

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria BC Canada V8R 6S4

May 2008 Twenty-eighth Year of Publication

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Meeting

7:30 pm Monday, May 5, 2008

Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria BC

SPEAKER: Glen Jamieson “A Continent without rhododendrons—a biologist’s travels in Ecuador and Peru”

May Refreshments:

Joan Bekius, Roy and Lois Blackmore, Frank Bosworth, Jacqueline Bradbury, Peter Bradley, Archie and Norah Brown, and Norma and Bert Buckley are asked to bring wrapped goodies to March’s meeting. Please phone Nadine Minckler at 474-1429 to confirm contributions. Help for Joanna Massa and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

Review of April’s talk on “Rhododendron Hunting in the Arctic”

by Theresa McMillan

Daylen Bayes talked to us about the canoe trips he and his wife Lori, sometimes with family or friends, have made during the summer in Canada’s northwest territories during the last thirty-five years. It was a remarkable

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change from spring here in Victoria. Our tall trees, forested hills, and gardens gave way to pictures of vast expanses of water and land underlain by melting permafrost. Numerous eskers, long snaking sand and gravel bodies, formed under the ancient arctic glaciers as they melted and retreated due to climate change, leaving desert-like scenes.

But not all of the land was flat, so there were many rocky areas with several waterfalls and white-water rapids. The canoeists had to make many portages overland to get to lakes and rivers to continue their journey, just as

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the voyageurs did in the old days. Daylen and Lori had to be resourceful when a fellow canoeist, Michael, fell ill, and could not do much to help. Lori acted as nurse and doctor. They had to wait for weeks for new supplies and access to medical aid. The floatplane came on scheduled dates. With good care, Michael recovered and was able to go canoeing up north in the next summer. The land is mostly treeless, and looked barren. Closer looks revealed fields of wildflowers and low-lying rhododendrons. The mauve *R. lapponicum*, the white *R. subarcticum*, and the white *R. groenlandicum* or “Labrador tea” (the last two were formerly classified as *ledums*) are three very hardy, carpet-forming rhododendrons of the north. The days are very long in high summer in the arctic, so we were treated to several pictures of glorious long-lasting sunsets and dawns and orange tents in idyllic campsites, but canoes had to be tied down to keep them from flying away in erratic strong winds! The winds also blew the dense swarms of black flies and mosquitoes away from these hardy pioneer spirits.

Notices

The Board decided to allow advertising on the VRS Website. It must be related to rhododendrons or gardening and/or be relevant to members of the Society. A copy of the advertising policy will be available on the Website.

The Vancouver Island Rock And Alpine Garden Society’s 2008 annual show and sale will be held at Cadboro Bay United Church, 2625 Arbutus Road, Victoria, B.C. on Friday, April 25th from 1 pm to 8 pm and on Saturday, April 26th from 9 am to 4 pm. VIRAGS will also be hosting the American Primula Society National Show at this time.

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The Nanaimo Chapter’s show and sale will be Saturday May 10, 10 am to 2 pm, at the Centennial Building at Beban Park complex, 2300 Bowen Road, Nanaimo.

ED KUBEK

from the Morrisons

Ed passed away on March 13, 2008, after a short illness. He was 67 years old.

Ed had retired from a teaching career at Claremont High School. He had played and coached rugby, and had traveled extensively, accompanying rugby teams in tournaments in Europe, North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand. He also enjoyed fishing and was a devoted grandfather and great grandfather.

Over the last few years an interest in gardening was reawakened, and he was gradually building a beautiful garden at the family home on Ardmore Drive. He was collecting plants from a variety of sources including the Dollar Table, salvaged plants from property redevelopment, and even a couple of plants found in a ditch having probably fallen off a truck!

Ed enjoyed attending meetings of the Rhodo Society, and was a willing volunteer at the Show and Sale. He will be remembered for his success in soliciting an astonishing number of donated items from Peninsula businesses for the Raffle. One of his most prized plants was a *R. fulvum* that he had obtained at the silent auction at the A.R.S. Convention (from the Hyslop garden). In his final days, Ed's wife, Alice, endeavoured to provide him with daily reports and digital photos, as the plant was just coming into flower.

Ed is survived by his wife, Alice, his children Ron, Larry, and Barbara, as well as six grandchildren and two great-children, and many friends.

We will miss his enthusiasm and companionship.

Companion Plants

G is for Gentians

the Gentian Family

Family: Gentianaceae

Reprinted from the Yak newsletter November 2003

You want blue?? You'll get blue with Gentians, and not just blue, but electric fantastic true, true, blue!! But you're going to have to work for it, because they're not all that easy to grow. If you have a well-designed rockery, you'll be more successful with the mat-forming types, but there are a few other taller ones that can thrive in mixed borders. With careful selection, you can have gorgeous blue blooms from May to October, or even later if the weather holds.

It starts with the Star Gentian, *G. verna*, and then the Trumpet Gentians, *G. acaulis* and *G. alpina*. Then for mid-summer blooms, try *G. dahurica* (Spotted Gentian), *G. paradoxa*, *G. septemfida* (Crested Gentian), and *G. cruciata* (Cross Gentian). For fall there are the lime-haters that like cool peaty soils – *G. sino-ornata*, *G. asclepiadea* (Willow Gentian) and *G. macaulyi*, and the exception to the rule, *G. farreri*, which prefers a scree bed. We also have some native gentians. One suitable for quite moist sites is *G. sceptrum* (King Gentian) (*G. menziesii*), an herbaceous form growing 2-3 feet tall, with large purple-blue trumpets in late summer.

In truth, not all gentians are blue – there is the yellow species, *G. lutea*, and several white types, but I personally dismiss these as not worthy of being called gentians!

The very low alpine species grow only 2 to 4 inches tall, and are never invasive, spreading only 8 to 12 inches. They are mostly evergreen or partially so, and have comparatively large flowers for their size – some trumpets up to a startling 2 inches long. The herbaceous types are generally taller, from 12 to 36 inches. Most make tidy clumps, and may re-

tain a winter rosette of foliage.

When you see gentians in a plant center, please don't be so distracted by saying WOW! so many times that you forget to read the labels carefully to determine exactly which ones you're about to get. They are quite particular as to growing conditions, and poor locations tend to encourage leaf diseases. Slugs can be dissuaded by a good dressing of grit around the base. All gentians prefer drainable light humus soil that does not dry out in summer, and partial shade. Spring and early summer bloomers can tolerate a neutral soil, but the later they bloom, the more necessary an acidic soil.

Increase is tricky for many, due to their tight growth habit, but some, like *G. acaulis* and *G. sino-ornata*, come apart well; just make sure to firm the divisions in well to establish. Seed production is probably best left to experienced professionals, but hey! You've nothing to lose if you try.

So, if you're one of those gardeners blessed with a rockery, you owe it to yourself to have at least two or three different ones and for those of us who do not, well—we



Gentiana septemfida (Crested Gentian) showing the seven cuts of the crest.

can dream, can't we?

Happy Planting,

Colleen Forster



Gentiana alpina



The spring-flowering *Gentiana verna* (Star Gentian) does not display the familiar trumpet shaped gentian flower.



Our native gentiana *sceptrum* showing the terminal purple-blue trumpets

SPECIES PROFILE: *Rhododendron triflorum* Hook.f. 1849

Synopsis of an report by Steve Hootman

The majority of the 30 or so rhododendrons introduced by Joseph Hooker from his 1848-1850 Expedition to Sikkim have become well known and, at least in species collections, widely-grown. Showy and impressive species such as *thomsonii*, *arboreum*, *niveum*, *maddenii*, *edgeworthii*, *falconeri*, *hodgsonii*, *griffithianum*, *campanulatum*, *barbatum* and *cinnabarinum* gained the widespread attention and admiration of western gardeners and botanists following this historic expedition into the eastern Himalayas. To this day, these plants make up the “backbone” of a species collection in most gardens and many are commonly used in hybridizing programs.

Since Hooker introduced this variable and often common species, it has been widely collected by later plant hunters. *R. triflorum* occurs at elevations ranging from 7,000 to 13,000 feet (2,100 to 4,000m) in the eastern Himalaya from E Nepal through Sikkim and Bhutan, including adjacent areas of N India (West Bengal) and eastward into the mountains of SE Tibet and the N Myanmar/Tibet/Indian frontier. It was also collected by Frank Kingdon Ward in 1928 from an isolated population in NE India (Manipur & Nagaland) where it occurs from 8,000 to 9,500 feet (2,400 to 2,900m). Although similar to *R. triflorum*, this new collection was named *R. bauhiniiflorum* due to its distinct range and larger, flatter flowers. Dr. Cullen reduced it varietal status within *R. triflorum* in 1980. Forms from the eastern end of the range (SE Tibet and adjacent Arunachal Pradesh) originally described as var. *mahogani* are best referred to as *R. triflorum* var. *triflorum* Mahogani Group. These have non-peeling bark and often have

a reddish coloring in the flowers, whether a suffusion, blotch an/or spots. These are nothing more than color variations within populations. The flower color in Mahogani Group is quite variable and the plants tend to be hardier.

Chinese botanists have recently located an amazingly disjunct population of this species which they have named *R. triflorum* ssp. *multiflorum*, distinguishing it on the basis of its very isolated range and in having four to five flowers per inflorescence (versus the typical two or three). They collected this subspecies in the Wuliang Shan of SW Yunnan Province, China.

R. triflorum is a lepidote or scale-bearing rhododendron and is the type species for Subsection *Triflora*. It is found in a wide variety of habitats although like most rhododendrons, it is generally restricted to mountainous situations with cool, humid air and plenty of precipitation. Habitats range from shaded moss-covered cliffs growing with numerous other Ericaceae to dry, treeless, grassy slopes where it grew with *Rhododendron ciliatum*. Plants grown from seed collected on a trip in 2003 have flowers that are rather small and a bit pale in color but this “lack” is made up for by the glossy foliage and stunning smooth and peeling, deep chestnut-brown bark.

This species also varies greatly in size, ranging from fairly small and seemingly delicate to a large and vigorous thicket-forming shrub up to 20 feet in height. The leaves are typically aromatic, somewhat elliptic in shape and up to three inches (c. seven cm) in length. As with the bark, there are obvious differences in foliage between the western (very glaucous on the underside) and the eastern populations (green or only slightly glaucous beneath); the lower surface is always dotted with tiny brown

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ARS Western Regional Convention

Hilo, Hawaii,
September 25 – 28, 2008.

Some rhododendron club members might be interested in combining next fall's ARS convention with a fall holiday in Hawaii. The conference should be interesting. Likely, there will be lots of opportunities to learn about Vireya rhododendrons. The conference location in Hilo, on the Big Island of Hawaii, is near where the local volcano is constantly spewing lava into the sea. Also near Hilo is a very large and very beautiful tropical botanical garden; the orchid section alone is worth the price of admission. Moreover, many conference attendees in past years have reported that they have enjoyed the Western Regional conventions even more than the national ones.

Regarding air travel, both Air Canada and Westjet have direct flights to Maui from Vancouver and from there it is easy to take any one of several daily inter-island flights to Hilo. I booked on the phone with Westjet for 2 people, in March. The total cost from Vancouver to Maui, with all taxes and fees included was \$908. This seat sale apparently lasts until mid-April. Flying with Air Canada on the same days (with their cheapest on-line booking for 2 people) would have cost \$1926.

Conference details will be posted soon on the ARS website at : www.rhododendron.org.

Ron Knight
ARS District 1 Director

FRAGILE SPRING BEAUTY

.From Barbara Struthers, a photo of her R. Cilpinense. This year, she was able to see its flowers; the buds didn't freeze. Barbara took a few pictures of its lovely blooms, but shortly after words, the frosts came, turning the flowers limp and brown.

So many early blooming rhododendrons in the Victoria area suffered the same fate this cool spring....



R. Cilpinense

Tofino and Ucluelet Tour – May 17-18, 2008

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society has organized an exciting two day tour of rhodo gardens and special sites on the west coast of Vancouver Island at Tofino and Ucluelet on May 17 and 18- the peak blooming times for rhododendrons in several major heritage gardens.

See details in April's newsletter.

New Zealand Gardens Tour

Diane Weissman, De Anza Chapter, is organizing a trip to New Zealand this fall to attend the **New Zealand Rhododendron** convention in Geraldine and then tour both public and private Gardens of the South Island of New Zealand. Dates are **24th October—10th November, 2008.**

See details in April's newsletter.

Plant Sale & Garden Open . Saturday April 19th 10 am - Evelyn Weesjes' 10629 Derrick Rd. (left off West Saanich to Downey, left off Downey to Derrick)

Plant Sale & Garden Open. Sunday April 20th 11-4pm. -Carmen Varcoe & Friends 5450 Old West Saanich Rd. Parking available next door at the Gazebo B & B.

Plant a Holics Sale. Sunday May 18th (9 - 12pm) ABKHAZI GARDENS- A Plant sale extravaganza. 1964 Fairfield Rd. Parking at Margaret Jenkins School. Gardens Open Free 9:00 to 12:00 Tearoom Open from 10:00 on. More info call Abkhazi Gardens 598-8096

GRAND OPENING of the Memorial Rhododendron Park in Lake Cowichan

Grand Opening at Lake Cowichan, **Saturday, May 17 at 12 pm.** Location, Point Ideal Road, next to the Info Center.

Topic: "Bringing back our Rhododendron Heritage". Reception after the Grand Opening.

RSVP Ingeborg Woodsworth 250- 749-6291 or MayoCreekGardens@shaw.ca

2008 GARDEN VISITS

THE JOHNSON GARDEN

Sunday, May 18 1:00 p.m. 635 Lost Lake Road, Highlands

The Johnson Family is honoring Charlie and his love of gardening by having an open garden in his memory. It is a forested garden situated on Teanook Lake.

A number of the rhododendrons in the garden were inherited from Sue's father and many more have been collected over the years. A large waterfall and pond anchor the garden in what is known as the Rhododendron Dell. Winding pathways, rhododendrons and native vegetation describe this natural and beautiful garden.

Directions: Coming from town, take Hwy. 1 to exit 14, choosing the Highlands option. Continue on Millstream until Lost Lake Road. Turn right and continue to 635.

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scales spaced approximately their own diameter apart. The flowers (late spring to early summer) are borne in a terminal inflorescence of two or three (sometimes four), thus the epithet “*triflorum*” meaning “three-flowered”. Individual flowers are widely funnel-shaped and up to one and a half inches (four cm) across except in the NE India population (var. *bauhiniiflorum*) where they are much flatter in shape and one and a half to two inches (four to five cm) across. They range in color from pale yellow to bright yellow or greenish, usually with greenish spots and in the case of the SE Tibetan/Arunachal Pradesh populations (Mahogani Group) variously marked or blushed with red or reddish-brown. The calyx is quite small, the ovary is covered with scales and the style is typically smooth.

In cultivation, *R. triflorum*, like most members of Subsection *Triflora*, is vigorous and easy under normal rhododendron growing conditions. It prefers strong light but performs more than adequately in partly shaded conditions. As always, good drainage is essential. The hardiness varies somewhat as would be expected from a species with such a wide distribution. Most forms of this species should be hardy from +10°F. to 0°F. with the typical Himalayan as well as the NE Indian (var. *bauhiniiflorum*) forms generally less hardy than those from SE Tibet.

I am unaware of any awards this species may have received and the only hybrid I could locate was a cross with *R. xanthostephanum* called ‘Butterball’.



Rhododendron *triflorum* at Glendale Gardens—note that this specimen is pink in flower, not yellowish.