacific coastline (on and offshore) for ten years from 1850, surveyed the Delaware River and Philadelphia environs for six years from 1860, surveyed the Alaskan coast in 1867, built the first Pacific coast observatory in 1879 in San Francisco and, in addition, led several American observational expeditions to follow solar eclipses and passages of Mercury and Venus. He investigated water supply and sewerage of large European and American cities, as well as drainage problems of large areas such as Holland and Egypt. He invented relevant new precision instruments, and considered irrigation issues in California, volcanic activity generally, movement of sediment in San Francisco bay, and promoted the inclusion of science in the curriculum of public schools in America. He fulfilled a wide range of Government appointed tasks, including an influential report on Alaskan geography and resources when the USA was considering the purchase of 'Russian America'. He was a member of the California Academy of Sciences (its President from 1871-1885), The Geographical Society of the Pacific (its President from its inception in 1881), The American Philosophical Society, a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a life member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, (The) Philadelphia. In addition to a glacier in Alaska and various mountains, the NOAA (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration – US Department of Commerce) Ship Davidson was named after him. His published works include *The Discovery of San Francisco Bay*, and *Francis Drake on the Northwest Coast*.