

The Yak



Newsletter of **Fraser South Rhododendron Society**

Volume 13

Number 9

November, 2000

F.S.R.S., a chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, holds its regular meetings on the third Wednesday of the month - January to June, and September to December at St. Andrew's Church Hall, 20955 Old Yale Rd. Langley, BC, at 8:00p.m.

FSRS

Officers & Committee Chair Persons for 2000

President: David Sellars 535 0763

Vice President: Trev. Badminton
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Past President: Les Clay

Directors: 1 yr. Colleen Forster

2 yr. Mike Bale

3 yr. Wenonah March

Secretary: Wendy Sellars

Treasurer: Les Clay

Chair Persons:

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November 15, 2000

Glen Jamieson Vireya Rhododendrons

Even if very few of us have the requirements to grow these very interesting plants, it will be exciting to see them, and who knows who may get hooked on this specialty !

Glen Jamieson, is President of the MARS Chapter of the ARS. He is also heavily committed to the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Foundation formed to maintain the security and purity of the ecology of the area.



- ☼ Nov. 15, 2000
Regular Meeting
Speaker - **Glen Jamieson**
The Vireyas
- ☼ Friday December 15, 2000
Christmas Party
At the Clays' Residence
NB - the date and day
- ☼ January 17, 2001
FSRS Regular Meeting
AGM and election of officers
Speaker : ARS Gold Medalist
Clive Justice
- ☼ Saturday April 14, 2001
FSRS Annual Sale
Langley United Church park lot
Keep this date in mind

☼ **Coming Up**

Speakers to include Clint Smith,
? an expert on photography
? an expert on orchids
Local Garden Tours,
The Great Mother's Day Garden
Tour,
Washington Bus Trip

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October Meeting

Have you all run out to buy roses ?? or at least put them on your garden want-list for 2001 ??

I was very reassured by Brad's 'lecture' that even I might be able to find some roses that would thrive in my casual garden. Not only that - but some of the pictures he showed of the undemanding kind of roses, looked great !! - really my kind - with scent, too !! I noticed that the gift certificate that Brad kindly donated for our raffle disappeared with the first number called.

* * * * *

HELP PLEASE

In our early years, Pat Dahl, as librarian, began a scrapbook of pictures to record some of the functions Fraser South and its members enjoyed. Included were pictures from picnics, parties, tours and shows etc. This book was kept in the Library - a number of people recall having seen it there. It is now not to be found - librarians have searched all materials, and no one seems to know what has become of it. If any of you, gentle readers, have any knowledge of its whereabouts - PLEASE let me - or Joan Bengough or Pat Dahl know. I have been tasked with compiling a 'history' of FSRs and this would be very valuable to me. Mike Trembath - 856 7261

* * * * *

Note:

The magazine 'british columbia gardener' (formerly Coastal Gardener, I think) - eight issues per year - is offering special reduced subscription rates for garden club members \$17.50 for one year; \$33 for two; \$48 for three years. In addition, they are offering a sweetener to clubs - sending the club \$10 per new subscription, or \$5 per renewal. On the off chance that any of you are interested - I hereby offer to collect cheques (payable to british columbia gardener of course) and will forward same to magazine with your name and address for the benefit of FSRs. Ed.



From our President

It's that time of the year again, when Les will be coming among you to sign you up for a position on the Executive. If you have not taken an active role before in running the club, please consider it, as you will find it makes your participation in the club more enjoyable.

You will meet more people, learn the ins and outs of setting up meetings and get a great deal of satisfaction. It does not take a lot of time so when Les comes calling, give him the nod.

* * * * *

NOTE

The Pacific Coach Lines is organizing an excursion to The Northwest Flower and Garden Show. Tour departs Feb.10, 2001 and returns Feb.11, 2001. Cost includes one night accommodation, buffet breakfast on Feb. 11., admission to the garden show for 2 days, and round trip transportation from Vancouver. Total cost \$185.00 plus GST per person sharing twin or double. Space limited to 46. Confirmation and payment in full required by Dec.15th, 2000
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* * * * *

LOCAL GARDEN TOURS:

Three years ago the three lower Mainland Chapters namely Fraser South, Pearce Arch and Fraser Valley Chapters agreed to rotate local Garden Tours. This year it will be the turn of the Peace Arch Chapter and we look forward to seeing their interesting gardens. The details will be made available as soon as they have been formalized.

2. WASHINGTON BUS TOUR May 19th -20th, 2001.

Last year's trip to Tofino proved to be of sufficient interest that a further tour is being organized for next year to gardens in Washington. At this time, we have confirmed arrangements to visit the Merkeerck Gardens on Saturday May 19th in the morning and will have formal tours by garden guides at that time. In the afternoon, Frank Fujioka has kindly agreed to accommodate us and this will be a tremendous opportunity to see some of his own hybrids. We are presently formalizing arrangements to travel to Port Townsend to visit gardens on Bainbridge Island on Sunday. Further details to be announced.

(see pages 7&8 for the 'official' report from last year's very successful bus tour)

3. MOTHERS' DAY WEEKEND GARDEN TOUR & PLANT SALE:

The executive have agreed to approve the Mothers' Day Weekend Garden Tour for 2001 on Saturday, May 12th. This could only take place with the willingness and cooperation of the previous host gardens. Two other gardens have volunteered to participate despite the fact they are non ARS members. In addition, we are hoping to provide an opportunity for plant sales so that visitors who may have seen a plant of particular interest will have the opportunity to purchase the same plant. The garden tour provides an opportunity for the entire Chapter to be involved and hopefully further encourage membership and camaraderie among our members.

Mike Bale

The following article was posted to a rhododendron interest group on the net. In view of our programme this month, I thought it was of interest, and Mr. Wagner kindly gave me permission to reprint it here

I often wonder about the natural history of the VIREYAS. I'm not a botanist, so please be patient with me...

There are two great concentrations of Rhododendrons in the world, one in the area generally comprising the eastern Himalayas, the great river valleys of southeastern Tibet, northern Burma, and southwestern China; the other the islands of Australasia (Malesia), where the Vireyas are concentrated.

The most primitive species of Rhododendron all belong to the former region. To the best of my knowledge, the closest genera to Rhododendron (*Ledum*, *Kalmia*) are found exclusively in the northern hemisphere. So Rhododendron probably represents the Laurasian contingent of Ericaceae, and the ancestors of the Vireyan Rhododendrons probably came from the north.

The missing pieces of the puzzle are what route they took, and what are their closest non-Vireyan ancestors.

Unfortunately they don't seem to have left much in the way of clues. Between the two Rhodie homelands lie extensive stretches of tropical lowlands (not to mention open sea) not very hospitable to Rhododendrons. Species are rather sparse within the gap.

A few MADDENIAS, IRRORATA and STAMINEUMS range pretty close to mainstream VIREYA territory. Vireyas are classified as Lepidotes, but they don't look much like Maddenias and apparently attempts to cross them have failed. Generally, Maddenias are relatively primitive Lepidotes, and their more advanced relations seem to be spreading north, not south - leaving no obvious southern branches to have spawned the Vireyas.

IRRORATAS are not only Elepidote but they don't look like Vireyas either. And they too are relatively primitive.

R. stamineum bears a strong superficial resemblance to a typical Vireya, minus the scales. They also share a peculiar growth pattern with the Vireyas: whereas most Rhodies grow new leaves from fat, tight buds, Vireyas and *R. stamineum* usually skip the fat bud when only producing leaves - something you might expect from tropical plants. I can't compare the flowers, as my

specimen of *R. stamineum* may perhaps not bloom until I am an old man!

One more intriguing thing about the STAMINEUMS - they occur on the Malay Peninsula - overlapping the range of Vireyas. I would think that the Malay Peninsula would have been the route the Vireyas took to get to Sumatra, then to Borneo and Java, then the Celebes, the smaller islands, then to New Guinea where the high mountain ranges gave them a range of habitats for them to diversify into, and finally a few finding a small foothold in the hills of Queensland.

I also tend to wonder if they haven't gone back and forth along that route several times, every time the sea level drops enough to connect the islands - in other words if the Malaysian (ie, from the Malay peninsula, not Malesian) species aren't relatively recent arrivals from further south and east. Whatever their ancestors were, they seem to have been cut off from them long enough to become rather distinct. Or maybe their nearest relations are all extinct. Then there are those strange mainland Vireyas like *R. santapau*, *R. kawakamii*, - etc. early Vireyas that went north again?

The relatively few successful (in the sense of producing any offspring at all) crosses between Vireyas and non-Vireyas have been between Vireyas and Elepidotes. I've found no references to successful crosses between Vireyas and Lepidotes - even tho' the rest of the Lepidotes seem to cross fairly readily with one another. Is it possible that the Vireyas are actually more closely related to Elepidotes, and developed scales independantly of the Lepidotes? In any case what are their closest living non-Vireyan relations?

I welcome speculative comments...

Rob Wagner

(see JARS summer '93 - Vol. 47 No. 3 - "Concerning the Origin and Distribution of Rhododendrons" by Hebdia & Irving Ed.)

**Please Do Not Forget Your Dues
The Excellent ARS Journal May No
Longer Come to You if Dues Are Unpaid
After December 1st
Your Newsletter Will Cease after the
December Edition if Dues Unpaid (and
you wouldn't want THAT to happen,
now would you ??)**

Rhododendrons and I Chris Ballyn

Part 2

It was almost twenty years after that beautiful summer at Royal Roads when an opportunity to finally move here (to BC) unexpectedly arose. I had come to expect that my career would probably keep me in Ontario, and so I had filed away all thoughts of the wonderful gardens and plants I had seen here under " Fond Memories Only". But suddenly the chance was there, and I seized it.

My first months were busy and agreeably challenging, but there was also time to squeeze in some house hunting. One day I was on my way to North Vancouver to meet yet another real estate agent and view yet another property, when I happened to pass the inconspicuous little " House for Sale" sign of a private vendor. The house was a very early Fred Hollingsworth design - more strongly influenced by his time studying with Frank Lloyd Wright than any others of his I have seen. I really liked the layout, and since the property had been rented for years, house and garden were in need of "TLC" and so " the price was right ". I agreed to buy it the evening of that same day, and took possession two weeks later.

My new home had many interesting features, it was perhaps most remarkable for being possibly the only home in North Vancouver without a single rhododendron in its garden. That first summer and fall had to be devoted to pressing work inside and little thought was given to the outside. It was pretty early next year when that changed.

I had met a couple who were about to remodel their home in South Kerrisdale. They had decided that the large rhododendron in front of their kitchen window would have to go - it blocked the light and the view to the street. My distress at their intention to simply chop it down prompted a bemused chuckle at my "typically eastern" reaction to such an idea and then, an offer to give it to me if I would only take it away. Of course I accepted; no matter that they couldn't tell me its variety - or even its colour. It was a rhododendron !

Having no hands-on experience in the matter of removal of large shrubs, I assumed that moving an eight foot high plant of this type would be a logistical problem at least, and probably quite risky. I arranged to have a truck with a fifty-four inch diameter tree spade on its back meet me at home the following Saturday morning to dig the large, conical hole into which the rhododendron would later be planted. The truck then left for South Vancouver, carrying this large plug of soil from my garden to be deposited on the lawn near the plant to be removed. The big apparatus was then positioned to encircle the rhododendron, and the four big spades were successively driven deep into the soil. The tension was dramatically increased by the owners choosing this moment to wonder aloud if the water main did not, in fact, run into the house at this very spot. However, to the relief of everyone, there was no geyser as the rhododendron and its great cone of soil was lifted into the air. When I looked into the hole, I was amazed to see not a single severed root. I expected (feared) there would have been many. Nothing !! The entire root system was in the cone of earth. I could not believe that such a big plant could have such compact roots. The rest of the operation went smoothly as well, but I am sure there were a lot of chuckles from people at the sight of this piece of heavy landscaping equipment (meant for the transplanting of fairly mature trees) lumbering by carrying only a shrub. My new acquisition plugged neatly into its prepared hole, and looked as though it had always grown there. I returned to Angus Drive to fill up the hole there, and to plant something else to say " Thank You " before eagerly returning home.

Spring was around the corner.
I was at last on the West Coast.
I was in the garden of my first house.
I finally had my first rhododendron.
I was in Heaven.

That was 1973

Survivor

by Norman Todd



For those readers who do not watch television or who have discriminating taste, the following is a precis of the 'plot' of 'Survivor'. This program attracted the second most numerous TV audience ever. Coverage in newspapers was extensive and required more time from a diligent reader than did the one hour per week for the TV show. Sixteen candidates were selected and taken to a small 'uninhabited' island in the China Sea. The participants, at two day intervals, held a vote to reduce their number by one. When only two remained, the winner, who was awarded \$1,000,000 US, was chosen by the seven last voted off the island. The only food provided was a small ration of rice. Water was available from a spring - a twenty minutes walk from the beach.

Let us now assume that the uninhabited island is Vancouver Island and the participants are rhododendrons and the necessities for the preservation of life, i.e. food and water, are limited but sufficient to keep the strongest as survivors. Following the model of the TV show our contestants are divided into two tribes. I have chosen species and hybrids. Members of the species tribe are: - *augustinii*, *impeditum*, *macabeanum*, *macrophyllum*, *ponticum*, *proteoides*, *williamsianum* and *yakushmanum*. The hybrid tribe is composed of 'Cunningham's White', 'Fantastica', 'Ginny Gee', 'Lem's Cameo', 'Loderi, King George', 'P.J.M', 'Point Defiance' and 'Virginia Richards'.

It is interesting to note that 'Castaways 2000', a British TV program of the same 'reality' genre, currently being aired, is reportedly plagued with contention. A group was sent to a windswept treeless island in the Outer Hebrides, in an attempt to establish a new community over a year's time. Many of the entrants almost lost their lives to influenza and other maladies - much more debilitating than the sand lice and rats of the tropical island. The candidates, for this show, were subjected to vigorous selection tests, and were chosen mainly, according to one article I read, not on the basis of resourcefulness and stamina, but on potential interpersonal incompatibility. Conflicts give higher TV ratings.

Our rhododendron selection is not chosen on a potential conflict basis, but at the end of the day there can be only one survivor, despite the fact that rhododendrons are sociable plants. Nearly all can be classified as 'good doers' in our current, here and now, 'sheltered' garden environment and so each has a reasonable chance to be

the winner. Inasmuch as the competitors are not physically able to vote, I am exercising that prerogative for them.

The first to be booted out was 'Virginia Richards'. Despite being very beautiful and photogenic, she is not a good doer as she is extremely prone to powdery mildew - the AIDS of rhododendrons. The others wanted her to hell and gone fast. They were scared of infection. There were 15 votes against her.

The next to go was *macabeanum*. I feel devastated at this result, but it is logical. Here is a big plant that needs lots of water and nutriment. It is a happy plant in its own environment of Manipur - but a miff as an immigrant if it doesn't get cosseted and kept warm. Furthermore, it has little sex appeal to the others in the tribes as it is old-aged by their standards before it becomes fecund.

There are now fourteen. Some of the remaining group realize that to win the most threatening competitors must be removed - and the sooner the better. And so the next to get the chop is 'Cunningham's White'. This is a plant I don't have in my garden but many gas stations do. It is a proven survivor. It's a tough, 150 year old hybrid, whose propagatability is legend. Hackmann, of Germany, uses it as understock for all of his nursery material. It is a dour Scot, of no great beauty. It is the rhododendron equivalent of George Forrest - persistently productive. If our game were taking place on the Outer Hebrides and not Vancouver Island, it would probably win.

The next two to be jettisoned are 'Lem's Cameo' and 'Loderi'. Both have the allure of great beauty and seductiveness - the Marlene Dietrichs of rhododendrons - but are hard to root and only contented if pampered. The latter's fragrance intoxicates the most jaded nose but counts for nought with our tough rhododendron tribes. 'Neither of you can take the sun or the wind and you wimp if you are not fed', the others say. 'You're out'.

The competition is getting tough. Those remaining rhododendrons are scheming and pushing their roots out for all available food and water. 'Point Defiance' has a great menacing name and is genetically endowed to be a survivor. It is boldly brash. Its muscular physique makes the others feel inadequate. It wins prizes. It is too much of a threat and it has to go. The vote, however, is close.

Escaping notice so far because of its unassuming size

and lack of pushiness is 'Ginny Gee'. She is really quite a show off and despite her diminutive stature gives an aggressive display every year. But she is a lepidote. She has scales. She is different. Racism rears its ugly head. No doubt the scaly rhododendrons are the oldest breed and have a lineage to boast about, and most are *polyploids*, but the audience likes the big bosomed belles - their elepidote cousins - better.

'*Williamsianum*', despite its elepidoteness, is not one of the blousy barmaids. It is a good neighbour and a good parent. Its minuteness and slow growth are severe drawbacks. Furthermore, small round leaves do not show up well on TV. Willy is the next casualty.

Augustine Henry was a remarkable man - long-lived and industrious. The rhododendron, named to honour his first name, is virtually an aristocrat - almost a blue blood. Augustine Henry served in China as a medical doctor. His time with the Chinese customs would constitute a normal career for most of us. In retirement, he, however, became Professor of Forestry at Dublin. *R. augustinii* does survive pretty well on southern Vancouver Island as it comes from the drier sides of the deep chasms cutting south from Tibet and so is more suited to our monsoonless summers. *Augustinii's* fault, however, is that it is not blue blooded enough. Rhododendrons are bigots and not without an internal hierarchy whose elite prefer pure primary colours. The true gentian blue is absent in the genus and blue pretenders like *augustinii* are of lesser caste and have to go.

This prejudice against the blue tinge is now aimed at 'P.J.M.'. Despite being a toughie - it even survives in Winnipeg - it has that racist strike against it and it is scaly. It is a lepidote. It is voted out.

Hiding all this time, but quietly voting, is poor little *impeditum*. Being bluish and scaly, it can see that it is only a matter of time before its name is called. A true dwarf, a heather of the Himalayas, it has been inconspicuous so far, but it is not comfortable. Being an alpine plant, it will not survive global warming and so its future survivability on lower Vancouver Island seems limited. It belongs in colder, harsher climes.

Where do we stand now? Still in competition are *macrophyllum*, *ponticum*, *yakushmanum*, *proteoides*, and 'Fantastica'. Clearly, the species tribe are going to outvote any hybrid. After all the species have been around for 60 million years. The hybrid upstarts have to go. 'Fantastica', despite its beauty and strong Teutonic upbringing, can't compete with the four remaining old-times. There are four votes for dismissal.

Proteoides is probably the most coveted of all rhododendrons. Dave Dougan is the one exception to this generalization. He says he would rather grow spinach. In its favour, however, is an unsubstantiated report that Bill Gates paid \$1500 US for a three year old plant. Native to Tibet, it loves a long winter and a cool, moist summer. The climate on Vancouver Island is incompatible. It is so loved by weevils that it cannot survive without human intervention. Toast.

It is no coincidence that the last three are closely related. All are members of the Pontica, that group that spreads itself all over the Northern Hemisphere. *Yakushmanum* is the beauty and gardeners and the TV audience are clearly rooting for it to win. As a survivor, however, it is at a disadvantage. It is naturally an islander but there, on Yaku-Shima, at the southern end of the Japanese archipelago, it rains every day. It is a hog for water. On this basis it is dismissed.

It is now obvious that the winner must be *macrophyllum*. It is on its native soil and having survived the last Ice Age has good credentials for persistence. In some parts of the world its rival *-ponticum-* has proved to be a successful colonizer, in fact a weed, so it too has the characteristics of a good survivor. The deciding factor, drawn from the long memories of the judges is that *ponticum's* pollen is known to be toxic to humans. Honey from *ponticum* makes people sick. Whether *macrophyllum* has a similar toxicity has not been proven but the local gets the benefit of the doubt. We have a winner.

Now all the armchair analysts and coffee break pontificators can have the stage and can write pages on the vicissitudes of a rhododendron's life. It's amazing the amount of trash that fills newspapers - and newsletters.

(The above article appeared in the October issue of the Victoria Rhododendron Society News Letter, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the author, and the newsletter editor.)

THE MILLENNIUM TOFINO TOUR

May 20-21, 2000

This was not a tour for the faint-hearted.

Some rose as early as 4a.m. to reach their designated pick-up point on time. Others snatches an extra hour's sleep and drove to Tsawwassen terminal, meeting the others on the ferry, where all 49 were aboard our special bus as it rolled off at Naniamo. We came from Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Burnaby, Langley, Maple Ridge, Mission, Surrey, Vancouver, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, and Duncan and Crofton on Vancouver Island. This trip with its amalgam of members from various B.C. Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society was the inspiration of Mike Bale, whose vision was perfectly realized with the help of Mary-Anne Berg and Ken Gibson, and willing volunteers from the MARS Chapter. In two days and one night we saw nine unique rhododendron gardens, large and small, all lovely in the pouring rain. And we ate constantly.

The early morning offered us light grey skies and the occasional glimpse of white cloud. Senses attuned to Nature, we could admire wild broom, lupines, daisies and poppies that grew along the highway as we travelled north from Naniamo towards Nanoose Bay, and our first stop at the garden of **Maria and Al Bieberstein**.

Here, a narrow roof of cedar sheltered a small gate which led into a charming garden on various levels. The garden is about ten years old, and filled with newer rhododendron hybrids in artistically curved beds. There is an artist's touch for colour in this garden, evident in its interesting grasses and perennials, and the Japanese pond with its heron statue.

Across the road, we visited the **Rasmussen** garden, whose generously curved driveway is surrounded by rocky outcrops planted with rhododendrons and woodland plants, a blue poppy was especially nice. This is a twelve year old hillside garden of stone-lined paths and large boulders, which features an extensive hosta collection, some dwarf, including hosta crown jewel, and miniature trilliums (*hibbersonii*). There is an extensive perennial collection here, surrounding the house, and a wonderful grove of arbutus trees at the bottom of the hillside. Like the Bieberstein garden, this garden was well protected from deer with high wire fences.

Back at the Bieberstein garden, we ate a picnic lunch on the patio. It had not yet rained on our parade. Just after noon, we departed for the **Milner Gardens and Woodland** at Qualicum Beach.

Not yet open to the public, the Milner property was a seventy acre estate belonging to businessman and philanthropist Ray Milner and his wife, Veronica, who developed the gardens, which cover about 10 acres, high above the beach. Upon Veronica's death in 1996, the estate was acquired by Malaspina University College, who plan to maintain the garden for education and community benefit.

The staff are presently trying to identify and map up

to 700 mature rhododendrons. They have already raised the forest canopy of the garden to let in more light and help renovate the plants—"chain saw pruning". Their aim is to maintain the character of the garden, "An English Garden in a Woodland Setting". We were divided into smaller groups for the tours, each of which was excellent. We were especially interested to hear about a locally made fish and wood compost, used throughout, which is nutritious. It has a distinctive black colour.. The garden includes specimens of Japanese maples, Davidia, Stewartia, Katsura, and many other fine trees, as well as the rhododendrons, many of which are tree-sized themselves. There was a huge, blooming *Beauty of Littleworth* for example. The poet Alexander Pope, who was a gardener of note, wrote that one must consult "the Genius of the place", by which he meant "Spirit" or Genii. The Genius was quite evident here in this magical atmosphere, which the Malaspina staff are determined to maintain. One could imagine the elegant, comfortable life in the plantation style house, which was named Long Distance because the telephone was always ringing. We were all impressed with the enthusiasm and vigour of our young tour group leaders, who answered endless questions and inspired many of us to keep taming our own little wildernesses.

The weather was holding up and about 3:15pm we departed on schedule to see **Vick Vicker's Garden**, which was formerly owned by **David Crabb**. This garden had quite a different "Genius", but one no less distinctive. It is a small garden, densely planted with many yak hybrids in curved beds with no front lawn at all, full of colour, and beautiful healthy plants, showing their trusses under a blooming apple tree. "Ella would be so proud to see this", remarked Lillian Emerson. Vick has added a watering system to Dave and Ella's original plantings, and he uses the same new fish mulch we saw at the Milner Garden. There is an unusual weeping larch whose spines felt "almost as nice as the back side of a yak", said Dixie Mueller. The many textures of the rhodos and trees here would hold our interest even when the trusses were not in bloom.

Our next stop in Qualicum was **Louise Dwyer's Garden**. This is a charming, large suburban woodland garden ringed with tall firs, containing a little creek, pond, and tennis court. Notable was a huge, fragrant white rhodo. (This trip was quite remarkable for the number of lovely mature white rhododendrons we saw. I only wish I could have identified them.) At this time, we were treated to a wonderful assortment of hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, prepared and served by members of the MARS Chapter, whose gardens we had been touring. Our enjoyment was enriched by liberal quantities of various vintage wines, and speeches were made by MARS president *Glen Jameson* and FSRS president *Dave Sellars*. A special thank-you here to *Carol Hickman*, who co-ordinated our programme on Saturday, and provided the cookies. And Mrs. Dwyer had kindly offered her garden even though she was away on vacation.

By now the variety of the styles of gardens we have seen has made us sensitive to the adaptability of the rhododendron to any location. Back on the bus by 5.15pm, we head toward Tofino with more goody bags to munch on, stopping to marvel briefly at Cathedral Grove. We are also charmed by the beautiful native dogwoods we could see on the rather thrilling ride between Port Alberni and Tofino.

By the time we reached Tofino at 8pm, it was raining hard. Under our umbrellas we found our rooms, some at Weigh West Resort, and some at the Tofino Motel. Dinner at 9 was at Weigh West, where we had a private dining room, candles and rhododendron trusses on the tables, and a delicious buffet with choice of salmon or steak. Ken Gibson welcomed us and spoke of the planned trip next day over the water to the Clayoquot Preserve Garden. He expected the storm to blow over by morning.

"Tofino is either damn good or damn bad," said Ken. Unfortunately, it was damn bad on Sunday, and the boat trip to the Preserve Garden on Stubbs Island had to be cancelled. We watched the torrential rain as we breakfasted the next morning, but it did not stop us from visiting the unique and famous garden of **Ken and Dot Gibson**. Their rocky hill is now covered in bloom, colorful even in the rain, punctuated by several tall cedars and evergreens, and special trees like mimosa and palm. This is a beautiful, mature garden, and Ken has a great interest in preserving rare plants by grafting them to sturdy ordinary stock. He has been active in rhododendron circles for many years, knows everyone, and is a fund of information on plants and also local history. He says he never waters his rhododendrons, but then in that climate it appears Nature does it for him. Three inches of rain fell on Tofino that Sunday.

We went back to Weigh West for coffee and cakes, since it was too wet to have them in the Gibson Garden as planned. Here *Barbara Bryant*, mayor of Tofino, said a few words of welcome. In attendance also were *Sharon Whelan* and *Chris Taylor* of the Clayoquot Preserve, who brought some pictures along to show us what we had to miss. There is such an interesting story behind the garden: Clayoquot was the first white settlement on the west coast of B.C.; there had even been a hotel on the island. The 25 acre garden was first planted 60 years ago by two women, Jo Bridges and Betty Farmer. It now belongs to Susan Bloom, who in 1990 started to reveal the hidden rhododendrons. Sharon and Chris are her assistants in the project, which now takes specimens of unusual plants from all over B.C. We had brought for the garden four rhododendrons from Trev Badminton's collection: "Horizon Monarch", "Kiwi Magic", "Haydon Dawn", and "September Song". The garden is open to the public only twice a year, in May and in August.

Undaunted by the rain, we proceeded next to **Ken Gibson's mother's garden**, just down the road and on the

shore. The large rhodos were on a mini-cliff. The little red and white heritage house is still in the Gibson family, and Ken has erected a plaque to the memory of his parents. This garden includes a 25 foot rhododendron *macabeanum*. Presiding over our visit was a magnificent bald eagle perched atop one of the conifers, spreading its wings in an attempt to shake off the torrential downpour.

On then to the **McGuiness Garden**, a newer, more formal garden, with a lovely lawn sloping to the beach. The older part of this garden is underplanted with perennials and poppies almost ready to burst. Very tall cedars edged one side.

Back on the bus, we had a mini-tour of Ucluelet, to make up for missing the Preserve Garden. Ken Gibson regaled us with stories of the early settlers in the Tofino-Ucluelet area, his own family among them. Unfortunately, those of us at the back of the bus could only catch tantalizing snatches of Ken's stories. From the bus window, we saw an impressive front garden composed of *Gunnera* about seven or eight feet tall. Someone observed that *Gunnera* seemed to be scattered like appleseed all over Ucluelet. We ended up at the Lighthouse point for a box lunch in the shelter of the parking lot, venturing out later to see the sea and the black rocks and the beginning of a hiking trail. Ken left us on the way back at the highway junction, where we thanked Ken and Dot for their hospitality and their help in organizing our visit. We should also acknowledge here our thanks to **Ken Webb** from Victoria, who offered the use of his car when last minute arrangements had to be made with the cancellation of the trip to Clayoquot, and to **Bill Burgoyne**, who escorted the bus from one garden to another on Saturday. And to our intrepid bus driver, who was converted to rhododendrons.

By now it was 2.45pm and we set off for Naniamo, stopping again at Cathedral Grove around 4pm for more snacks and to admire the old growth trees that had survived recent storms.

But yet another garden was in store for us. In Naniamo, we had time to visit **Hailey's Rhododendron Grove** in Bowen Park. Once again we could admire mature rhodos in bloom. And it was nice to find a bench dedicated to Harold Johnson there.

You might think that our adventure ended when we were back on the ferry, heading to Tswassen,,but no. Upon landing at 10.30pm, the bus could not move off the ferry, its battery having given up after its hard trip. After an hour of shifting cars around us, and being pushed by other mechanical means, we rolled away to our drop-off destinations, after forty-eight hours of new life experiences and sensations, and memories of new acquaintances and nine gardens!

Janet Warner

A Rhododendron Primer

Book 2



is for haematodes

Subsection NERIIFLORA

Haematodes ssp. hematodes

As you might guess from the species epithet, *Rhododendron haematodes*, is noted for its blood-red flowers. The flowers are borne in relaxed trusses, usually in May, with 6 to 12 flowers per truss. The flowers have a prominent calyx. This relatively small species, between 1 to 1.5 meters in height, makes it very useful for small gardens. *R. haematodes* is native to high elevations in Yunnan. By the way, there can be variation in flower colour from pink to deep red.

As long as it has good drainage, it is fairly easy to grow, although it may take several years to have a good flower display. However, the foliage is attractive, so *R. haematodes* a good choice for year-round landscape interest. The leaves are dark green above, and there is good brown indumentum. It does best locally where it receives protection from full sun; high, over-head shade is preferred.

R. haematodes has been used a lot in hybridization; just a quick glance through Greer's lists of hybrids finds it showing up in the parentage of such hybrids as 'Always Admired', 'Aronimink', 'Avondale', 'Blitz', 'Mayday' and 'Hummingbird'.

Norma Senn



is for Helene Schiffner

arboreum ssp *arboreum* hybrid

F.C.C 1893

-5f/-23c

T. Seidel, R. Seidel

M to ML

Low

If you are looking for a white flowered rhododendron you won't find many whiter than Helene. Slightly mauve in the bud, it opens to a pure white, tightly packed truss of about twelve florets which have very faint brown speckling. Foliage is a dull - finished dark green, the leaves rather rigid and pointed. Bud scales are almost black, a distinctive feature of the plant.

A neat and tidy plant, slow growing altogether good natured in most gardens here. Nice to have no worries about the plant rushing up and out to overcrowd the neighbourhood almost as soon as planted. It is said to be sun and heat tolerant.

DOOISTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

About 40 years ago, families in England would have their Sunday dinner at one o'clock sharp, which would be roast beef and yorkshire pudding if we were lucky. At two o'clock the radio would be tuned to the BBC Light Programme for the half hour comedy programme "Beyond our Ken". This always concluded with "Homerama", a parody of the television programme, Panorama, in which a panel of distinguished guests would respond to leading questions of the day. My favourite character was Arthur Fallowfield, played by the late Kenneth Williams, who modelled his style on Fred Streeter of Gardener's Question Time. Whatever the question, whether it be the state of the National Health Service or the deplorable quality of popular music, Arthur Fallowfield would always respond, in that inimitable Kenneth Williams voice, with "I think the answer lies in the soil".

Although the audience of the day would always find this extremely funny, it struck me recently that for gardeners at any rate, the answer does lie in the soil. If you are wondering why some plants grow well and others struggle, it is likely that the plants that are thriving will have a good depth of organically rich, well-drained soil to grow in. With the exception of bog plants, it doesn't seem to much matter whether its rhododendrons, roses, perennials or rock garden plants, they all like good drainage and they all like organic matter for nutrition and to retain moisture. They all like mulch too, which Arthur Fallowfield failed to mention.

Creating these necessary soil conditions is the gardeners biggest challenge. Native soil, even if you are lucky enough to have any, has a high clay content in most of the Fraser Valley and thus does not drain very well. Buying topsoil is generally hazardous as it often contains nasty weeds like horsetail and some very fine material, making it set up like concrete. The organic content is also low.

We have found the solution is to make our own soil. Except for rhododendron planting, the basic ingredient is garden compost and as we compost most of our weeds, the compost has quite alot of soil to start with. The *problem with using it directly is weed seeds, so we always top it off with a thick layer of mulch.*

For rhododendron planting, we are now using composted bark mulch mixed with 'crusher fines' which is a mixture of coarse grit and sand. If you have bought a truck load of concrete, thinking it was topsoil, mix it with bark mulch which will lighten it and improve the drainage and organic content. For the rock garden, the drainage has to be excellent and the soil richer, so we mix garden compost with sand and birdseye (small pea gravel). We also use clean birdseye as the rock garden mulch.

We are thus importing truck loads of material into the garden which works well, as our basic landscape design is to create raised beds, which improves the drainage even more. When people raise their eyebrows about the cost, we tell them that it's cheaper than golf or sailing.

(Note: Many thanks to my Mum and the World Wide Web for helping with details on Fred Streeter and Arthur Fallowfield.)