

The Yak

FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

November 1996

In The Garden



*Gardener, if you listen, listen well
Plant for your winter pleasure, when the months
Dishearten; plant to find a fragile note
Touched from the brittle violin of frost.*

V. Sackville-West



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Wednesday, November 20, 1996 Meeting
8:00 P.M.

St. Andrews Anglican Hall
20955 Old Yale Road, Langley

Guest Speaker: Susan Murray
Garden Touring by Bicycle

Susan Murray rode a bicycle to 17 gardens in southern England in August 1995 over a three week period. Her presentation will include slides of famous gardens in Sussex, Kent and Dorset.

Susan is an Educator in Landscape Design at Kwantlen University College. She is also a consulting arborist and is Founder and President of the Fraser Valley Heritage Tree Society.



YAKALENDAR

❁ DECEMBER 18

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Christmas Party, Potluck Dinner
St. Andrews Anglican Hall
20955 Old Yale Road, Langley
The hall will be available to us
starting at 5:00 P.M. Dinner will
be at 6:30. It is expected that
most people will arrive around
6:00 to set out their dishes. Our
phoning committee will contact
you with more details.

❁ JANUARY 15

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: David Sellars
'Construction of a Pond and
Stream for a Rhododendron
Garden'
Annual General Meeting and
Election of Board of Directors

Call for Nominations

We require nominations for the
following positions:

President, Vice-President,
Secretary, Treasurer (1-year term);
and
Director (3-year term)

If you would like to nominate a
member please contact Norma Senn,
Chair of the Nominating Committee
at 856-0075.

Our Thanks to Dave Hammond

At our October meeting we were
pleased to have Dave Hammond
share slides of his nursery and garden
with us.

Reminder—Membership Dues Due November 15

The deadline for renewal of your
membership dues is November 15 in
order to receive the Winter issue of
the ARS Journal and the next issue of
The Yak.

The Yak will be back

The Yak will be issued again in early
January 1997.

Seeds Available

Interested in growing some special
species from seed collected in the
wild? John Anderson has seeds
available from Peter Wharton's
expedition to China a few years ago.
Contact John at 820-0821.

Librarian where are you?

Fraser South has a well stocked
library, thanks mainly to the efforts of
Pat Dahl, who was our library for
many years. And now we need
someone to take over this position. If

you would like more details about this
position contact Bobby Ogdon at
583-7434.

Service Awards Committee

At the Executive Committee Meeting
in October it was decided that Fraser
South should establish an Awards
Committee. The purpose of this
committee is to provide members
with an opportunity to recognize
individuals who have made
significant contributions to our
chapter. More details on Service
Awards nominations, etc. will be
reported in subsequent issues of
The Yak.

Newsletter Editors
Wendy and David Sellars

Design
PageSet Graphic Design

16877-30A Avenue
South Surrey, B.C., V4P 2V7
Tel 604 • 535-0763
E-Mail 75111.2434@compuserve.com

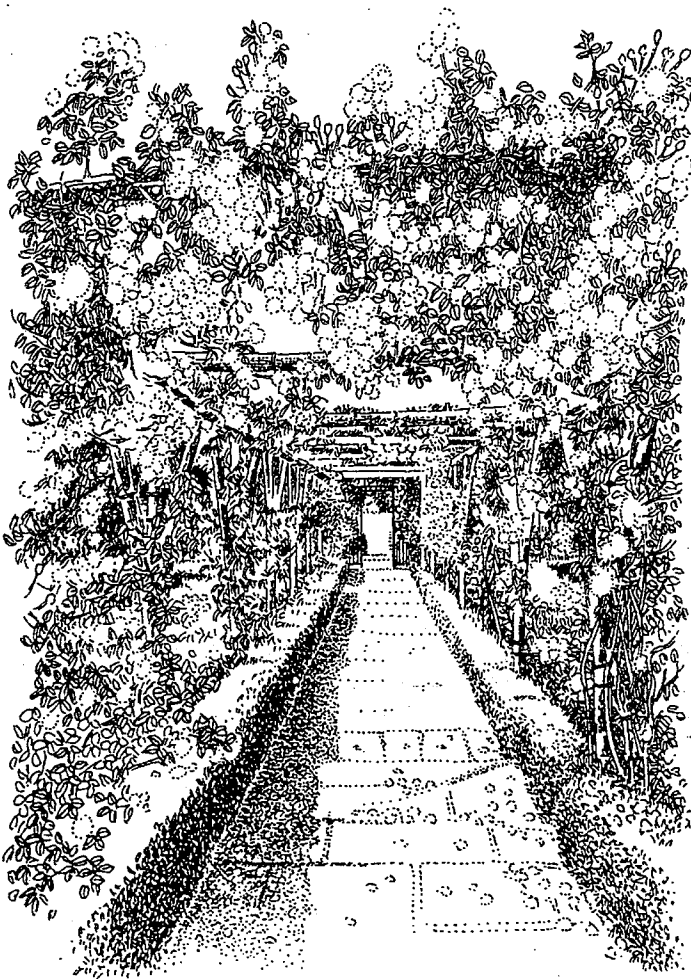
Unconventional Rhododendron Tour

by Mike Trembath

Looking back from the levelling distance of six months I wonder why should the vagaries of British showers be so promptly prominent in memories? Is it the effects of prolonged pampering produced by our personal perfect plumbing?, or is it simply a hitch in ancient memory processes? Even if the system LOOKED familiar—it might blow you and the curtain out and deluge the floor—or , having endured the buzz of the heater, there might be no

heat transferred to the water—or no water—or instructions designed to be read by a giraffe with bifocals whereas I am a hippo who doesn't expect to wear glasses in the shower.

When Oban was first announced as site of the '96 ARS convention there was a general feeling of "good excuse—lets prolong the trip and make it worthwhile". When we gathered our little group, I confess it was I who insisted we start ahead of convention time—on previous trips I had always been too late to see the "big leaf" rhodies in bloom in the beautiful west coast gardens of Scotland. Preliminary plans were somewhat vague—only a very few fixed spots: departure and return, of course (even that altered along the way); Vern wanted to see Old St. Andrew's (the golf course); Lillian wanted to visit a grandson in Cambridge; I wanted to get (at last) to Inverewe; and Mary?—she just wanted to GO (and boy—did she ever go!). We planned to break the touring by spending a relaxing week on the canal narrow boat hotels. The overall idea was to have a leisurely tour—at our own rate, not pushed or restricted by tour commitments—suitable to our age and dignity. Seven and a half weeks later—6,000 miles (plus the 25 miles or so in five days of canal trip) we had travelled from Glasgow to Aberdeen to Inverewe to Lands End, to Dover (and even Boulogne), from Cambridge to Portmeirion, and crisscrossed Cornwall from south to north and back several times. All of this was made possible, and enjoyable, by Lionheart Tours—owned



and operated by Mr. Paul Treverton—late of the London metropolitan police force and my very good friend from a previous trip, and now the very good friend of Lillian, Mary and Vern as well. Paul, good natured and unflappable, an excellent driver kept us well housed, and well fed, put up with our indecisiveness, and our occasional rigidities, and made the whole thing possible—and fun. Drop us at a garden entrance and we disappeared, in four different directions, at four different speeds—and as we straggled back to the car hours later would come Paul's plaintive cry, "Where's Mary?" My daughter went into a fit of giggles picturing "mother" Paul trying to corral his flock of elderly ducks.) We never did get to the convention, in fact when the programme for it was finally published, I was so incensed by the plan to 'do' both Younger and Brodick gardens in a single outing that it seemed we would do better all on our own. No doubt we missed some interesting meetings, but we gained some interesting sightseeing time.

Scotland

We were decanted at Heathrow and fled down miles of serpentine corridors to find the connecting flight to Glasgow. More miles of corridors to extract ourselves from the terminal—this time with luggage. Rescued by Paul, we were whisked off to Moffat—about an hour south and slightly west. Our host and hostess at the

B&B made us warmly welcome—tea and biscuits and lemon curd, and after our pub dinner, drinks and conversation. We stayed in Moffat for two nights (and felt so comfortable that we returned later for a couple of nights, and later still Mary went back—thoroughly delightful people).

Stirling Castle, 'tho steeped in history was over-run with 'restorers', and so lost some of its ambience. The Bruce still stands guard, of course, and surely no one will dare to 'restore' him!

On route to Edinburgh, we stopped to visit the satellite botanical garden at Dawyk. As a private estate it was notable for its pinetum, and one of the 'owners' made certain we admired their Brewsters spruce. 'Tho a bit bare at this time of year, the bones were appealing—drifts of snowdrops, a lovely purling stream, round-arched bridge, and of course the arboretum and the marvellous collection of conifers.

The newly-installed, East gate of Edinburgh Botanical Gardens honours the rhododendron—in bright silvery metal, the terminal buds and leaf whorls make a repeated pattern. The result is striking. Parts of the garden were familiar to me from previous visits, but this time there were areas I could not seem to find. A drift of *R. mucronulatum* in varying shades crouched under the bare horizontal limbs of a prunus. The *R. fulvum* and relatives were in bloom; *R. montroseanum* just beginning to open, but not enough to make a good comparison with those we saw later. I loved the black petioles of *R. beesianum*, and the riotously wavy foliage of *R. mimetes*. We climbed around road construction sites in order to have 'tea' under the Firth of Forth bridge, and admire its structure (being painted as always).

While the rest of us hunted for banks prepared to cash our traveller's cheques, Vernie walked part of the course at Old St. Andrew. How she managed to prevent herself from being rolled up the fairway like a bowling ball in the wind I don't know.

We stopped at Glendoick, and wandered around the large garden centre of the Cox family. I was humbled by the many new-to-me names both of species and hybrids, and heartily wished for reference books, but books are heavy—and we were trying hard to "travel light". Having heard that Scotland's east coast had a hard climate, I was surprised to see lovely rolling hills, prosperous farms, and fields of soft fruit as we drove to Perth. I was entranced by fields where pigs made their homes in miniature quonset huts with straw for bedding, and apparently quite unrestricted save for the field fences. Further into the Grampians the country was rougher, and a ski area was still operating. (It snowed that night in Braemar.)

We drove toward Aberdeen and Ella Crabb's hometown of Ellon. Crathes Castle and gardens—'tho not officially open, were accessible, and we marvelled at the smoothly sculpted yew hedges and topiary. The hedges date from 1702. Within a few weeks the large walled garden would become even more beautiful. The grounds at Pitmeddon were closed to visitors. A night was spent in Elgin, where

some of our troupe sampled the delights of single malt whiskeys—I pluralize that since they had 168 (or so), brands from which to choose. (Things have not been the same since.)

To Inverness—and along the shores of Loch Ness—we scrambled around a loch-side garden centre and arboretum which displayed some gorgeous hellebores—along the shore to gaze at Urquhart Castle—now made much more accessible to tourists. “Over the hills” we drove through superb scenery—catching glimpses of red deer on the hillsides, and even an eagle. We stopped to gaze across, and along the beautiful, historic, and mysterious Loch Maree, and on to Mellon Charles on Loch Ewe. We stayed with Mrs. MacCrae. At least one third of the population of Mellon Charles is called Mrs. MacCrae; the remaining proportionally Mr. McCrae and Miss MacCrae.

Inverewe Garden was all that I had hoped—*R. falconeri* in full bloom, 20 ft x 20 ft plants of *R. sinogrande*; glorious old plants of *R. barbatum* in full bloom with its spectacular bark colour helping to identify it, *R. ‘Cornubia’*, *R. thomsonii*. I hope my *R. smithii* (and I) live long enough to develop the beautiful bark. It was impossible to see it all, I’m sure I managed less than half. This became a constant threnody for me—so much to see, and not enough stamina to keep walking, or climbing.

We stopped to wander through the woodland garden of Lochlash—E.H.M. Cox had encouraged the planting of rhodies here, and this was our first glimpse of the charming *R. ‘R.W. Rye’*—a clear, bright butter yellow with lovely dark green foliage—too tender for our gardens. Eight foot shrubs of *R. spinuliferum* were in bloom, the flowering surprisingly unobtrusive. Thickets of *R. burmanicum* shone with coppery, peeling bark.

We eased our way across the new bridge to Skye—through throngs of ‘natives’ protesting the toll on the bridge. Paul doesn’t like Skye!—so our view of it was limited. We had a quick whirl part way up the west coast—then across the island (as desolate as ever I have seen) and then on to the ferry to Fort William, and the blood-soaked sites of Glencoe and Jacobite memorials to the Bonnie Prince—and so on to Oban. (Since the showing of *Brave Heart*—I think Paul half expected to be set upon by indignant Scots as soon as they heard his distinctive south London accent!)

Arduaine Garden seemed to be full of *R. macabeaenum*. People were hard at work preparing for the convention influx. One advantage we had in travelling so early—gardeners and helpers seemed ready to lean on their shovels or rakes and talk to us about the special plants in their particular garden, their own favourites, or the damage sustained by their garden from the bad winter which followed a summer of drought.

A ferry to Mull, and a bus trip across the Island (I swear it was the same driver with the same spiel as seven years before—fun nonetheless) and so to Iona. A beautiful day to visit a beautiful site—windy of course.

We settled in B&B’s (side by side) just out of Lochgilphead—ready access to Younger Garden, Crarae, Stonefield Castle Hotel, and Kilmoray Castle. There was so much to see! Younger was, is, too huge to cover—their *R. ririei* were in bloom—one a depressing magenta, another a more attractive mauve (but not as appealing as the picture we saw from Meerkerk Gardens). Thankfully most trees and plants are labeled. I took a picture of a yummy young acer griseum with glowing bark. The rhododendron ‘walk’ was up along the ridge, and I didn’t get there; I would have liked to see their *R. montroseanum* Benmore as comparison with the one we saw at Stonefield. This latter plant was unlabeled, but most impressive—shiny, grooved, unblemished foliage, and rather pastel pink flowers with a dark throat...my photo of it shows a touch of blue in the pink but I don’t remember that being the case (the plant was in shade as we saw it). What a marvelous setting Stonefield has—high above the water and overlooking banks of old rhodies.

By the time we inched through the narrow archway to Kilmoray Castle, we decided we were gardened out, and so went off to Tarbet and the ferry to Lachranza on the Isle of Arran.

This was my second visit to Brodick Castle Gardens, and I know that next time I would again see many things missed this time. It was gratifying to actually see some of the large leafed rhodies in bloom. One envies the weather that lets them

grow the maddenii in the garden. We spent two days on Arran, admired the coastline, the red sandstone and the odd sea-shaped rocks on the beach.

Then by CalMac ferry to Ardrossan, south to Stranraer, Lochinch and the Castle Kennedy Gardens; an imposing but contrived landscape, few blooms, and few labelled plants. I felt like the proverbial pea on a pumpkin, and failed to appreciate the long vistas.

The lovely old home where we stayed at Kildrochet was reputed to have a ghost but since she was interested only in youngish men, we were out of luck. Rooms opened into cupboards into other rooms, and one could get permanently lost. Some of the furniture had four inch shims under two legs to keep the surface level—needs must or not you trotted with acceleration downhill to the bathroom.

As we walked into the Logan Botanical Garden a large specimen of Magnolia Charles Rafil filled our view. The beautiful walled garden was a mass of camellias, magnolias, palms, and odd ball tender plants from Australia and New Zealand. The gardens at Threave had suffered a great deal of damage from heavy winter snows and clearing was still in progress. There was a lovely drift of erythronium (mainly pink forms) in one of the lawns. From Threave we headed back to Moffat—and felt as though we had come home.

ROOTSTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

The essence of gardening is to organise plants, rocks, soil and paths where you want them which includes, as the wife would insist, keeping everything more or less neat and tidy. It is unfortunate that an ordered landscape generally looks far more pleasing than the 'let it just grow' style of gardening. This requirement for organisation of plants and materials essentially means moving a lot of stuff around the garden: weeds to the compost box, compost to the new planting holes, rocks to the new raised bed, branches to the burn pile, drain rock to the drains, mulch to everywhere and, of course, rhododendrons constantly have to be moved around to keep them alert and happy in spacious surroundings.

Thus the landscape gardener can be spotted on a damp November day, trundling around the garden, always with a wheelbarrow and shovel ready to pick up stuff and move it to some other place.

The best kind of barrow is a 'contractors' model with a steel box with a pouring lip and a large pneumatic tire. Don't be tempted to save a bit of money on a wimpy wheelbarrow with a solid rubber tire. It will sink into the sodden lawn from November to March.

The standard Canadian long-handled shovel is an amazingly versatile tool and can be used for prying up rocks, slicing slugs and stoking the bonfire as well as the conventional digging and shovelling uses. Curiously, despite the fact that the leverage reduces back strain, long-handled shovels are not commonly used in England. Although they originated there as the 'Devon Spade', you cannot buy them at regular hardware stores. If you are travelling to England and want to take a fabulous gardening gift to friends or relatives, take a Devon Spade in your checked baggage. It would be no more awkward than a pair of skis and far more useful.