

The Victoria Rhododendron Society Newsletter



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Monday, January 8th, 7:30 p.m.

Bill McMillan

"Plant Hunting in Sichuan China - Travels and Travails - May-June 2006"

Tribute to John Trelawny

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January Refreshments:

Leslie Drew, Anne Allen, Diane Felker, Pat Fuller, Joan Gibb, Lloyd and Linda Gilmore, Maureen and Gerry Glaum are requested to bring goodies for the famished. Please phone Theresa at 478-3515 to confirm contributions and willingness to help behind the counter. Thanks from all of us!

The Christmas Dinner Party

To the following members for the Christmas decorations which graced the tables, thank you: **Keiko Alkire, Carol Dancer, Karen Morrison, Jacqueline Bradbury**. Thanks to **Dean and Ann Goard** for making the delicious punch and for delivering the many items to the Mustard Seed Food Bank after the party. Thank you to the **McMillans** and **Heather Dickman** for the kitchen and hall cleanup. Thanks to **Betty and Bill Gordon** and **Ian Duncan**, plus **Frank Fukioka**

who sent his DVD along to us for the programme. The **Webbs** donated the cooked turkey which was delicious and beautifully sliced beforehand. And finally, thank you to all who came and made it a success. For those who couldn't make it, we missed you! The raffle made \$200 which was not enough to cover the cost of the dinner but there was a considerable amount of canned food for the Mustard Seed Food Bank. Thank you! Happy New Year Everyone!
Margaret deWeese

Welcome New Members!

Maureen Thompson writes: My husband and I moved to Victoria from Ontario three years ago and inherited a very neglected garden with several rhodo bushes, about which I knew hardly anything. Some were named but I have several others which I am still trying to identify.

I have been an avid gardener for many years and was a tour guide and volunteer at Edwards Gardens in Toronto (now the Toronto Botanical Gardens). However, on moving to Victoria I realized that I knew very little about the growing conditions and plants on the West Coast, so I decided to take the Master Gardener course to gain a better understanding of gardening in Victoria. This proved to be a wonderful experience but also made me realize just how much I don't know about gardening!

I joined the Rhododendron Society to learn more about all the wonderful rhodos which grow so well in Victoria and the various conditions and care which they need.

Frances Brigham and husband John Davies who live on Twin View Drive in Saanich. Keiko, Carol and I sat across from Frances and John at the Christmas party and we enjoyed their company. Frances has an established rhododendron garden in which John drives the benefits such as pruning, weeding and the like. They love visiting the Meares Island garden in Tofino and make it a regular pilgrimage.

Bill McCarter, second generation of rhodophiles, son of Peggy and Alec McCarter, has his parents' beautiful garden on Henderson Road to maintain. Bill is an accomplished person, a fine cook, an electronics whiz and soon to be a gardening guru. We are pleased he has

decided to join the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

Vern McMurray by Norma Buckley and Judy Gordon

On Nov. 11th, Vern McMurray, a long time member of the VRS, slipped peacefully away after a lengthy illness. He and his wife Joan had a magnificent garden at the end of Gordon Head Road, which many members of the Club have visited and enjoyed.

Vern's quiet demeanor masked his wonderful sense of humour. His marvellous artistic talents contributed both to his success in business and to the delightful design of their garden.

He was always a gentleman, in every sense of the word, and his talents will be missed. The Club wishes to express their sincere condolences to Joan and her family.

John Trelawny, 1919-2006 by David Ballantyne



John Trelawny passed away on December 1st. John was a faithful member and a good friend to everyone in the Victoria Rhododendron Society. He rarely missed a meeting, and was always more than ready to show visitors the magnificent garden that he and **Ruth** had developed at Deep Cove. John was a good friend of mine for 45 years.

I met John in 1961, when I began working in the old plant pathology lab at what was then the Dominion Experimental Farm on East Saanich Road. We worked

together for two years in plant physiology, and John published two papers on the germination of seeds of Bells of Ireland (*Molucella laevis*), and of seeds of the western dogwood. He was a wonderful person to work with - bright, cheerful, energetic and enthusiastic. At the same time, John was working on his B.Sc. in Botany at Victoria College (later UVic), when he was only able to take one course a year. To complete a full year at this rate would have taken 5 years. John soon became impatient with this situation and, after I left the Experimental Farm to go to UVic, John soon left the civil service to go to UVic full time. At this time, John and Ruth and family moved to Henderson Road in Oak Bay, and John took up his botanical studies with a vengeance, all the while being completely devoted to his family. John was an excellent student, and graduated with his B.Sc. in 1967.

After graduation John worked at the federal forestry lab on Burnside Road for a couple of years in plant pathology, and then returned to UVic to qualify as a high school teacher. John taught a good many diverse subjects at **Edward Milne** High School, including French. At our regular Friday lunches, John never failed to correct my pronunciation of items on the menu. I never learned, and John never failed to correct me.

In the early 1970s, John joined the Biology Department at UVic as Senior Lab Instructor in Botany. John had a most successful career. He taught his students with dedication and enthusiasm, and when they arrived in my third and fourth courses, they were well trained, enthusiastic themselves and raring to go. As well as his teaching duties, John was successfully able to undertake a number of other projects. He edited and revised **Dr. Lewis Clark's** extensive book on the wild flowers of BC and adjacent regions. Also, from this work John, on his own, prepared and wrote a series of field guides on wild flowers growing in the various regions of BC. After two extensive trips to the Yukon, John wrote a highly successful field guide on the wild flowers of the Yukon. This book has gone into several editions. John carried out two plant-collecting trips to southeastern Turkey for Edinburgh University, for UBC and for the University of Alberta. For some years John organized and led a series of popular garden tours to Britain, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. John

certainly didn't waste his time between May and September!

In 1986 John retired from UVic. Before this, John and Ruth had long since returned to Deep Cove. However, John always maintained his connection with UVic. He was an enthusiastic member of the committee that was advising and managing the development of the Finnerty Gardens, and he was responsible for the addition of many rare and attractive plants to this garden.

After 1986 John and Ruth developed their garden, which features so many rhododendrons. This garden kept growing and growing, and I accused of John keeping on going until it reached Swartz Bay! As well as rhododendrons, John and Ruth had a number of attractive and rare woody plants, a greenhouse and a productive vegetable garden with a small orchard. Anyone who knew John was always invited to visit. My last visit to the garden was in October - and we had a great time going through the garden, as usual. John was on his scooter and drove it at an astonishing speed, so that I had to run after him. We paused often to admire and discuss many of the plants. As usual, Ruth provided a fine tea, and, as usual, we were late showing up for tea, which was always most enjoyable. Like the rest of the Victoria Rhododendron Society, I had a wonderful friendship with John. From the early 1970s, John and many of his UVic colleagues had Friday lunch together, and this continued after we all retired. Over the past 20 years, lunch always ended with a pressing invitation from John to visit the garden.

I have not discussed John's extensive and distinguished military career, but I must mention that after graduating from Sandhurst just before World War 2, John was in the British Army and served in India, Iraq, the Middle East and Italy, where he lost one leg and became a prisoner of war. Despite all of this he achieved a very great deal.

John will be greatly missed by the Society. He might not approve of my terminology, but John Trelawny had a magnificent "innings".

For those of you who missed seeing Frank's DVD here is the list of his registered hybrids: winners all! You will be able to check the DVD out of the library. Just before **John Trelawny** went into hospital he sent me this list he had typed out for the VRS members to use for the December presentation



Frank Fukioka of Whitby Island

Vibrant Violet	Primary Pink
Silver Skies	Purple Amethyst
Elsie Watson	Pink Pinwheels
Cranberry Lace	Opal Luster
Starbright Champagne	Saffron Silk
Midnight Mystique	Louisa Wittrock
Seaview Sunset	Miss Frances
Glowing Gold	Jim's Blueberry Jam



***R. macrophyllum* at Shawnigan Lake**

photo by Dean Goard

Update Report on *R. macrophyllum* by Dean Goard

1. Research Program

In late August a group of *Rhododendron macrophyllum* aficionados met at the **Helen R. Whiteley** Center on San Juan Island. The major topics of this workshop were the geographical map of *R. macrophyllum* populations and variation within this species, both within and between populations.

Dr. Ben Hall reported on studies of two genes that show a remarkable extent of DNA variation across *R. macrophyllum* and his plans to expand these studies to additional genetic regions. There was general agreement that comparative growth studies under controlled garden conditions might lead to a clearer understanding of both flower and DNA variation in *R. macrophyllum*.

Given the large differences in rainfall, solar illumination and temperature across the region and the genotypic differences between populations, it seems likely that selection for fitness in specific micro-environments has shaped the genomes of the *R. macrophyllum* populations growing in them. A suitable test for the existence of such adaptive differences would be to carry out common garden growth studies like those performed in the mid 20th century by **Clausen, Keck and Hiesey**.

A number of regional sampling locations and test-garden sites were agreed necessary. It was proposed that Victoria could be a site representing rain shadow coastal locations. I have been in discussions with UVic about availability of suitable space but it does not look too promising. In the New Year I will be meeting with representatives of the native plant gardens at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific (Glendale Gardens). The current plans are to make cuttings of selected plants in autumn 2006, and then to proceed with the larger project one year later. During 2006-2007, additional meetings will be held, either at the Lake Wilderness Centre in the South King County Arboretum or at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden.

2. Mt. Elphinstone

In October, **Ron Knight** and I went up to the site. We labelled and numbered what appeared to be the seven

clumps of rhodos and where possible collected some seeds and a few cuttings. The seeds had opened and were quite damp but have been dried out and I will try and germinate them this month. Cuttings are in my propagator. We'll see how they do.

3. Other Reported BC Sites

On Vancouver Island rhodo sites include:

Western end of Haslam Lake west of Ladysmith and north of Lake Cowichan, Southeast Middle Quinsam Lake (reported in Discovery the quarterly of the Vancouver Natural History Society New Series Vol. 1 No. 4 (No. 157) Dec. 1972 - Feb. 1973. On the Sunshine Coast there is a report of a site near Mt. Tetrahedron but no details yet.

In the Cascades north and east of the Skagit site at Roscoe Lake another site has been reported.

4. Moving forward

There is a need to confirm a test garden site in Victoria, some of these possible sites on the coast and appeal to the greater public for additional sites of *R.*

macrophyllum.

San Francisco ARS Convention

The web site for the ARS 2007 annual convention is open for business. The web address is <http://www.ars2007conf.org>. Interested registrants will find the convention program, tour, speaker, hotel accommodations, plant sale and photo sale information, as well as on-line registration with payment by credit or debit cards (**we would MUCH prefer checks**) and a print and mail form for **check payment**.

June E. Walsh

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What a storm!
by **Rhonda Rose**

I was surprised on Sunday November 26 to see the

amount of snow accumulating when the forecast was for only a few centimetres. I woke up early Monday knowing that I would have to walk the few kilometres into work. I arrived to the office only to see many of my co-workers already there busy keeping open the fire roads and main arteries to the campus. We spent more than fifteen hours Monday opening paths to allow entry into all the buildings on campus and access for all the residences.

Tuesday I had my first opportunity to walk through the Finnerty Garden, and I was devastated. I had never witnessed that amount of damage to the garden in the sixteen years I have worked in Finnerty. I felt overwhelmed still knowing that I would have to go back out into the campus to help clear the way for the university community and the many events scheduled on the campus. I also knew there was not much that could be done until the snow started to melt.

Monday, December 5 we were able to get the resources we needed to start the garden cleanup as the Douglas Firs with the weight of the snow had snapped, falling and crushing the plants beneath them, littering many of the paths. Starting with the paths for safe passage, we began cutting the large limbs and hauling to the storage yard. Running out of space in no time we then moved to lot 6. We have lost many of the tops of the *Magnolia grandiflora*, a *Magnolia denudata* and large limbs of a few other magnolias. The timber bamboo was bent into the pond leaving us to remove about half the canes because they split under the pressure of the snow. The Garry Oaks shed some huge limbs as well causing collateral damage to the rhodos below. We have lost some of the specimen trees, some of the remaining ones have had the broken branches removed and we will have to determine what can and should be saved. The rhododendron damage is still to be uncovered as we go from bed to bed removing the large fir limbs leaving any remnant of a plant and hoping the propagating group may have a cutting or be able to take one.

I write this while feeling very optimistic, seeing the spring bulbs poking through as we clear the ground. The hellebores are starting to push their flowers up to the opened canopy. I look forward to the opportunity to work with the Rhododendron community and the Friends to replace and repair what we have established

over the many years.

Rhonda added: “I wrote this at the beginning of the week! What a difference a day makes. The high winds have caused more damage and the garden had to be shut down for the first time ever. I guess it will give me reason to write another article.” RR



photos by Carol Dancer

Winter Damage
by **David Sellars**

reprinted from [Siftings from the Compost Pile](#)
compiled articles for Fraser South's newsletter

Snow in the garden is a mixed blessing. A blanket of snow provides valuable insulation for the rootballs of our tenderish rhododendrons when the temperatures fall

below- 10 degrees centigrade. If the snow is wet and heavy it can break branches which is not always a bad thing for rhododendrons as it prunes out weak twiggy growth. Snow also helps to keep us indoors, otherwise we would not catch up on our garden diary and rhododendron inventories.

In 1991 we planted an *Acer palmatum* 'Seiryu' near the spot where we had a native birch tree cut down. This was clearly in the days before the City of Surrey enacted their ludicrous tree bylaw. 'Seiryu' is the only Japanese Maple with a dissectum leaf that grows into an upright vase shape. The other dissectum maples prefer to squat around the garden like cloaked goblins.

With loving care and attention the 'Seiryu' grew to be our favourite tree in the garden. The two main branches are like huge tropical ferns, one arching over a grass path with that highly desired romantic look that the Wife is always going on about. The Spring growth is magic, the Summer leaves are a delicate green tapestry and the Fall foliage is a mellow orange, the colour of warm blankets.

It seems to me that, five years later, a tree starts to make a significant contribution to the garden landscape. At this age, a tree has not come to dominate the surroundings but is large enough to be a beautiful plant in its own right. How timely then, that the heavy wet snow a few days before Christmas, weighed down the vigorous twiggy growth of the 'Seiryu' and split off the branch arching romantically over the grass path. five years of effort, mostly by the tree, now ready for the bonfire.

In the spring I will either dig it up and plant another, or cut the stump half a metre above the ground to see if new growth will spring from it like a coppiced hazel. Garden books are always talking about the winter being a season of renewal and now I understand what they mean.

(Rootstalk, January 1997)

Ed. note. The above article is to remind us of the damaging snow which southern BC endured in 1996. We look forward to hearing David Sellars speak on 'Alpine Gardening in his Rhododendron Garden' at our March meeting.