

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

January 2015

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Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)

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HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THE LATEST NEWS ON THE ARS WEBSITE?

www.rhododendron.com.au

FACEBOOK: Do you have some interesting garden photos, information about your garden, visits or tours, etc., you have done, which may be of interest to other members? You are invited to send them to Prue Crome via email and she will put them on Facebook and/or the ARSV website. Email prue.crome@fcpl.net.au

2015 PROGRAMME

MARCH

Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th Plant Collector's Sale and Garden Expo at Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Hilton Rd. Ferny Creek.

APRIL

Early April; **Newsletter**

Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th: Gardening and Plants Expo at Tesselaar Gardens 357 Monbulk Rd, Silvan, 9.00am-4.00pm. The ARSV will have a stand selling plants grown at the NRG. Helpers would be very welcome. Please contact Prue Crome by email or phone (see back page).

PRESIDENTS REPORT JANUARY 2015

This president's report will be just a brief précis of events we have held in the last few months, an outline of things we plan for the next few months and the usual plea for contact from members with ideas for events or visits the Society could run that would interest.

As you can tell, given that I am writing another presidents report, I have been allowed the privilege of running for another term as your president. This role really is a privilege and not in the least bit like hard work. The reason is that the committee I am fortunate to work with is exceptional. The committee is a fantastic blend of energy, experience and enthusiasm. You need only look at last years National Convention where Prue Crome, Andrew Rouse and Michael Hare did all the hard work. The results of this hard work was an excellent meeting, with a very well attended public talk given by George Argent and Frederic Danet at the Mueller Hall, a conference at Olinda, a very pleasant conference dinner and tours of three excellent gardens at Mt Macedon.

In November we were lucky enough to be able to again sponsor an excellent public talk this time by an expert on plant conservation in China, Bob Moseley. This was not quite so well attended but we find each time we hold these public talks we get a chance to meet and talk with different members of Melbourne's botanical and horticultural community. I see great merit in continuing these public talks as and when we can convince suitable experts to present interesting talks.

Our Christmas Dinner this year was a BBQ at the Gardens. This was well attended and enjoyable Saturday afternoon, all were well fed especially the Kookaburras who helped clean up the last of the sausages.

The Tuesday volunteers continue their very good work at the Garden at Olinda. The number of comments and the breadth of recognition for the improvements we have been able to make is very encouraging. Our recent visitors (George Argent and Frederic Danet in particular) were very impressed. What is very noticeable is that after about three years work by Alex Pottage and others in the nursery we are getting a very impressive collection of very good, desirable and often very hard to come by plants. These are of course always available to members (and we encourage your requests for plants you want as well as your involvement) and probably starting this spring we will increasingly release plants for sale to the broader public.

One of the very useful things the Society can do is help ensure that the bureaucracy of Parks Victoria doesn't cause significant harm to the Gardens by just being silly. Most members will know Wally Loboza, he has been a very long serving and very good gardener at Olinda with a tremendous knowledge of the genus *Rhododendron*. Unfortunately (for us) he is nearing his retirement and will go half time as of July this year. We had always been keen and had expected that another contract staff member and ARS(VB) committeeman, Dan Macleod

would then be given his chance to apply for the vacant full time position. Parks Victoria however could not see its way clear to extend Dan's contract until July so he could not apply for Wally's position. Your committee has agreed to help support Dan and with the aid of other funds left to the Gardens we have ensured that he will be with us longer and if he wants will be in a position to apply for any available future positions.

We would be very happy to organise things members want we are just not sure what that might be. So contact a committee member and give us some guidance.

John O'Hara

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT JANUARY 2015

I was elected President at a meeting of Australian Rhododendron Society National Council on Friday 24th October 2014. Rob Hatcher had served as President for the maximum 3 years that ARS Rules allow.

Other Office bearers elected were:

Jeff Jenkinson [South Australia] Vice President

Jackie Hatcher [South Australia] Secretary

Rob Hatcher [South Australia] Public Officer

Barry Stagoll [Victoria] Chair of the Editorial Board

Lesley Eaton [Southern Tasmania] Registrar

In the absence of a volunteer as Treasurer to succeed Peter Wiadrowski Jacki Hatcher agreed to serve again as Treasurer and her offer was accepted

These appointments were announced at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday 25th October and the appointees assumed office at the conclusion of the AGM. The Auditor was reappointed.

The Branches appoint their delegates at their respective annual general meetings. Victoria has appointed Andrew Rouse and Francis Crome as its delegates for the upcoming year

First, on behalf of the Society, I thank Rob for his sterling efforts as President over the past three years. The Society's principal focus has been its attempt to collect Australia's native rhododendrons, *R lochiaie* and *R viriosum* from their Queensland mountain tops and to further their study. Is there one species or two or, possibly, three? Rob has led the effort with much energy and distinction. I also thank Peter Wiadrowski for his many years' service as Society Treasurer. In addition Peter raised for consideration the future purpose of National Council and he has been responsible for the establishment of an ongoing relationship with Norwood whereby the Society details appear on the new Norwood plant labels along with cultivation notes for which the Society contributes \$500 per year

Next my objectives for the coming year.

*** The study of Australia's native Rhododendrons**

On 29th October Dr Sue Gardiner [immediate Past President of New Zealand Rhododendron Association Inc. and Principal Scientist Plant Gene Mapping, The Horticulture and Food Research Institute of New Zealand Limited] was in Melbourne for a conference. Marcia and I hosted her for dinner along with Andrew Rouse and John O'Hara. We had a teleconference with Professor Darren Crayn [James Cook University, Cairns Campus, and Australian Tropical Herbarium] and Rob Hatcher. It was agreed that the DNA studies will be undertaken

by Dr Sue Gardiner's team in New Zealand with provenanced samples presently available in Australia and New Zealand and new collections by Australian Tropical Herbarium directed by Professor Darren Crayn. The resulting research papers will be jointly authored by the participating academics. The Australian Rhododendron Society members will have the opportunity to participate in collection of new samples. Funding needs to be secured. The Society will contribute. Subsequently Professor Crayn advised that his Plan A for funding did not succeed but he had a Plan B, a little slower than Plan A. As I write we await Sue Gardiner's return from a conference in San Diego so she can discuss with Professor Crayn what the current plan is for the immediate future.

*** Securing the collections of Rhododendrons**

The creation of the Vireya House at Nation Rhododendron Garden Olinda is a remarkable achievement. The primary credit belongs to John O'Hara who did much of the building and Andrew Rouse who designed the conditions inside and provided the largest portion of the plants. Very considerable credit is also due to Parks Victoria local staff and Glenn Maskell in particular. Glenn also did considerable construction work and made possible the chipped tree fern that forms the base of the media in which the Vireya collection is planted. I do not forget the members of the Tuesday volunteer group who pulled together for this project and the associated new Propagation glass house and Rouse House.

The various projects together with the revitalization of the propagation process under Alex Pottage have given new life to the Victorian Branch and real cooperation with Parks Victoria local management inconceivable 5 years earlier. The Garden has miraculously improved to rival major overseas gardens despite its staff levels being a very small fraction of those of comparable overseas gardens. The Garden has a Management Plan for the future. The future holds the hope that the Garden will become Melbourne's cool climate Botanic Garden with a name change to reflect that status.

One consequence is that the collections of rhododendrons and other plants at National Rhododendron Garden need to be secured against the ever present possibility of a disastrous bushfire or other calamity such as disease, vandalism or power failure. I know the Branch leadership under John O'Hara, Andrew Rouse, Michael Hare and Prue Crome is giving active consideration to power back up for the Vireya House and propagation facilities. It is also giving active consideration to backing up the Rhododendron collection.

Part of the propagation effort is directed at backup plants. I want to see backups held where they will be looked after and secure. There need to be multiple backups at Gardens at Emu Valley, Mt Lofty other suitable gardens and private collections. Of course it follows that those other gardens with rhododendron collections need their own backup plans. I hope to further this objective.

Another consequence is accurate records and proper provenance for the plant collections. Alan Keper, Laurie Begg, Elizabeth Xipell and Tom Noonan have been doing sterling work identifying, labelling and recording the Rhododendron collections with much help and encouragement from Glenn and his team. Glenn is working on a similar project for non rhododendrons.

*** Reconsideration of the Society structure for the 21st century.**

Peter Wiadrowski started this discussion back in 2013 in his last year as treasurer. On the one hand the hope is that a way will be found to include Rhododendron Groups in New South Wales, Queensland and even Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. On the other hand the Society, like other plant societies, has to face dwindling membership and a shortage of funds at least in some Groups.

The current model of a membership number affiliation fee makes it impossible for Campbell Rhododendron Garden, Blackheath [Blue Mountains] to become a Branch and has reduced current Branches to three, Emu Valley, currently, being affiliated rather than a Branch. Emu Valley and Campbell have gardens to maintain and insufficient funds to pay a membership based affiliation fee as well.

The Society, at a National level, has to rediscover relevance and, it seems, trim its expenses to a lower level of affiliation fees and, possibly abandoning its membership based model. But in favour of what? It has already agreed that projects, such as North Queensland collecting, have to be undertaken in consultation with Branches and Groups willing, and able, to contribute. The Journal is being printed, in hard copy, in limited numbers with Branches paying extra for those of their members who want hard copies. Victoria, alone, is paying extra to provide all its members with hard copies. In some other Groups, with significant membership numbers, only a handful of members want a Journal. That says, loud and clear, that in those Groups the National body is irrelevant.

The Society, nationally, has a new modern website. How to make best use of it? Victoria has abandoned its own site in favour of the National site. Victoria, currently, is the only Group to do this. Indeed some Groups are reluctant even to allow their material to appear on the National site. Obviously rhododendron enthusiasts, from overseas, consult the National site. But do Australians, outside Victoria, do so?

Dwindling membership, and dwindling attendance by members at National society functions, means that it is difficult to meet the current quorum at the Society Annual General Meeting. Dwindling funds makes it important to avoid unnecessary expenses. Postage and hard copy communication spring to mind. But also face to face meetings and travel expenses. Someone in the Society has to put forward a concrete plan for consideration at National Council mid year meeting. I need to find that someone or do it personally. The plan, if adopted at National Council, has to be translated into a special resolution for consideration at the 2015 Annual General Meeting

*** Visit all the Rhododendron Groups to obtain their members' views**

This is not a new initiative. My predecessors had this objective also. But it is important.

It would be nice to hear views from Society members. Past experience as *Newsletter* editor does not make me optimistic. But I live in hope.

Simon Begg

THE SPECIES COLUMN JANUARY 2015.

Rhododendron aberconwayi -Subsection *Irrorata*. [photo page 11]

The *Irrorata* Subsection contains some of the most beautiful flowers in the rhododendron genus and contains 17 species, although 6 are listed as “not in cultivation”.

The distribution is interesting as they all grow at the Eastern end of the Himalayas with some further South into Burma and Malaysia. Most are regarded as of borderline hardiness in England due to their cold winters but they thrive at Olinda. These species have mostly white flowers with some reddish or purple spots although two species have red flowers (*ramsdenianum* and *kendrickii*).

Name:

Named after the late Lord Aberconwayi, former president of the R.H.S. 1931 to 1953. He was owner of one of the great British gardens, Bodnant in North Wales.

Distribution:

From a limited area in East Yunnan, growing at under 3000 metres.

Characteristics:

This species forms an upright shrub up to 2.5 metres high. The leaves are around 5 cm. long and are stiff and leathery, recurved at the margins. The flowers are saucer-shaped, white or tinged pink with crimson spots on the upper lobe. One clone named “His Lordship” received an Award of Merit in 1945, but in my opinion the pink-tinged form we grow is the best of all. Peter Cox in “The Larger Rhododendron Species” comments that this species is reasonably cold-hardy and has moderate heat-tolerance, presumably due to its small leathery leaves. Its nearest relative is *R. annae* which has much longer leaves and more cup-shaped flowers.

Hybrids:

Several significant hybrids have been raised from this species:

R “Enborne” (*aberconwayi* x *anwheense*) A.M. 1966.

R “Streatley” (*aberconwayi* x *yakushimanum*) A.M. 1964.

The Hybrid Database shows one plant of R “Streatley” planted in 1985 but I have not been able to locate it.

Where to See These Plants.

There are a number of *aberconwayi* plants in the “Irrorata Bed” which is about 30 metres past the Camellia Garden on the gravel track. We have 4 plants of “His Lordship” in this area. There is also a beautiful plant of the pink form in front of the Gazebo opposite the Main Rockery, which flowers in late October. This form is pink in bud, opens to pale pink flowers, and gradually fades to pure white with crimson spots. (see photo page 11).

Alan Kepert.

VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN JANUARY 2015

R. verticillatum [photo page 11]

Classification

Section *Schistanthe* subsection *Euvireya*. This accords with the classification proposed by Craven *et al* **Vireya Rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification (*Ericaceae*, *Rhododendron* section *Schistanthe*)** Blumea 56, 2011: 153. The classification proposed by Argent *Rhododendrons in subgenus Vireya* RHS 2006 had Vireya as a subgenus and this species in section VII Euvireya Subsection v Euvireya. It is in good company as Argent’s Subsection has 90 members.

Name

Latin *verticillatus* whorled, referring to the tight pseudowhorls of leaves

Origin

Found in Borneo in both Sarawak,[Malaya], Mts Penrissen, Santubong, Lundu, Gading,Bongo,Batang,Lupar,Merurong, Hose, Batu, Laga, Kapit and *R javanicum* Kalimantan [Indonesia], Mt Kenepai at from 700-1500m.

This species was first recorded in the Journal Horticultural Society, London 1848. 3:86,87. So far as I know the plants now in Australia derive from a **collection** of cuttings given to Bill Taylor and Murray McAllister by David Binney in New Zealand in August 2003. Andrew Rouse may be able to say if the species was held in Australia from other sources earlier. Unlikely, I think, as the species was not introduced to Edinburgh until 1982. The plant I have may well be the first to flower in Australia. There is a much bigger plant in the Vireya House but that is yet to flower. My plant is planted in Marcia's and my garden in Montrose shaded in summer by a Japanese maple.

Conservation Status

Unsurprisingly, considering its wide distribution, it is classified in *The Red List of Rhododendrons* Douglas Gibbs, David Chamberlain and George Argent Botanic Garden International, Richmond UK 2011 as of least concern.

Description

Argent *op cit* describes the species as a generally epiphytic shrub to 2m. With an internode of 5-10 cm this is a slow growing plant. In the Vireya House it seems much more vigorous, though, even there, it would take a long time to reach 2m. Leaves are 6-10 x 2-4 cm, curved downwards. The mid vein is reddish and raised below; side veins at about 7 a side are curved towards the tip. My plant requires pruning to secure branching. The one in the Vireya House is much better shaped. The leaves are not glossy

The inflorescence is pleasing being full with the florets erect to horizontal. According to Argent, *op cit*, there should be 8-15 florets [my first has 11]. The corolla 50-60 x 40-50 mm [my first 60 x 50 mm] and red to reddish orange. My first is orange as one would expect from *R javanicum*. Argent says its flowers are similar to *R polyanthemum*. My plant is a quite different colour from my memory of that species seen at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Verdict

The species can, clearly, be grown in Melbourne suburban gardens, outdoors with shade from full summer sun. It is flowering as I write. How often it will flower is yet to be seen. As is how long gardeners are prepared to wait for results.

Simon Begg

VALE BILL TAYLOR

ON the 7th December 2014 the Victorian branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society lost Bill Taylor. Bill had been in ill-health on a number of fronts, following a stroke five years ago. It follows the loss of one of his mates, Murray McAlister, just a couple of months ago. They are back together with another mate, Ken Cathie. Ken died in 2004.

I met Bill one day in 1997, a few weeks after I had retired from my employment. I was visiting the Rhododendron Garden to seek information on a Rhododendron problem that I had

at home. Luckily for me, it was a Tuesday. I was directed down to the glass house where I would find a group of knowledgeable volunteers who would help me. I was met by Jack Morris who proceeded to advise me on my problem and show me another few tricks. I hadn't been speaking to Jack for long when a white unwashed Nissan Urvan pulled up. No prizes for guessing who was driving, it was Bill. The group, including Jack and myself, came to order and it was immediately obvious to me that Bill was in charge. It was suggested to me that I should return the following week and that I should bring a lunch. For me the rest is history.

Bill, a life-member of the Fern Society, joined the Australian Rhododendron Society in 1970. He was elected onto the Victorian Branch committee in 1989. Bill's value was quickly recognised and he was elected Vice-president in 1991. There followed two terms as Branch President, 1994 to 1988 & 2001 to 2005. Bill was awarded a Life Membership of the Australian Rhododendron Society in 1999.

Bill represented the Society in various groups. He led a semi-technical Discussion Group, was the Society representative on the Parks Victoria Horticultural Reference Group and provided assistance to the group formulating the National Rhododendron Gardens Master Plan. As Victorian Branch President, Bill led a small group of Community persons who successfully drew up the Memorandum of Understandings between the ARS and Parks Victoria as it related to the National Rhododendron Gardens.

In 1990, Bill restarted and led the Volunteer Group in a successful attempt to bring the National Rhododendron Gardens and the Society together. Up until the time when Bill began to struggle with ill-health, he was the undisputed leader of that group. Fellow volunteers could go to the Garden on a Tuesday, confident that there would be a worthwhile work program for the day. Bill would have been busy, between Tuesdays, making sure that there was something organised to be done. The Tuesday Volunteer Group continues to flourish and is a major contributor to the ongoing welfare of the Garden.

Each September at Rhododendron Show time, the volunteers had to work together as a team to create a worthwhile display in the Show Hall. It was a matter of great amusement to see grown men, especially Ken Cathie and Bill, struggle to co-operate together and achieve an outcome. Negotiation was often done at the top of their voices. It always came to a good quality and congenial conclusion. Significantly, a majority of the display plants came from Bill's nursery stock and, of course, his show entries were always well represented in the prizes for the best plants and blooms. You could always identify Bill's plants by the signature green mossy deposits on the woody parts of the plants.

Bill had a significant influence on me in the way I now regard plants. I was always amazed at the incredible propagation results that Bill achieved using quite basic methods, polystyrene boxes, clear plastic and a bit of wire. He had his routine and showed great patience while his

cuttings did their work. I would look at cuttings and see the new growth but Bill would always use the cliché, “Tops before bottoms”, meaning that top growth didn’t necessarily indicate root growth and that we should be patient and allow the roots, what he called “the engine”, to develop. He always said that it was what was under the ground that counted most.

To a novice like me, visiting Bill’s nursery at Belgrave South was a revelation. The nursery always seemed full of thriving, healthy potted plants and there were polystyrene boxes lying around with the struck cuttings hardening-off. It seemed chaotic to me but Bill knew exactly what he had and where it was. I was always given a conducted tour around the nursery followed by a coffee with Joan, Andrina and the dogs.

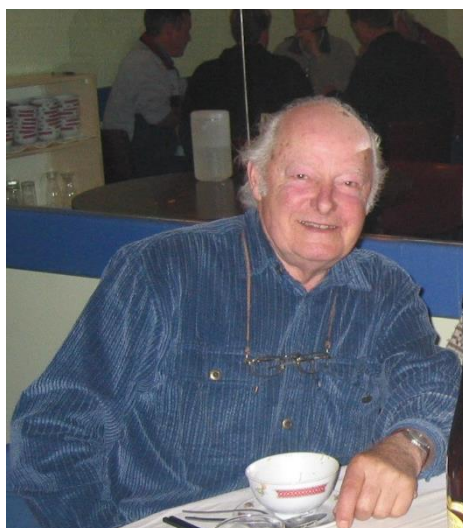
Coincidentally, during the last couple of Tuesdays at the Olinda Rhododendron Garden, activities have included cataloguing the Vireyas in what is now known as “The Bill Taylor Bed”. Also, there have been informal discussions about ways to improve the operation of the large shade-house that Bill relocated from Tindale Garden with the help of his son Euan.

I’m personally grateful for the insight Bill gave me and I know he’s sorely missed by others of us whose lives he touched and who benefit from the legacy he has left.

Tom Noonan

I first met Bill in 1993 when Simon and I joined the ARS. Sometime later I responded to a request for members to join the group of volunteers working on Tuesday’s at the Rhododendron Gardens. This suited me very well as I needed to do work experience to complete the horticultural course I was doing. During the next few years from Bill and the other volunteers I picked up many tips on propagation, planting, grafting, weeding, pruning, etc. while enjoying a stimulating social day. Everyone looked to Bill as the leader of the group and he was always ready to give advice and share a joke. His knowledge and leadership will be sadly missed.

Marcia Begg



The following poem was written for Bill by his step-daughter Andrina Wilson.

LOVE

is a tiny seed
waiting within moist soil
its secret potential
released by both rain and sun.

is a blade of grass
growing among thousands
its precious curve
swallowed by tides of green.

is the briar rose
winding up derelict walls
its simple tender bloom
protected from harm by thorn and spur.

is the maidenhair fern
embracing moss speckled stone
its infant unfurlings
hidden from all but the sharpest eye.

is the mountain ash and golden wattle
ruling over shadowy gullies
their ageless presence

inescapable as the turning of the earth.
Even when winter comes
with its cold bitter touch
and all seems lost
love endures.





R aberconwayi pink form
Photograph Alan Kepert



R verticillatum
Photo Simon Begg



SUCCESS? WITH RHODODENDRON PROTEOIDES AS A GRAFTED PLANT

Sometime ago I became interested in Rhododendrons in subsection Taliensia of the section Ponticum. Their neat slow bushy habit and thick woolly indumentum provide the plants with interesting features all year round, not just in spring when they are flowering. I find I cannot walk past a *R. elegantulum* without stroking the underside of the leaves and admiring their



brown woolly luxuriance. This indumentum also makes the plants somewhat resistant to attacks by leaf sucking insects.

Some in this subsection, like *R. elegantulum*, strike reasonably easily from cuttings and grow well at Olinda. Others like *R. wiltonii* strike easily and make good stout growth in pots and fine garden plants. Unfortunately, some of the most desirable species, like *R. proteoides* and *R. roxieanum*, are difficult to propagate and others, such as *R. lacteum* are difficult for us to keep going.

We have in the nursery one plant of *R. proteoides* that was grown from seed (I think from RHS) germinated 7 years ago. It has two very weak branches the healthiest being about 25mm long. I doubt it will ever make it into the Garden or give us any cuttings.

Two years ago I asked Ian Wallace, who has a plant of *R. proteoides* which is over 20 years old and about 250mm across (it has never flowered), if he could spare a cutting. I was very surprised when he presented me with the only piece of

cutting material he had that year. I was not surprised that he gave me a cutting just the size of what was available, what he gave me was a three year old branch that was 20mm long. Being the age that it was (therefore very unlikely to strike as a cutting) and seeing as we had some *R. wiltonii* cuttings in 4" pots I thought it best to try propagating it as a side graft on to one of the *R. wiltonii*. Below is a photo of this graft just two years later. It has become a very dense bushy plant, so far making growth of about 15mm long twice a year. If this keeps up then we will definitely have not only a plant for the Garden but also plants to distribute to interested members to try in their gardens.

Note: I have subsequently tried *R. roxieanum* as a side graft onto *R. wiltonii* with so far similar results. We also have seedlings of *R. lacteum* and *R. roxieanum* var *cucullatum* from RHS seed growing in the Rouse House.

John O'Hara

**Australian Rhododendron Society
Victorian Branch Inc.**

**Citation to National Council for the Presentation of Society Medals and Life
Membership to Alan Kepert.**

Alan, an excellent plantsman, has made an outstanding contribution to the Society. He has been a regular Tuesday volunteer at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda for about 20 years. He also served as ARS National Secretary from 1969 to 1971.

Alan has a particular interest in *Rhododendron* species. The integrity of the species collection at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda is a testament to Alan's decades of volunteer work. Alan's extraordinary depth and breadth of knowledge of *Rhododendron* species has been invaluable - each Tuesday, Alan undertakes a targeted plant search to check whether species listed on the database can be located in the garden. Alan will select a different species, or related group of species, and armed with the database records, will endeavour to hunt down the specimens in the garden. Plants found are GPS'ed, photographed (if in flower) and the database updated.

Alan has been a regular contributor to ARS publications; he has written the Species Column for the ARS-VIC newsletter for many years, providing informative updates on the species held in the garden, their location, flowering time and horticultural merit. He's also written many articles for The Rhododendron including, for example, articles on the Maddenia Series, the Pentathera and Tsutsui azaleas, and on specific species such as *R. ciliicalyx*.

In the mid-1990s, Alan coordinated the Azalea Project at NRG Olinda. The project aimed to build up the collection of deciduous azaleas in the collection. Alan systematically assessed the plants in the collection, determined those that were true to the species description, then set about developing techniques to propagate the azaleas from cuttings in order to safeguard in cultivation the true species and best forms. The project was highly successful and the propagation techniques developed by Alan are still in use today.

For many years Alan coordinated the Society's ordering of seed from overseas seed exchanges such as the Royal Horticultural Society and the American Rhododendron Society, with a particular focus on building up the species collection at NRG Olinda. Alan would also collect seed from the gardens and private collectors, and lodge these with the seed exchanges.

The Society and its members, have greatly benefited from Alan's encyclopaedic knowledge of Rhododendron, his methodical and systematic approach to tasks, and his willingness to share his expertise and knowledge.

It is with great pleasure therefore, that the Australian Rhododendron Society Victorian Branch and its Committee unanimously requests the presentation of Society Medals and accompanying Life Membership to our esteemed member Alan Kepert.

Signed on behalf of the VIC Branch Committee.

John O'Hara, VIC Branch President



Australian Rhododendron Society Victorian Branch Inc.

Citation to National Council for the Presentation of Society Medals and Life Membership to Laurie Begg.

It has been over five decades since the establishment of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society and there's only a handful of members who've been with the Society since its inception - one of those is Laurie Begg.

Laurie has made an outstanding contribution to the Society, as a long-standing ARS-VIC Committee member until recently, and as one of our longest serving volunteers. Laurie is one of our most highly esteemed members and exemplifies all that is good about the Society.

Laurie commenced working as a horticulturalist with the Rhododendron Gardens Olinda shortly after their formation in the early 1960s. Walking around the gardens today with Laurie you realise how much of the gardens we now enjoy are a result of Laurie's early plantings.

Laurie is a regular Tuesday volunteer and has been so for over 20 years - we're actually not sure for how long as it pre-dates the involvement of all other active members! Suffice to say that Laurie has made an extraordinary contribution to the Society and to the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda.

Not only does Laurie have the most extraordinary knowledge of *Rhododendron* hybrids and species, he has an amazing re-call of the location of plants in the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda.

Laurie has taken responsibility for a group of volunteers, who every Tuesday tackle a section of the garden and undertake a plant hunt as part of the re-labelling and GPS'ing of the plant collection. This work is vitally important in maintaining a record of what is actually held in the garden and to be able to re-locate plants. Under Laurie's guidance, the Tuesday volunteers have tracked down and re-labelled well over a thousand plants.

Laurie is an expert plantsman, and when he's not planting hunting in the gardens, is coordinating much of the Society's propagating of new tube stock, and the collection and

sowing of seed. That the Society has had potted plants for sale reflects Laurie's annual propagation binge! More importantly, propagation from plants in the NRG Olinda collection undertaken by Laurie has meant that losses from the garden or from cultivation more broadly, have been kept to a minimum.

Early this year, Laurie donated to the NRG Olinda glasshouse, mature specimens of the Thornton Peak and Devil's Thumb forms of *R. viriosum* - plants originating from the 1979 Society expedition to North Queensland. Laurie had been growing these at home in his extraordinary garden at Gembrook since participating in the 1979 expedition!

No-one better exemplifies the values of our Society than Laurie – a passion for rhododendrons, a willingness to impart knowledge and support others in their interest. His quiet enthusiasm is infectious – it's not by chance that each week a large number of the Tuesday volunteers gravitate to working in his planting hunting crew!

It is with a great sense of pride that this Branch and its Committee unanimously requests the presentation of Society Medals and accompanying Life Membership to our esteemed member Laurie Begg.

Signed on behalf of the Branch Committee

John O'Hara, Branch President

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE VIREYA HOUSE AND ARS CONVENTION IN OCTOBER 2014

Rhododendron Conservation and a Changing World

The new Vireya House was, mostly, planted out in 2013. But there were finishing touches and there needed to be a suitable occasion for its official opening. It was also Victorian Branch turn to host the ARS Convention, National Council, and ARS Annual General Meeting. So the Branch Committee decided that Saturday 25th October 2014 was to be the day for the Convention and the Opening, National Council would meet on Friday 24th, the dinner and AGM would be on Saturday 26th and it would invite Dr George Argent to open the Vireya House and Dr Argent and M Frederic Danet to speak. To try to reacquaint Melburnians with Rhododendrons in an era where such lovely plants are seldom grown in Melbourne suburban gardens any longer and no more than a couple of Nurseries even grow them, George's and Frederic's addresses were to be presented twice, once at the Convention and the other in the City. On the Sunday attendees were to visit three Mt Macedon Gardens not usually open to the public

Along the way an opportunity arose to have Dr Bob Moseley to speak about conservation in China, in particular, having retraced some of Joseph Rock's explorations, a comparison between the photos Rock took in his time and present day photos from the same position. That was arranged in the City for November. Organisation was undertaken by Andrew Rouse, Prue Crome and Michael Hare. The organisers performed brilliantly. Originally Lyn Craven, CSIRO and Australian National Herbarium, Canberra, Australia's premier Vireya taxonomist and a Society member was to be asked to speak also but sadly Lyn died in July. The organisers dedicated the convention to him.

The Convention

John O'Hara, Branch President, welcomed the delegates and introduced Francis Crome, the first speaker. Francis is a Biodiversity Consultant. He has written a series of research articles for *Newsletter* on Rhododendron species not covered in the usual texts. Francis provided an insightful overview of Rhododendron conservation

Glenn Maskell, Team Leader, National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda has made a huge positive difference to the Gardens since his appointment despite a serious shortage of staff and funding. Glenn addressed *Botanic Gardens and Olinda Gardens, in particular, as an agent for global conservation*.

Dr George Argent spoke on *South East Asian Vireyas- exploration and change over 35 years*. George is a tropical botanist at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and, until his partial retirement recently, in charge of the Vireya research glass houses. They house the world's best collection of Vireya Rhododendron species. Over 35 years he has travelled, and collected, plants in South East Asia, particularly vireyas. He is the author of the principal text *rhododendrons of subgenus vireya* Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh 2006. A second edition is about to be published. George has been to Australia a number of times including the ARS Convention in Melbourne in 2000. George had many interesting stories to tell and photographs to illustrate them. He emphasised the threat some species were under and the importance of establishing living collections in cultivation.

Monsieur Frederic Danet spoke on *New Guinea-Vireya hotspot and the last frontier for collection and conservation*. Frederic is on the staff of Jardin Botanique de la Ville de Lyon, France. Marcia and I visited him there in 2011. Frederic is an unique Vireya collector. He has made many expeditions into Indonesian New Guinea over more than 10 years in his vacations and at his own expense. He was described to me by Lyn Craven as a very canny botanist. Lyn meant a compliment. Frederic was a co-author with Lyn in several Vireya research articles including *Vireya Rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification (Ericaceae, Rhododendron section Schistanthe)* Blumea 56, 2011: 153-158. Jardin Botanique de la Ville de Lyon does have a significant collection of pitcher plants (mostly from the families Nepenthaceae and Sarraceniaceae) that are kept in a glass house with a special, non alkaline, water supply. But its location has alkaline soil reflected in an alkaline water supply. So it only has a small number of rhododendrons that can be provided with non alkaline water. Frederic collected pitcher plants as well as vireyas but he has to export his vireya seed to institutions and collectors who can grow them. Lyn Craven, and latterly Andrew Rouse and I, have received the benefit of seed from Frederic. These include new species and fresh collections of previously described species. It was a privilege for me to show Frederic the results of these and for Marcia and I to introduce Frederic and George to Sherbrook Forrest. John and Andrew took Frederic to Wilson's Promontory following the Convention which all three enjoyed greatly. Frederic spoke to photographs of his collecting expeditions and maps of the relevant locations. He expressed his view that there was much discovery work yet to do there.

Andrew Raper is well known to Victorian members as the proprietor of Rhodoglen Nursery and supplier of Vireyas. He is a camellia expert and a leading light of the Camellia Society. Andrew has a very positive outlook on what plant societies must do to prosper in the very

difficult 21st century environment. He has spoken to us before. Andrew spoke to *The role of commercial growing in Rhododendron conservation*. For such a positive man Andrew had a bleak view of commercial rhododendrons including Vireyas. Andrew propagated only 10 or so varieties and was questioning whether to propagate any. He has found, latterly, that herbs are much better value than Vireyas or, even, camellias with a quick turnaround compared those others. We were left in little doubt that preservation of rhododendron species and even hybrids was very much the responsibility of the Society

Andrew Rouse and John O'Hara spoke to *Ex-situ conservation at home- the Vireya House at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda*. Andrew is an Environmental Advisor and John a physicist as well as Branch President. Andrew and John are, of course, very well known to us. They can rightfully be proud of the Vireya house for which they are principally responsible. They described what they had set out to do and their hopes for the facility. There are also the associated facilities, the propagation fogger for growing roots on cuttings and the Rouse House for seed propagation built by John in the design of Andrew's father John Rouse- as is the Rouse House at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

The Vireya House Opening

Dr Argent duly opened the Vireya House at 2 pm with complementary words about it and its authors

ARS Dinner and 2014 Annual General Meeting at Eastwood Golf Club

As usual the AGM was a short affair. Dwindling attendances meant that a 30 member quorum was assured by proxies from Victoria and South Australia. Rob Hatcher presented his final President's Report. Jackie Hatcher presented the Treasurer's Report. The Auditor was re-elected. As incoming President I thanked Rob for a job very well done and that his involvement was to continue as Public Officer. His advice will be invaluable.

One additional duty was the presentation of Society Medal and accompanying Life Membership to two very long standing members Alan Kepert and Laurie Begg. They were very well deserved. Their citations appear in this *Newsletter*

An excellent dinner was enjoyed by delegates

Visits to Mt Macedon Gardens on Sunday 26th October

About 25 delegates journeyed to Mt Macedon on a beautiful sunny day. We saw in turn *Tieva Tara*, the garden of John and Judith Brand, *Durrol*, the garden of the Mckinnon family and *Glenrannoch*, the garden of John McBain and Penny Foster. All were magnificent. All survived the Ash Wednesday bushfire of 1983 though all were very close on the day. Thank you Andrew for organising these visits and to Prue Crome and Marcia Begg for catering.

Simon Begg

NEW ZEALAND RHODODENDRON ASSOCIATION Inc.

70TH JUBILEE INTERNATIONAL RHODODENDRON CONFERENCE **OCTOBER 2014**

The conference was conducted in the central area of the Dunedin Centre which is also part of the Dunedin Town Hall complex so it was easy to house the 250 + attendees for the period of the convention from Tuesday 21st October to Friday 24th October 2014.

My wife and I attended along with Jeff and Jill Jenkinson and Richard and Bron Illman.

On the first day we were educated by the likes of Hartwig Schepker [Bremen], Steve Hootman [Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden], Denis Hughes (Hybridiser) and Lynn Bublitz who spoke on Maddenia in New Zealand.

Then on that and subsequent days we visited Tannock Glen, Dunedin Group's own garden, Dunedin Botanic garden, and private gardens at "Lindenfield", Larnach Castle gardens on the Otago Peninsula, Glenfalloch, 398 and 396 Portobello Road and "Ashburn Garden"

"Lindenfield", the property of Bron and Tony Fitchett (NZ President) is a property of 3.5 acres which started out as a Pony paddock plus heaps of Blackberry and gorse. A further 5 acres were bought in 1992 and the substantial planting of Rhododendrons commenced.

Further visitations were made to "Kanuka Ridge" the home of John and Gretchen Henderson and Patti and John Matheson's home at Maori Hill.

The next day saw us visit the gardens and property of Lanarch Castle which has been substantially improved.

Our visit to Portobello Road properties were a highlight. We were treated to impressive gardens of bulbs, Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Primula, Primroses Maples, Birch, and indigenous New Zealand native ferns. Of particular interest to us was 396 Portobello Road which is nestled in a sheltered valley on the Otago Peninsula, developed over 24 years by the current owners. White stemmed Himalayan birched and rock walls line the entrance driveway. The front garden features an expansive lawn bordered by heavily perfumed rugosa roses framing a view of the Otago Harbour. Rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias in the lower sheltered areas.

Ashburn Garden contained many of the large trees and stone walls dating back to when the property was originally settled in the 1880's. The current owners developed the rhododendron garden as we now see it in the 1950's The original plant of the hybrid rhododendron "Mrs Percy McLaren is in the garden.

Lunches on many days were at the Alhambra – union Clubrooms which gave all attendees an insight into NZ Rugby. Lunch with over 250 attendees was an enjoyable event.

Peter Wiadrowski





THE GARDEN RAMBLE

Are we allergic to colour?

One of my good friends built a new mansion and proudly showed me through a well-built very large house with a colour scheme of off white, cream, cappuccino and grey. On the trip home 9 out of ten cars had the same colour scheme.

It makes me wonder how much we really think for ourselves or are game to express ourselves. Our gardens are no different. Our pallets of plants have been reduced by large nursery outlets and garden advice programs on the tellie. Many of the lovely old gardens around us have been ripped out and replaced with concrete and Cordyline dullness.

As I pull into my driveway with my blue car and look at my orange and green house with flowering Prostanthera, Banksia and Tea tree I feel a sensory relief from the non-descript colours of my neighbourhood.

I think the Rhododendron Gardens are a good place to show people how to break the mould in their garden. Hopefully we inspire people to landscape their garden with some different plants and liven up our neighbourhoods adding colour to their lives.

Lessons from my Travels

I have just returned from three months traveling up the east coast of Australia with my family stopping at many botanic gardens along the way. One of the observations I make is how a garden is managed. Many of them have great collections but their collections seem to be living in past glory. They are tall, woody and visually unattractive to a visitor. Actively managing a botanic garden collection is extremely important and can be controversial. A major source of complaints or enquiries from the public here relate to pruning or removing plants. Our counter is that we are continually planting, renewing and upgrading collections to make the garden dynamic and changing.

The Rhododendron Gardens team has been very active in removing and planting for many years providing a diversity of plants and stages of growth. When I compare many of the gardens I visited I am very proud of what the Parks Vic. team and the ARS volunteers have achieved here.

What I found in my travels was that where gardens are actively managed there seems to be a greater interest from visitors and increasing visitation. Another feature of dynamic gardens is

involvement from volunteers who drive collections and keep management of the garden accountable in a positive empowering way.

This Spring in the Garden

The garden this Spring has been great. With dry cool weather flowers have lasted well and have really only just finished in the last week. The building of a shelter at Serenity Point will begin in the New Year and should add a destination at that point in the garden. Tex has planted up the top area around Serenity Point lookout area with Victorian alpine plants. This collection is raising the profile of the gardens outside of our traditional supporters as we look at the impact of bringing some of Victoria's most vulnerable plants down in altitude testing their adaptability and also how garden worthy they may be.

Visitation to the gardens is still breaking records with 84,000 so far this year which is 8000 more than the same time last year. Gift shop sales continue to grow at a healthy rate with revenue from sales outstripping entry fees before free entry was introduced five years ago.

It is a privilege for us all to be able to work here in the garden and I am excited about where we are at and the direction we are taking into the future. The support of the ARS will continue to be a vital part of keeping these gardens dynamic.

Glenn Maskell

VIREYA HOUSE UPDATE

It's been 15 months since the initial planting out in the glasshouse, and as we approach the end of the year I thought it timely to give an update on the glasshouse collection.

A total of 428 specimens have been planted out in the glasshouse, comprising:

- * 178 vireya accessions i.e. different provenanced species, sub-species, varieties. For example, we have three different provenances of *R. crassifolium* which I count as three accessions. There are single specimens of some of these - see below.

- * 17 non-vireya species, including specimens of species found within the geographic range of vireyas (*R. excellens*, *R. saxicolum*, *R. wrayi*, *R. ludwigianum*), others that will benefit from the climate control (*R. burmanicum*, *R. arizelum*, *R. championae*, *R. minus ssp. chapmanii*, *R. seinghkuense*), and a couple salvaged from the cage for safe-keeping (*R. magniflorum*, *R. montigianum*).

- * 54 vireya hybrids, mostly comprising small, compact cultivars that we are unlikely to be able reliably to display outdoors.

We've had minimal losses - only 7 vireya species specimens and 7 hybrids have died. The higher % mortality of the hybrids reflects that many of them are planted on the edge of the hanging baskets with the intention that they will cascade out of the sides of the basket. The baskets dried out too much in early spring. Species losses have mostly been specimens that were in poor shape when they were planted. Possibly a couple died of transplant shock.

Of the 178 vireya species, we currently have single specimens of 73 of them. For others, we have up to five specimens. We'll need to adjust this over time and prioritise propagation of those that we can only reliably grow in the glasshouse. Simon and I have been propagating duplicate plants some of which can be planted out in 2015.

We only have about 5-10 vireya accessions yet to be planted in the glasshouse. These are currently small seedlings - some will be large enough in 2015 to plant out.

I'm endeavouring to keep a record of flowering. There's a print-out in the storage container labelled 'glasshouse' in the tea room. Over time we will build up a record of flowering periods for each accession. Feel free to add to this.

Some observations:

* climate control - the climate control system has performed extremely well, and by controlling the humidity we're getting the temperature control we require on hot days. Full credit to John for the choice of misting/fogging system. The plants are enjoying the higher humidity. We are getting good growth and we're finding that many of the species are producing larger leaves which, I assume, is a response to higher humidity. The western end of the glasshouse is getting warmer than I'd like - there is not a set of misters on the western-most truss and this end of the Vireya House is furthest from the fans.

* watering - the watering system is working well though it does need to be checked regularly as it is very easy to tread on the sprinklers in the beds which can alter spray pattern. We also need to keep on top of the weeding, including fern removal, to ensure good coverage. There may be a case down the track to go to raise sprinklers to avoid this problem. The watering of the vertical tree fern logs is starting to get the desired effect, with moss and ferns growing on the logs - we're hoping that some of the smaller vireya species planted into the logs will in time run shoots through the moss and take root i.e. *R. rubineiflorum*. The watering system frequency and duration needs to be adjusted about 4 times a year. A printout of the current watering protocol is kept in the glasshouse container in the tea room.

* bed mix - this has worked really well, with excellent surface root growth out into the mix. I don't think we need to do any top dressing for some time - at least a year or two.

* capacity - the glasshouse is already close to capacity, and particularly the beds. Given we need to add duplicates of some of the 73 species where we currently only have one plant, we're going to need to make some hard choices as to what is kept and those that are grown only outdoors. For example we have a number of specimens of *R. rarilepidotum* in the glasshouse, which we know grows well outdoors at Olinda

* weeds - weeds also like the growing conditions in the glasshouse. We're finding it needs to be weeded nearly every week during the growing season. Whilst most aspects of the Vireya House are low maintenance, weeding is one area that needs to be done regularly. Thanks to Elizabeth who has largely done the weeding over the last year. If done once a week, it takes about 15 minutes to complete, though including the hanging baskets takes longer because they require a step ladder.

* pruning - as you well know I'm not a advocate of hard pruning of vireyas. I have however been tip pruning to see whether we can get some additional branching. There's also been considerable epicormic shoots on many specimens due to improved growing conditions and, particularly, light.

* baskets - the baskets lined with carpet underlay - Prue's suggestion - have performed much better than those with the coir lining. The latter is degrading quickly, the mix is coming out, and the edges dry out too quickly. We may need to revisit these baskets

* pests and disease - we've had no signs of rust or powdery mildew, and, thankfully, no phytophthora. We are getting a fungus on older leaves and the occasional shoot dieback, however this is not a major issue. There's been some caterpillar damage, and some scale and woolly aphids, however no major outbreaks. Since planting, the glasshouse has been sprayed 4-5 times or about once a quarter. We will need to remain vigilant as pests/diseases could

quickly take hold in the glasshouse. Thus regular checking is of benefit, and spraying is needed at the first sign of pests/disease. We are getting sooty mould which likes the high humidity. It's not damaging the plants however it is unsightly - I'm not sure at this stage what to do about it.

- * fertilising - there has been no fertilising to date, unless Wal you've added fertiliser on the occasion you sprayed the Vireya House. We're getting excellent growth, and at the moment I don't see the need to fertilise. There's a couple of plants that have been given low doses of chelated iron.

- * As far as I can determine, there's only been one theft, an orchid that was growing low down in the centre bed. A very good reason to include some orchids in the Vireya House!

Proposed program for 2015

- * planting - decide which species to remove to make space for those that can only be grown in the glasshouse and the 5-10 accessions yet to be established in the glasshouse. There's also space for about a further 5-6 hanging baskets. This can commence early in the New Year.

- * landscaping - the tree fern logs have been such a success, I'd like to look into ways we can add more, and particularly elevated where they are horizontal (like a tree limb). We'll need to determine whether the trusses can take the weight.

- * misting - I'd like to add another set of misting sprays on the western-most truss. We have the bulk of the fittings - this should be a relatively quick task.

- * Craven collection - it's quite likely that some, if not the bulk of the plants remaining in Lyn's glasshouse in Canberra will be relocated to the Olinda Vireya House. Many of these are old specimens of small vireya species that will need to be kept in pots. We'll need to work out how we can best keep and display these.

- * baskets - review coir lined baskets and possibly find an alternate lining.

- * airflow - whilst currently pretty good, as the plants grow the airflow generated by the fans at the Eastern end of the glasshouse will struggle to push air to the western end of the glasshouse. We should look into circulating fans that we can add to the side trusses to help circulate air around the glasshouse. This will also help with disease control

- * door lock - Glenn, I agree with your suggestion that we should lock the glasshouse at night.

- * alarm - my primary concern is a failure of the misting system, particularly on a hot day. I'd like to investigate installing a temperature sensor that is set to an alarm i.e. in the event the temperature get to a point that indicates misting system failure (i.e. 38 Deg C), an alarm is triggered that notifies the Parks Victoria office.

- * Vireya House protocol - write up a protocol so that Parks Victoria staff and volunteers can take steps as required to manage Vireya House day to day and God forbid, in emergencies i.e. power failure on a hot day.

I'd welcome any comments on the above and other things we should consider in 2015.

Andrew Rouse

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