

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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Sept. 4

Executive meeting at the home of Paul Wurz, 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. Remember - all members of the executive for the previous and current years are invited.

Sept. 11

Ken Gibson will be our welcome visitor, and will tell us more about his trip to Cornwall.

June 16

The annual BBQ was held at the home of **Paul Wurz** and members enjoyed tours of the extensive garden, good food and entertaining games. A lovely evening!

MEMBER NOTES

There were many garden tours during May, June and July, and any members who would like to describe one are welcome to give a few notes for the newsletter. A "new" one for this writer was the tour of 12 gardens in the Sayward area. There are many

beautiful gardens there; an outstanding large one is owned by our Sayward member **Rose Marie Silkins**. She enjoys trying seeds of unusual perennials, shrubs and trees as well as caring for her rhodos. Several smaller gardens were very interesting also. It was noted that roses do very well in that area, and many people had water features in their gardens.

Attention birdwatchers! Sayward is a great destination for unusual birds. Last year **Rose Marie** reported a Virginia Rail in her garden, this year a White-faced Ibis was seen by many people in the area, thousands of miles from its usual haunts. The estuary of the Salmon River is a wide expanse with no commercial activity, and I am sure there must be a great variety of shorebirds there in the fall and spring.

RHODODENDRON LAKE

Pyllis Stapley kindly sent in a report of a visit in June.

"Here I am, finally going to Rhododendron Lake. How long have I wanted to make this trip - 30 or 40 years. George and I drove from Campbell River down to the right hand turnoff to Northwest Bay Logging, a Weyerhaeuser timberland empire, just north of Nanaimo. We were cheerfully greeted at the logging gate by the watchman of the day and enthusiastically encouraged to proceed with our journey.

After registering, we parted with \$2 for the permit and given a map and clear directions to stay on road 155A in the heart of an active logging show. The loggers were working 7

days a week so our watchman radioed ahead to warn the logging truck drivers that we were coming through.

From the gate, it was 3.4k to the left turn onto 155A. Then at 5.8k further the road then goes onto 155B while 155A branches to the left. Follow 155B about 0.9k then turn right onto 155C. Go up 155C about 3.8k, up some hills, then left turn and go 0.1k into the parking lot. The single lane road was graded as far as the left turn point. The trail goes off on the right, providing a fairly flat walk to the lake.

There were some log benches with the seats carved out. Along the way were some interpretive signs identifying the white pine, bunchberry, salal, huckleberry and of course the Rhododendron macrophyllum.

We made this trip on June 2, and while the rhodo trusses were not all in full bloom, their colour and form were recognizably outstanding for their rare beauty. Their showy flowers would still be bright for another 2 weeks.

Sheltered in the lee of Mount de Cosmos, the rhodos were growing in mixed conditions, from lakeside peat to a gravelly sidehill, all thriving equally well. We continued along the single car lane farther than the parking lot to find a direct trail down to the lake. We met some fishermen - they had a good-sized trout they had easily landed.

Some botanists say these rare beauties must be survivors of the last ice age. True or not, I consider this unique trip a must for the rhodo purists."

RHODODENDRONS ON A WESTERN SHORE

The RHS publication Rhododendrons 1991 contains an article by **Leslie Drew** of the Cowichan Rhodo Society, and over the next few months I plan to serialize this historical information.

"From the Queen Charlotte Islands, the mist-drenched archipelago off the north coast of B.C. came a recent report of an abandoned garden where rhodos still flower each June. A botany student working at the Butchart Gardens, near the Provincial capital of Victoria on Vancouver Island, had heard mention of them on a visit to the Charlottes and her curiosity had been piqued.

The garden had been the **Edward Evans** property, wrested from dense rainforest. Evans, settling there in 1911, had a fine two-storey house built for his family. The house is now a dank heap of rubble. The rhodos, mauve and white (the mauve more vigorous and tree-sized), live on unidentified amidst the ruins, seldom seen by anyone.

Their survival unintended in this remote, storm-swept place seemed remarkable, even assuming the durability of a ponticum. Beyond this, though, they could be regarded as representing the exuberant spirit of early gardeners in B.C.- ambitious, eccentric, eager for every new plant the world had to offer.

The British, of course, introduced gardening to this part of the world, after having introduced a good many of our native species from North America to Europe. In rhodos, the starting point came almost 200 years

ago. On 4 May, 1792, the Scottish botanist, **Archibald Menzies**, who was acting on forthright orders from **Sir Joseph Banks** as a member of **Captain George Vancouver's** expedition, stepped ashore onto land that is now American and discovered the native *R. macrophyllum* - big leaf, which it then was. ('I...met here with a beautiful shrub of the *R. ponticum*...')

The encounter was botanically significant and today the *R. macrophyllum* is the state flower of neighbouring Washington. At the time, however, it counted for nothing in a land touched only by a few explorers and fur traders and continued thus well into the 1800s, after this region of the Pacific Northwest became part of the vast domain of the Hudson's Bay Co. The rough and ready men of the fur trade would scarcely have given a thought to a rhodo, if indeed they even knew the word; they had much more important matters at hand in their barterings with the sparsely distributed native tribes, each of whom, incidentally, would have been acquainted with at least one of the three indigenous species (the Thompson Indians of the interior used *R. albiflorum* Hooker as a scent)." - continued -

MEMBER NOTES

An email from Betty Spady told of the upcoming Western Regional Rhodo Conference, to be held Oct. 26-28 in Welches, Oregon. Theme of the conference is "Rhodos along the Oregon Trail". Among the speakers will be Warren Berg and Clint Smith.

Unfortunately the registration forms for this conference were omitted from copies of the Summer ARS Journal which we received, but there will be some on hand at the meeting, for any members who plan to register.

THE WOLLEMI PINE, a dinosaur of the plant world, was described in an article on the New Zealand Gardener, Dec. 1995.

This tree was discovered in Wollemi National Park, Australia, by David Noble, a Park employee. Botanists studied leaves and found the closest relatives were to be found in fossil records, extinct species from 65 million years ago. There are only 24 mature trees and a few seedlings. They grow to 40 metres, and have bubble-like bark. Their leaves are elegant, waxy, fresh green, fern-like. There are large green cones, but seeds are difficult to collect. A helicopter was used to get some from tops of trees.

Tissue culture seems to be the best way to propagate, but it is not easy, as 500 were set in test tubes to obtain 20 cuttings. By now there may be some plants for sale as it was felt it would take at least 5 years from these cuttings. They should make fine pot plants or garden specimens. The writer knows nothing about the climate of this area so it is not known if they will grow in Canada. Watch for further information.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome back after our usual summer holiday! Our last activity was the year-end BBQ held at my home. The food was superb as usual, and special thanks are due to **Isabelle and Edna** for organizing the entertainment.

It's also the time of the year that we have a change in our Executive. Many thanks to **Dick and Pauline, Ernie, Phyllis and Kirsten**- you will be missed. Welcome back to **Bernie** who will be taking on Membership, and **Don Law**, who will again be our Treasurer. Thanks Dick, for continuing to look after the Revenue table.

Our guest speaker for Sept. will be

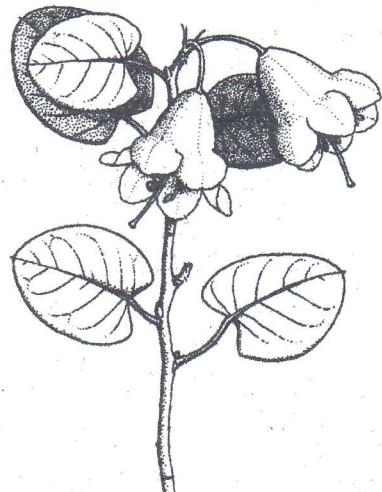
Ken Gibson, with more on rhodos from Cornwall, and hopefully Tofino; and **Kirsti O'Donnell** from Whidbey Island will be our Oct. speaker, to talk about the wonderful Meerkerk Garden, and rhodos in general.

I hope all our club members have had success with their gardens during the summer, and have been able to deal with mildew, water shortages etc. I expect that all members are looking forward to getting back into the rhodo club activities. See you soon!

R. WILLIAMSIANUM

Gary Green, a member of the club some years ago, wrote this article for the newsletter:

"R. williamsianum is a dwarf species, reaching 5' at maturity. It was discovered by **R.H. Wilson** in 1908, growing in isolated thickets at 8,000 ft on Mt. Wa-shan in the Sichuan province of China. A larger-leaved form was later found growing on Mt. Omei



R. WILLIAMSIANUM

This rhodo was named after **J.C. Williams of Cornwall**, who ultimately was responsible for "Hummingbird" and "Cowslip", two of this species' most popular hybrids. It grows to a compact, low spreading shrub, with small roundish leaves. New foliage opens bronze to brown

and becomes a bright, glossy green. The flowers, little bells in various shades of pink, hanging in loose trusses of 2-3, around 2" long, can produce a show that almost completely conceals the foliage. The blooms show first colour in early April and peak about the 3d week.

This plant is best grown in full sun and is hardy to about -20C (5F), but flowers and young growth can be damaged if it is planted in a frost pocket.

This species has been a very popular parent in hybridizing and is at least a 50% parent of "Bow Bells", "Brocade", "Jock", "Hummingbird", "Kimberly", "Maureen", "Mission Bells", "Temple Belle", and "Wilbrit", all of which are rose-pink.

"Cowslip" and "Moonstone" are two good creams and "Olympic Lady" is a very good white.

The parentage of all these is easily recognizable and hybridizers almost always use R. williamsianum for its size, shape and foliage, working only to improve or change the flowers. It is difficult to choose which is best - they are all attractive, easy-to-please plants.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie Silkins has produced more useful and interesting snippets for us.

"Like most rhodo gardeners, I am firmly committed to deadheading my plants as soon as the flowers fade. Getting the job done is, of course, another matter. This year I was particularly slow about it as the spring was so wet and the other late spring gardening tasks cried out loudly on those few occasions when the rain stopped. Not that I mind deadheading in the rain, it is very nice to have something that can in fact be done in

wet weather, or for that matter, if one has only a few spare minutes.

When I worked full time, I would take my breakfast coffee outside and deadhead a few rhodos before going to work - a very soothing way to begin the day. Then those long spring evenings offer enough light to get a few more plants done before bedtime. I use little scissors so that I don't break off too much stem, and to avoid the stickiness characteristic of some plants.

My rhodo guru, **Hart Wellmeier**, long ago impressed upon me the hazards to plant health of leaving flower debris strewn about, so I drop all the spent blooms into a five-gallon pail and empty it on the compost. If one keeps up with the deadheading as the plants have their turn to bloom and fade, it's not too onerous a task, even with my 200-odd plants.

I just didn't get it done this year, which is both annoying and humbling. Happily, though, what I remember most about the job not finished has nothing whatever to do with work ethic. On a briefly-dry evening in late May, I began the two-evening job of deadheading 'White Gold', a large plant with spectacularly generous bloom. The sky had cleared and as the light faded, I heard the calls of a nighthawk, the first one of the season here in the north. How glad I was to be out there, albeit under a dripping-wet rhododendron, with such a sound to grace my task.

The second half of Sept. is a good time to plant biennials into their blooming locations. Cottage garden favorites such as Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*), wallflowers (*Cheiranthus cheiri*) and Canterbury Bells (*Campanula medium*) that were started from seed in spring will have had time to become well-established before winter. Setting out the plants can be delayed until spring, but they

perform much more generously and reliably if they are placed in the early autumn".

DO SOME RHODOS SUFFER FROM LACK OF IRON?

The Times-Colonist printed this useful article by Lee Reich, 16 June of this year.

"New leaves on rhodos or azaleas can sometimes unfurl bright yellow rather than green. The yellow is made more striking in contrast with the leaf veins, which remain green. Although many find this variegation attractive, it is the symptom of a problem that can kill a plant.

You might say that the plant has 'tired blood', because the symptoms are of iron deficiency. Plants don't have blood, but iron is needed for chlorophyll, which makes plants green (and actually has a similar structure to blood hemoglobin).

Before dosing the soil with iron pills or rusty nails, know that there is probably enough iron in the soil. Deficiencies usually occur when a plant cannot absorb iron because the soil is too wet or not acidic enough, or contains too much clay.

Plants in the heath family - rhodos, azaleas, blueberries, heathers, Kalmia, - need soils that are especially acidic and well-aerated, and thus are prone to iron deficiency.

Correcting soil conditions takes time, perhaps more than an ailing plant has to offer. In such cases, give the plant iron sulphate or iron chelate. Sprinkle the powder on the soil, then water in thoroughly. For a plant severely deficient in iron, spray iron solution, mixed according to the package directions, directly onto the leaves. Within days the leaves will turn dark green.

RHODOS IN NEW ZEALAND

Here are some rhodos that are highly recommended by Jack Hobbs, writing in the New Zealand Gardener, June 1996:

'Apricot Road', a NZ raised hybrid, rich cream flowers with peach-pink toward the edges.

'Bruce Brechtbill', a sport from R. Unique, soft pink flowers with creamy-yellow throats, small compact glossy-leaved shrub. Hardy to 0F.

'Goldfingers', golden yellow flowers, lax trusses.

'Yellow Butterflies', soft yellow flowers with red pepper flares, dense trusses.

'Countess of Haddington', compact, slightly scented trumpets of pink and white. Soil must be VERY free-draining. Hardy to +20F only.

'R. impeditum', one of the finest dwarfs. Hardy to -15F.

'Percy Wiseman', numerous dense trusses of creamy yellow flushed pink, orange spotting. Robust, compact, good for smaller gardens. Hardy to -10F.

'Princess Alice', compact, considered superior to Frangrantissimum. Sweetly scented white trumpets flushed pink, glossy foliage. Hardy to +15F only.

'Lemon Lodge', a superb NZ hybrid, wonderful spectacle when smothered with lemon-yellow flowers. Hardy to -5F.

'Rubicon', outstanding red flowers, needs a COOL position. Compact. Hardy to -10F.

'Taurus', medium sized shrub, glowing red blooms, handsome deep green foliage. Hardy to -5F.

'Van Dec', a hybrid of Van Nes Sensation x R. decorum. Has inherited best characteristics of both parents, with abundant, slightly fragrant, frilly pale lilac pink flowers. Hardy to +5F.

Editor Note: Hardiness notes (by me) from Greer's Guide, but several not traced.

HARRY WRIGHT reports that the club's Rhodo Garden has been kept in fine condition all summer by a group of members who have faithfully turned up when called to deadhead rhodos and remove weeds. Thanks, gang - your work is very much appreciated by residents and by visitors to the area.

BOOK REVIEW

New Illustrated Guide to Gardening in Canada

Readers' Digest Association Canada Ltd 2000

This book would make a wonderful gift for a beginning gardener, for it is not only comprehensive, but includes many fine photographs as well as line drawings of various gardening tasks.

There are chapters on trees, shrubs and vines, many popular herbaceous perennials such as dahlias, irises, lilies - even good advice for rhodo growers, rose lovers, rock garden and pond owners - a very comprehensive book. The illustration of climatic zones is all Canadian (for once) and very clear. No problem discerning that **Ken Gibson** in Tofino is in Zone 9 and cousin **Jim** in Saskatoon lives in Zone 2.

This is a great book for browsing. I borrowed it from the library in Campbell River and will be loathe to return it.

