

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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Meeting 7:30 p.m.

Monday, April 6, 2009

Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria, B.C.

Speaker: Ted Irving, “India-Asia Tectonic Collision: Rhododendrons and Magnolias, A Second Look”

Ted Irving is a long-time member of the VRS, and was responsible for the mid-90s renovation of the Rhododendron Gardens at the HCP. Ted is a geologist and emeritus scientist with the Geological Survey of Canada. His studies of magnetism frozen in rocks provided the first physical evidence of the theory of continental drift.

APRIL REFRESHMENTS

Nadine Minckler, Bonnie Moro, Karen and Burns Morrison, Patricia Murray and David and Joyce Parker are asked to bring wrapped refreshments to April's meeting.

Please phone Joanna Massa at 250-642-5491 to confirm.

Help for Joanna and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

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A Review of March's Talk

By Theresa McMillan

Pam Eveleigh's talk on Tibetan Alpines recounted her three-week tour of Tibet in 2007. Pam began the talk with a Google Earth picture of Tibet, a dry plateau in the Himalayas, surrounded by India, Kashmir, Burma and China.

The trip itself began in Yunnan, China, an area with incredibly rich flora. Then the expedition, comprising two jeeps, Pam and her husband, two other plant hunters, driver and guides, began the ascent to Tibet.

Pam found the Tibetans, in spite of modern dress and cell phones, held their traditional values. The prayer flags are seen in the shrines and along the passes, but now they are made of nylon, not the cotton of the past. The old prayer flags were biodegradable, but the new ones proliferate, and seem as if they will last for many years.

The plateau and mountain slopes are heavily grazed by yaks, making the photographing of the beautiful alpine flowers a bit hazardous at times because of the animals' droppings.

As well as primulas, Pam's specialty, there were various types of androsaces, meconopsis, cypriums, rhododendrons, calthas, corydalis, and saxifrages on the alpine slopes.

Pam has taken hundreds of pictures of plants, and found it difficult to pick the best for her talk. However, the pictures she chose were very fine, showing details of flowers, leaves and habitat with remarkable clarity.

The VIRAGS and VRS members enjoyed Pam's talk, while she appreciated experiencing early spring in Victoria rather than late winter in Calgary.



Androsace tapete—notice the red centers of the fertilized flowers. The unfertilized ones are yellow.



Primula secundiflora

ODDTHOUGHTS 2

Wild Orchids

By Joe Harvey

Wouldn't it be wonderful, you may dream, if exotic orchids grew wild in your garden, with no need for care and attention, no need for watering, fertilizing, staking or mulching, if they just came up at random, anywhere, on their own, and blossomed to their hearts' content.

Well, stop dreaming because it is already happening, and it isn't pretty. Some reader will have guessed where this is going but before I reveal the answer let me deal with the word 'exotic'. It means 'outsider' or 'from a different land'. So to someone living in North America exotic means something from Asia, or Africa, or even Hawaii, but it can also mean Europe, and this is where our exotic orchid comes from.

The plant in question is epipactis helleborine, the common helleborine because it produces a dense clump of roots, which resemble the roots of helleborus, a favourite of the ancient herbalists (don't copy, the roots are poisonous). Helleborine has a long history of being

in North America, having first gained attention in New York State in the 1800's. It was presumably introduced in soil attached to tree or plant roots.

During my time in Nova Scotia the helleborine was in gardens fairly generally in Halifax. It particularly likes the mulch spread around rhododendrons. I then saw it in Montreal in old gardens, in Lachine in the 1960s and when I moved to Vancouver Island in 1990 I found it growing around the bases of several rhododendrons I had brought with me. I felt guilty about having introduced yet another weed to B.C. but I need not have worried because it is widespread at least in southern B.C. and has been for years. So what does the helleborine look like? It is a very modest little orchid indeed, usually 20-30 cm tall at flowering; there are broad clasping leaves at the base and a narrow spike of many small flowers. The overall impression is greenish when viewed from a distance. It looks nothing like an orchid in a florist's shop. You have to look closely at the individual flower to detect the characteristic lip and tepals of orchids. The flower colour is usually dull pink but I have seen



Broad-leaved Helleborine

Epactis helleborine

greenish white ones. In the fall, the many green capsules turn brown, split and slowly release their hundreds of tiny seeds into the wind.

The life cycle is typical of an orchid. The dust-like seed lacks a cotyledon or root and is just a cluster of cells. This embryo, when seen under a microscope, is enclosed in a rather pretty network box formed by the testa. When moist, the cells put out a few root hairs and just sit like that for possibly months. Soil is of course full of fungal hyphae on the constant hunt for juicy little fragments of organic matter to digest. Sooner or later the orchid seed gets invaded by a fungus intent on sucking out the digestible nutrients. At this point the orchid shows its special adaptation because it sucks harder than the fungus and draws nourishment from the fungal mycelium. It is, in other words, a parasite on the fungus. The parasitic phase may last several years until a pea-sized pseudocorm has formed which can put up a shoot to form a leaf. At this point the helleborine becomes more of a normal plant with green leaves, a cluster of roots and eventually one or several flower spikes. I don't know how many years it takes from seed to flowering but probably between 10 and 20 years.

Is the helleborine a weed? Yes. Is it a serious pest? No. It does however have the characteristic of many weeds: it has outrun its own pests and occurs in a much wider range of habitats than in its native Europe. I never saw it invade cultivated gardens in Britain where it is widely distributed in woodlands but never common. In North America it seems to grow in a wider variety of habitats from shrubberies, grassy fields and a range of deciduous and coniferous woodland.

How to get rid of it? Not that easy. Deer generally ignore it. Darn! The rhizome is fairly deep so it doesn't pull up by hand. RoundUp hardly bothers it (like a lot of rhizomatous or bulbous plants). The complete

solution is to dig it up and burn it. The ultimate remedy? Smile at it. It has defeated us and is here to stay, but it takes up hardly any room. The operational word for the twenty-first century is tolerance. This is a great virtue and we should practice it more.

Proposed Amendment of Constitution and ByLaws

A vote will be held at the April meeting.

20. EXAMINATION OF ACCOUNTS

20.1 The members shall at each Annual General Meeting appoint an Accountant to hold office until the next Annual General Meeting.

20.2 If an appointment of an Accountant is not made at an Annual General Meeting or the Annual General Meeting is not held, the Directors may appoint an Accountant of the Society for the current fiscal year, and fix the remuneration to be paid to him/her by the society for his/her services.

20.3 The Directors may fill any casual vacancy in the office of the Accountant, but while any vacancy continues the surviving or continuing Accountant (if any) may act.

20.4 The remuneration of the Accountant of the Society shall be fixed by resolution of the members, or, if the members so resolved, by the Directors.

20.5 The Accountant shall prepare a notice to readers for the members and Directors on the account examined by him/her and on every balance sheet and statement of income and expenditure laid before the Society, at any Annual General Meeting during his/her tenure of office. It is understood that the Accountant has not performed an audit or a review engagement in response to these financial statements and accordingly does not express an assurance thereon. His or her report shall state:

20.5.1 Whether or not he/she has examined

the balance sheet of the Society as at December 31st, and the statements of income and expenditure and changes in equity for the year then ending.

20.5.2 Whether or not based on his/her examination nothing has come to his/her attention that caused him/her to believe that these financial statements are not in all material respects, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

20.5.3 Every Accountant of the Society shall have a right of access at all times to all records, documents, books, accounts and vouchers of the Society, and is entitled to receive from the Directors and officers of the Society such information and explanations as may be necessary for the performance of the duties of the Accountant.

20.5.4 The Accountant of the Society is entitled to attend any meetings of members of the Society at which any accounts that have been examined or reported on by him/her are to be laid before the members for the purpose of making any statements or explanations they desire with respect to the accounts.

20.5 The rights and duties of an Accountant of the Society shall extend back to the date up to which the last examination of the Society's books and vouchers was made, or where no examination has been made, to the date on which the Society was incorporated.

The 2008 New Zealand Rhododendron Conference

By Norma Senn (reprinted from January 2009 newsletter, the Yak, of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society.)

When you're a "rhodoholic", spring can't come often enough. The solution? Go to New Zealand in October and November. Mary Berg, Nancy Moore and I, all members of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society, did just that in 2008. While there, along with

several other ARS members, we attended the New Zealand Rhododendron conference and then visited many lovely gardens around the South Island on a tour organized by Diane Weissman.

This year, the NZ conference was held in Geraldine on the South Island. Their conferences are a bit different than the usual ARS ones in that the New Zealand conferences are spent touring gardens. Every morning, everyone gathered at Woodbury Hall just outside Geraldine to board the buses for the day. We returned to Woodbury Hall for meals, the banquet and for the one talk presented at the conference. Funnily enough, the presentation was by Richie Steffen about Seattle's Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden. The Miller Garden has the reputation of being a local Seattle jewel, but only allows a small number of visitors to visit each year. Richie gave the three FSRS group the inside "scoop" on how to make sure we get a chance to arrange a visit. Isn't it always the way? We go half way around the world and end up learning about something in our own backyard.

In addition to using Woodbury Hall, the N.Z. conference organizers used white marquee-style tents to house the truss show. The tents provided soft, diffused light which showed off flower colour very well and made taking photos easy. The tents also remained cool which helped keep the trusses fresh throughout the conference.

The conference program included visits to twelve gardens, and I'd be hard-pressed to pick just one as my favourite. They were all lovely, and ranged from a couple of relatively new suburban gardens to large country gardens. The large gardens were, for the most part, established decades ago to surround the farmhouse of working sheep stations. Fortunately for my pocket book, I couldn't buy any plants, but lots of the New Zealanders did

when we visited Woodbury Rhododendron Nursery. The bus drivers were very gracious in helping people load their purchases into the storage units under the buses.

In most of the gardens we visited, the topography was rolling, allowing changes in elevation throughout the gardens and lovely views of the surrounding countryside. Often Rhododendrons were planted on steep terrain providing them with excellent drainage although planting must have been a challenge. Also in most places some sort of water feature was present, usually a natural stream which added to the charm of the gardens.

As long as plants can be protected from the wind, it seems that anything can grow somewhere in New Zealand. The "Southerlies" are cold winds that originate in Antarctica and these sweep over the South Island frequently. For protection large, dense windbreaks have been planted throughout the South Island. Numerous species are used for windbreaks, but particularly common are Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). Around the "stations" we visited woodlands had also been planted early on, and we saw lots of mature oaks, elms, beeches, maples, Douglas firs, *Chamaecyparis* and some *Thujas*. We were told that both Monterey Pine and Douglas fir have become a bit of a problem in some areas, and steps are being taken to control their spread into grazing lands. Considering that NZ was colonized just over 150 years ago, the size of the trees is amazing, but growth rates there are phenomenal. Shrubs and herbaceous ornamentals also grow quickly once shelter is available. And in the Orari Garden, as Nancy said, they were just showing off when *Cardiocrinum* had turned itself into a ground cover.



R. “Kiwi Magic”

Many of the popular hybrids grown in New Zealand would be easily recognized by ARS members, for example, most gardens we visited had ‘Mrs. G.W. Leek’, a whole host of Loderis, and ‘Lem’s Cameo’. Also popular were ‘Horizon Monarch’, ‘Pink Pearl’, ‘Taurus’, ‘Scarlet Wonder’, ‘Pink Petticoats’ and ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’. Of course there were also loads of lovely New Zealand hybrids, some we grow here but some I had not seen before. ‘Kiwi Magic’ [(*yakushimanum* x ‘Dido’) x ‘Lem’s Cameo’] is certainly a sensational plant, with frilly flowers changing from deep pink in the bud through soft pink to pale yellow over time. I was also pleased to see lots of ‘Rubicon’ (‘Noyo Chief’ x ‘Kilimanjaro’), although in most cases this gorgeous red flowered rhody was just past, leading to our hosts using that popular garden phrase, “you should have seen it last week”.



Magnolia “Yellow Bird”

A few plants that I hadn’t known before I thought were terrific. They were: ‘Ilam Cream’, ‘Ilam Cerise’, ‘Michael’s Pride’, ‘Lemon Lodge’ and ‘Floral Dance’. I kept picking these beauties out every time I saw them. Here we know ‘Ilam Violet’, but there are lots of other hybrids grown in New Zealand that carry the Ilam name. Both ‘Ilam Cream’ and ‘Ilam Cerise’ are large plants with large flowers. ‘Ilam Cream’ is a Loderi seedling that starts pink in the bud and then opens to rich, creamy-white flowers that are tinged with pink at the edges of the flower lobes. Flowers have the added bonus of fragrance. ‘Ilam Cerise’ is a cross of ‘Lady de Rothschild’ x *arboreum* and is truly cerise coloured. The plants I saw were loaded with flowers and looked particularly nice when back lit. These are old hybrids, and have the reputation of being difficult to propagate, so are usually grafted. ‘Michael’s Pride’ (*burmanicum* x *dalhousie*)



The McAtamney Garden

is tender with large, scented flowers, similar to ‘Mi Amor’. It was at its peak while we were there. It has large fragrant flowers, yellow in bud and as they open, the flowers gradually change from yellow to a creamy colour. For us it would definitely need to be over-wintered in a greenhouse, but it just knocks your socks off! ‘Lemon Lodge’ (‘Prelude’ selfed) has primrose-

yellow flowers, fairly large, in an open truss. Leaves are a nice medium green on a good size plant. 'Floral Dance' (*nuttallii* x *edgeworthia*) shows its edgeworthia parentage with bright green rugose leaves. The prominent flower buds are bright pink and open white with deep pink edges. As you might expect with its parentage, flowers are scented and the plant wouldn't be hardy outside here but it's a beauty.

The deciduous azaleas were outstanding, and they had the most unbelievably intense, glowing floral colours. In talking with some of the New Zealand folks, I was told that one theory to explain the depth of colour was that because of the hole in the ozone layer overhead, the u-v light is exceptionally high and this contributes to floral pigment intensity. The intense floral colours weren't limited to azaleas; all flowers seemed to be just that much more colourful than what we see.



Embothruim

It was interesting to see that, at least for the gardens we visited as part of the conference, there weren't many species Rhododendrons planted. We did see some *macabeanum*, a few *augustinii*, and *arboreum*, and occasionally a few other species, but they weren't common. I have the impression that in the

Pacific Northwest, we use more species in our average home rhododendron gardens than the New Zealanders do. Perhaps this is due to our proximity to the RSF?

On a slightly silly but very practical note, one of the ideas we could borrow from the New Zealand conference is their use of portable potties. Someone had the bright idea of putting 4 "port-a-potties" on a trailer and then trucking the trailer around to each of the locations where the activities were in session. This meant that individual garden owners didn't have to cope with 300 people all in need of a comfort stop at the same time. Keep in mind we were given tea, coffee and wine regularly, so the portable potties got a lot of use.

The conference was well-organized, and we were warmly welcomed by the New Zealanders. We enjoyed ourselves so much and the gardens and plants were fabulous. If you haven't had the chance to visit New Zealand, you must add it to your places to visit. Next year, the conference will be in Auckland, so if you are interested in Vireyas or maddeniiis, this will be the place to go.

**Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society
BOOK SALE**

The CVRS has been given a small library of books on rhododendrons. They are all in excellent condition. As a number duplicate books in our library, we are putting these in a silent auction that is open to anyone in District 1.

The information is on our website at:

<http://cowichan.rhodos.ca/newsletters/Silent%20Book%20Auction.pdf>

Some Tips on Exhibiting Rhododendrons

By Theresa McMillan and Alec McCarter

The success of our Show and Sale in April depends on our exhibits. A few hundred blooming rhododendrons add fragrance and colour to the show. Your entry may be just what the judges are looking for to award a trophy or a ribbon.

1. Entries are to be made at the Cadboro Bay United Church, 2625 Arbutus Road (not far from the University of Victoria) on Friday afternoon and evening, April 24, from 3 to 7 p.m.
2. A day or two before the show, go around your garden and make a list of the blooms you will pick on the Friday morning.
3. Organize whatever containers you will be using to transport your blooms to the show. Empty bottles or cans in six-packs work well. Be careful to avoid crushing the blooms. Fill the containers with water almost to the top.
4. Picking blooms always takes more time than you think it will! When choosing trusses (flowers that came from one bud), select ones that have straight stems with the bloom on top. When choosing sprays (flowers that came from more than one bud), look for ones that will present themselves gracefully in a bottle.
5. Prune judiciously if need be to enhance the shape of a spray. Avoid choosing entries with bruises. Sometimes rain or frost damage is inevitable, but avoid it if you can.
6. Look for freshness. In a spray or truss, it is better to have one or more unopened flower bud (for they frequently open after they have been picked) than to choose blooms that are already open and going over.
7. Choose blooms with good-looking

foliage. Avoid ones with chewed or otherwise damaged leaves. Some judicious snipping of damaged leaves can be done, but don't go too far because some foliage is needed. Do NOT trim off the bitten parts of a weevil-chewed leaf.

8. After cutting your truss or spray, plunge it deeply into lukewarm water.
9. Later, you can make an oblique cut across the stem leaving the right length to make your exhibit look balanced, and do this under water.
10. This will help the truss to take up water and keep it fresh all day. You may then store your exhibit in its water-filled container in the refrigerator.

When you arrive at the Church, help is available. We use Green Jamaican Ginger Beer or very small amber bottles filled with water for the exhibits.

Entries from more members (or non-members) would be great. Even one truss can help improve the displays and who knows, you might get a ribbon!

Alphabetical lists that show the classification of your exhibit are provided. Volunteers will also be happy to show you how to use the lists.

Show rules, schedules and entry forms will be available at the April meeting and also at the Church Friday afternoon and evening April 24th .

VOLUNTEERS

Please check the job lists at the April meeting and initial them confirm your willingness to do the assigned job or jobs.

Baked goods for the tea are needed. If you are able to provide some, please let Lois Blackmore know (there will be sign-up sheets at the meeting).