

# The Victoria Rhododendron Society

## *Newsletter*



Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria, B.C. Canada V8R 6S4

JUNE 2009 Twenty-ninth Year of Publication

e-mail: wtmcmillan@telus.net

web page – <http://victoriarhodo.ca>

### June PICNIC

12 pm Sunday, June 28, 2009

At Ann and Tom Widdowson's garden

4635 West Saanich Road,

Close to the Wilkinson Road/

West Saanich Road intersection in a north-west  
direction

### VRS PICNIC JUNE 28

Our June picnic will be held at the Widdowson's (the address above) on June 28 at noon. There is parking for about 20 cars on the lawn of the Widdowson property. Extra parking is available on the opposite side of West Saanich Road. The side nearest the house is a bike lane.

Bill McMillan will be helping with the parking.

You are asked to bring a wrapped savory, salad or dessert. Tags labelling eggs, dairy, nuts or flour for people with allergies will be appreciated.

A fruit punch, tea and coffee are provided. Lunch will be served about 1 p.m. and will feature barbecued salmon grilled to perfection by our volunteer chefs.

Please bring your own cutlery, plates and mugs and don't forget chairs to sit on!

A donation of a rhododendron, companion

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plant or other plant is welcome for our raffle. Each person will receive a plant. Trophies from April's Show and Sale will be presented to the winners.

For those members who cannot drive, please phone one of the members of the VRS Board (next page) and we will see how we can help you. It would be great if you can come!

This club affair in a lovely garden is not to be missed!

## A Review of April's Talk

By Bill McMillan

Ted Irving addressed the issue of why major cooling, which had a major impact on magnolia and rhododendron evolution, occurred from 50 to 33 million years (Ma) ago. This cooling led to Early to Late Oligocene glaciation.

Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere have a major impact on global temperatures. Both natural processes and human activities influence these levels today but we had not yet become a factor 50 million years ago. Thus global temperatures then reflected mainly changes in the sun's output, variations in the earth's orbit and CO<sub>2</sub> from natural processes.

During the 15 Ma following the breakup of Gondwanaland, what is now India moved about 8000 km northward. During this voyage, much carbonate-rich equatorial material was subducted and melted at depth. Resultant volcanic activity released large volumes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, which caused warming.

At about 65 Ma, when India was still south of the equator, these massive outpourings of lava created what are now called the Deccan Traps. At about 50 Ma, when this immense volume of volcanic rocks passed over the equator, they were deeply weathered by the abundant rainfall and warm temperatures. Equatorial rains dissolve CO<sub>2</sub> to produce a weak carbonic acid solution. This acid rain reacted with the weathered volcanic rocks and produced carbonate minerals, removing large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, which resulted in cooling and heralded the onset of glaciation.

Subsequently, little equatorial material was subducted as India continued its journey toward its present position. When India collided with Asia, two continental masses met

### VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BOARD

#### 1st Vice President:

**Jacqueline Bradbury** 250-389-1379  
jacqbradbury@shaw.ca

#### 2nd Vice President:

**Karen Morrison** 250-477-8281  
bkmorrison@shaw.ca

#### Past President:

**Bill McMillan** 250-478-3515  
wtmcmillan@telus.net

#### Treasurer:

**Ann Widdowson** 250-479-9167  
awiddowson@shaw.ca

#### Secretary:

**Theresa McMillan** 250-478-3515  
wtmcmillan@telus.net

#### Members-at-Large:

**Peter Barriscale** 250-385-3950  
pbarris@shaw.ca

**Lois Blackmore** 250-478-6615  
loisb@shaw.ca

**Carolyn Marquardt** 250-477.8387  
tonymarquardt@shaw.ca

**Calvin Parsons** 250-385-1970  
waterlily@shaw.ca

**Gareth Shearman** 250-385-4302  
shearman@victoria.tc.ca

#### Newsletter Committee:

Theresa McMillan 250-478-3515

Joyce Whittle 250-656-7313

Peggy Pitfield 250-592-4261

Bill McMillan 250-478-3515

#### Website:

Arthur Ralfs 250-337-5818

Bill McMillan 250-478-3515

Calvin Parsons 250-385-1970

causing crumpling, uplift and formation of the Himalayas. Related climate changes, like the onset of monsoon seasons, and sculpting of the high mountains and deep valleys by erosion coupled with the influence of glacial and non-glacial epochs helped drive rhododen-

dron evolution and speciation.

Plant evolution does not follow the traditional Tree of Life but is more akin to the spread of a bramble. Ted pointed out that plants, like continents, migrate. Botanical disjunct populations can result when, for example, glaciation or disease has erased the population in the plant's original range but not elsewhere.

Ancient magnolias originated in North America, where fossils are found as old as 95-85 Ma. They had migrated to Greenland by 88 Ma and later to Eastern Siberia by 30 Ma, and Asia where fossils are in rocks 30 to 50 Ma. There is no evidence they reached the Far East before 10 Ma. Now these populations have drifted genetically and are disjunct. Plate tectonics can also isolate populations. For example, the opening of the northernmost Atlantic Ocean about 60 Ma ago separated plant populations that were once related.

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#### NO REVIEW OF MAY'S TALK

Unfortunately, due to illness, both our editor, Theresa McMillan and former president, Bill McMillan were not able to attend the May 4th meeting. Thus we are unable to report on Joe Harvey's talk on "Reminiscences of an Out of Control Hybridizer". We wish we had been there.

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#### Tofino in March

By M.J. Harvey

Now that we are settled in town, Linda and I decided to take advantage of a two-night, mid-week 'storm-watching' special at Long Beach Lodge on Cox's Bay in Tofino. On the 314 km drive, we stopped at McMillan (Cathedral) Grove outside Alberni for a cup of tea and a stroll round the old growth forest. You get blasé about some things but the sense of wonder on my first visit in 1965 still takes over. Those 800-year-old trees are awesome, and to think most of the island was covered in trees

like that less than a century ago. The McMillan grove is safe but I was listening to a forest industry spokesperson saying with the dimensional lumber industry more or less ended due to the recession in the USA, it made sense to concentrate on the high-value old-growth to keep fallers and truckers employed. The wise Japanese are buying our logs at bargain prices and sinking them in lakes to preserve them until needed.

We also stopped to picnic near the petroglyphs at Sproat Lake to see the Martin-Mars water bombers—only one was visible. The huge aircraft are the 'old growth' planes of the aviation world.

Then onwards through the mountains with clear pavement but with gleaming white snow on top of old in the ditches from the previous day's storm, up Hydro Hill, past Kennedy Lake to the Turnoff and the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

No trip to Tofino is complete without a visit to see Ken and Dot Gibson. They are both doing well; Ken was recently given a clean bill of health and Dot had a cataract operation the previous week.

The unusually severe 2008-09 winter had passed lightly over the Gibsons' hill, although Fuchsia 'Double Dr. Otto', which usually retains green twigs and a few desultory flowers through the winter, was nipped to the ground. It will regrow from the base. Rhododendron 'Cilpinense' was fully out and in the pink, unlike Victoria where frost had munched it to brown. Tofino was having frosts at night while we were there but being on a hill was protection enough at the Gibsons's.

'Nobleanum Coccineum', possibly the oldest Rhododendron cross, was showing red flowers at the top of the rather leggy plant. I remember 40 ft high trees at Kew Gardens. 'Harry Carter' was showing pink with a bit of frost browning and a R. ririei with its beautiful/disgusting (delete one) deep pur-

plish-mauve flowers was in full bloom. Ken was regretting he didn't get more big-leaves when he started. The ones he had are doing really well, including spectacular *R. giganteum*. He has dug away the soil upslope of many plants to give better drainage. Also a ring of white powder around everything was explained as dolomite. In the high rainfall west coast there is rapid leaching and the soil can become too acid. Even rhododendrons need calcium and magnesium.

Back at the lodge the weather was sunny, no storm showed up (as usual) and the days were maybe 7C. We walked Chesterman and Cox's beaches looking for sand dollars. Then we sat in the great room drinking Phillips beer, watching the surfers and the sunset.

March 16, 2009

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## **The Victoria Rhododendron Show and Sale 2009 Report**

By Lois Blackmore, Show Chair

We moved our show back to Cadboro Bay United Church this year as Glendale Gardens would not commit to a date in combining the show with them in time for us to plan our show and sale. The date chosen this year was April 25. The sale opened at 10:30 am and the show opened at 11:00 am, with closing time being 3:30 pm.

The weather cooperated with us as the day was cloudy with some sunshine. Because of the harsh winter and late spring there were not as many entries this year. The trusses were many of the same as the previous year, but somewhat fewer in number. There was quite a good showing of species plants, but only the very few hybrids were on show because of the cold spring weather.

Preparations for the show included advertising in local papers and gardening magazines, preparations of photocopying material with

Xeroxing and paper cutting, and calling for and organizing volunteers. As well, judges and clerks were asked for their expertise and knowledge of rhododendrons and were in place early on. Peter Barriscale produced a beautiful poster which members distributed to garden centers, libraries and other interested places.

The judging took place early Saturday morning starting at 7:30 am. Thank you to Betty Kennedy, Norma Senn, Karen Morrison, Joe Harvey, Alan Murray and Judy Gordon for doing an outstanding job. Another thank you to the clerks who assisted the judges in making their job easier and for the judging to run so smoothly.

The raffles this year included both individual prizes along with a silent auction.

Some items from commercial enterprises were donated, but with the downturn in the economy, many donations were received from individual members of our group.

Such support is gratifying. Karen Morrison is sending commercial donators a letter of thanks, but is taking this opportunity to thank the members for their extremely generous donations.

The call for volunteers was great with many taking on multiple roles: outstanding work in organizing the set up of the show from Ian Duncan and Dick Pitfield; auction duties ably handled by Karen Morrison; Ann Widdowson spearheading accounting; Ena Vandermale and Johanna Massa doing double duty in the kitchen and Jacq Bradbury dealing readily with the award ribbons and trophies; all contributed to a very well run show and sale. The tasks of setting up, placing entries, arranging signage, cashiering and plant sales, accounting and keeping track of seller tags, contributing goodies and arranging tea and coffee and then the massive job of clean-up were beautifully handled by the many volunteers who used their ingenuity and

common sense to make the day go extremely smoothly. A debt of gratitude goes to them. We were able to sign up 8 new members, thanks to Roy Blackmore and Gareth Shearman. Several others signed up to receive our newsletter via e-mail.

Thanks to the sellers, we had a very successful sale. As this is a source of major funding for our club, we were pleased to have Firwood Nurseries, Ralf's Nursery, Paul Wurtz and the Propagating Group. Total sales were \$5310.00, with a profit to the club of

\$1066.00.

Other revenues included Admissions of \$669.42, Raffle \$439.05, Silent Auction \$576.00, and Kitchen \$127.81. Excess of revenue over expenses was \$1336.67, not including the engraving of the trophies.

I would like to close this Show Report by thanking again the many volunteers who gave of their time and effort to make the show a success.

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### **A report on the ARS conference in Everett, Washington (from the May 2009 newsletter, The Yak)**

By Norma Senn

When I arrived at the Peace Arch border crossing on my way home from the ARS conference in Everett Washington, the border guard asked what I'd been doing in Everett. When I told her I'd been at a rhododendron conference, she wanted to know what on earth people would do at such an event. She was genuinely curious, and not trying to be difficult. So, I told her there were all these nice people from around the world who liked to get together to talk about rhodies, look at rhodies, take pictures of rhodies, hear talks about rhodies and visit wonderful gardens featuring rhodies. She was interested enough to want to know what there was about rhododendrons that made them so special, but how can you explain what it is we all enjoy so much in a 30 second conversation? So, I told her (briefly) about the variety of flower types, all the flower colours, and that the Pacific Northwest is a great place to garden and grow rhodies. She said her parents had a couple of nice big red ones in their garden, and yes, they were very pretty. Who knows, maybe I've sparked some interest.

An ARS conference really is a great place to see, hear and talk about rhododendrons and

the Everett conference was very enjoyable and ran smoothly. I arrived at noon on Thursday, just in time to hop on the bus for my first tour. We visited two lovely gardens Thursday afternoon, one Jeanine and Rex Smith's garden, the other Rhody Ridge. Both are woodland gardens with native overhead vegetation providing shade and shelter. The gardens have some elevation changes which gives a pleasing sense of walking in the woods. We were fortunate in the weather during the tour days, and it was great to be outside enjoying the sunshine.

The Smith garden has over 160 different species and 350 hybrids with about 900 individual plants of rhododendrons and azaleas. One of the hybrids I fell in love with on this trip was R. 'Avalanche' (Loderi x calophytum). We saw it first at the



Smiths', but in other gardens too. This is a

Trophies awarded this year go to the following members, and their plants:

*The George Fraser Memorial Trophy*

**Dean Goard**

*Herman and Hella Vaartnou Plate*

**Evelyn Weesjes**

*Jean and Norman Todd Trophy*

**Norm Todd**

*Mary's Memorial Cup*

**Evelyn Weesjes**

*The Jim Calder Memorial Trophy*

**Evelyn Weesjes**

*The Mary Henderson Memorial Trophy*

**Madeleine and Ken Webb**

*The de Rothschild Challenge Trophy*

**Carolyn and Tony Marquardt**

*The Gibson Memorial Trophy*

**Johanna and Moe Massa**

*Angus and Mary Boyd Trophy*

**Evelyn Weesjes**

*Alec McCarter Bowl*

**Bill McMillan**

*The Webb Trophy*

**Judy Gordon and**

**Don Whittle**

**Best Vancouver Island Hybrid**

*R. pachysanthum + smirnowii*

**Best Fragrant Rhododendron Truss**

*R. lindleyi*

**Best Lepidote Species in a Container**

*R. megeratum*

**Best Rhododendron Companion Plant**

*Camellia mathotiana*

**Best Species Truss or Spray**

*R. campanulatum* "Roland Cooper"

**Best Hybrid Rhododendron**

Razorbill

**Best Rhododendron in Show**

*R. Countess of Haddington*

**High Aggregate**

**Best Entry by a Novice**

*R. campanulatum* "Roland Cooper"

**Best Northwest Hybrid**

Transit Gold

**Peoples' Choice**

*vireya laetum* Strybing's best form

large hybrid with snow white flowers and a small cerise red spot in the throat – just gorgeous. The Smiths have some wonderful herbaceous under plantings of things like trilliums, hellebores, hardy ferns, and primulas. They have also planted numerous deciduous trees that add flower, bark interest and fall colour to the garden, things like *Stewartia*, *Oxydendron*, many small maples, *Parroti*. I learned a new term from the Smith's write up about their garden; they, like the rest of us, are suffering from "zone denial" and sadly, they lost several maddeniiis and big leaf species this past winter.

Not far from the Smiths' garden is Rhody Ridge Arboretum Park. This is a mature 11 acre garden that will eventually become a county park. The owners have lived on the



Rhody Ridge

property for decades, and planted and planned the garden right from the beginning to be left as a legacy to the area. The property has many large specimens of older rhododendron varieties, as well as some trees and shrubs, including the largest *Stachyurus praecox* I've ever seen. In fact, I hadn't real-

ized that *Stachyurus* can get that big. Our timing was perfect to enjoy seeing sweeping patches of *Anemone nemerosa* at their peak. As well, the *R. schlippenbachii*s made a nice show, growing the way I like them, in amongst the trees so that their soft pink flowers add spots of brightness to the woods. The one problem with Rhody Ridge is that the plants are not labelled, and there was lots of discussion among the tour participants about getting plants identified as soon as possible, as that information is in the owner's head. It would add so much to the educational nature of the arboretum to have things positively identified. I understand that based on the visit to this garden, one of the local ARS chapters will try and do something about labelling soon.

The next day, I opted for the day-long trip to Whidbey Island. My bus visited Meerkerk Gardens first. It's been several years since I was there, so it was fun to see how things have grown. Meerkerk is becoming a local gathering place for lots of community activities. Based on Kristi O'Donnell's presentation the night before, it sounds like the staff and volunteers at the Gardens are making a concerted effort to offer programs and events that attract children in the hopes of creating interest in plants and gardens over the long term.

There are new propagation facilities and gatehouse, and of course, there's a sales yard. I wasn't planning on buying anything on this

*R. 'Starbright Champagne'*



trip, but what a silly idea! Meerkerk had lots of one gallon plants of things like 'Seaview Sunset' and 'Starbright Champagne', and I just had to have them. I've been mentally berating myself ever since for not having



*R. 'Saffron Silk'*

bought a few more of Frank Fujioka's hybrids while I was there as his 'Vibrant Violet' and 'Saffron Silk' are gorgeous.

One of the things I enjoy at Meerkerk is the



*R. 'Seaview Sunset'*



*Meerkerk Gardens*

“Big-Leaved Rhododendron Valley” and the big-leaved plants have certainly grown since the last time I visited. Some suffered some winter damage, but overall, the plants looked remarkably good.

Our next stop was at Glynneden Gardens, the home of Bill and Mary Stipe. This was an enjoyable stop because, among other things, there is a Northwest Hybridizers’ display garden. It was fun to see so many locally bred plants laid out in beds, each bed organized by hybridizer. The next day, one of the lecture sessions reviewed hybrids and hybridizers from the Pacific Northwest, so it was interesting to have seen the plants and then hear Mike Stewart’s talk.

Our last stop on the tour was at Frank Fujioka’s garden. Wow! There’s just no other word to describe it. In his write up Frank says that his garden is a working garden and not a true display garden, but he certainly has an eye for plant placement. I mentioned ‘Vibrant Violet’ and ‘Saffron Silk’ are in an area where they are planted together and the colour contrast draws the eye from all directions. It’s fun to look at Frank’s labels to see what plants are being used as parents for potential new hybrids. And, there are many things to see here besides Rhododendrons as Frank has an interesting collection of Japanese maples and some wonderful small conifers.

Members of the local ARS Chapters had open gardens that could be visited individually during the conference. I didn’t have enough time to get to any except for Don King and Prudence Holliger’s garden in Issaquah. Fellow FSRS members Garth Wedemire, Mary Berg and I, plus Bill McMillan from the Victoria Chapter, made a fast trip to see this lovely garden on Saturday afternoon. Bill, Mary and I had travelled with Prudence in China, so we not only wanted to see their garden, but also to catch up on the past three years with Prudence. Don and Prudence gar-

den on a semi-rural hillside that offers great drainage, but possible predation from local wildlife. I can remember Prudence talking about needing to build a better fence around their property to keep the local deer and elk out, but also to keep the bobcats and cougars



*R. albrechtii*

away from their small dogs. They have some great species rhododendrons (*R. pentaphyllum* and *R. albrechtii* were particularly memorable that day), and there were some very nice Magnolias in bloom. A lovely little Phylliopsis was in full bloom and a Calanthe orchid was just emerging. I was sorry not to have been able to get to see some of the other open gardens, and I’ve just got to get back to the Rhododendron Species Foundation Garden soon. But, so many gardens... so little time...



*Magnolia 'Daybreak'*