Alpine sunflower

Scientific name: ***Hymenoxys grandiflora*** **(Torr. & A. Gray ex A. Gray) K.F. Parker** (syn Tetraneuris grandiflora)
Common names: Alpine sunflower, Old-man-of-the-mountain, Tundra hymenoxys, Graylocks

You'll have to hike above the timberline to find this refreshing and robust plant. The Alpine sunflower in native to the Rocky Mountains in Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. And rocky it is; the Alpine sunflower is at home on talus slopes, gravelly meadows and other open rocky places of our Uinta Mountains above 10,000 ft.

Large showy flower heads, which unmistakably brighten up the landscape, obscure the densely woolly stems and linearly segmented leaves. Unlike many other members of the sunflower family who's floral heads follow the path of the sun during the day, the Alpine sunflower always faces east. Each floral head has 15 to 34 ray flowers and up to 400 disk flowers. Early season plants may only be a few inches tall, but later in the season plants will grow up to 12 inches. Flowering from June to August, this plant, like all alpine flowers is incredibly cold, wind and sun tolerant. Studies have shown that each plant may grow for a number of years, but only flower once before dying.

Despite being moved by botanical taxonomists through several genera, the specific epithet 'grandiflora' has remained with this species. 'Grandiflora' is Latin for 'large-flowered'. Another common name for this plant is Old-man-of-the-mountain, because of the dense covering of long or tangled white hairs on the leaves and stems. John Fremont made the first scientific collection of the Alpine sunflower in Wyoming's Wind River Range in the 1840's.