

February/March 2023

# Rhodo News

Newsletter 457



**Sustainable  
Tourism**  
Accredited  
Business

Official Newsletter of the

*Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Inc*

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## How Our Wollemi Pine Has Grown!

*The prehistoric Wollemi pine was only discovered in 1994, growing in an isolated spot in the Blue Mountains.*

*We obtained a sapling by kind donation from Dr Peter Davies around 2009.*

*As you can see, it has thrived in our mild environment, and could reach up to 40m in height. It is being admired here by visiting members of the Geelong Bushwalking Club—Jackie, Paul, Jan, Ben, Linda, Lesley-Ann, John and Richard.*



### Calendar

**Sunday 2nd April**  
Thank You Get Together  
At EVRG from 3pm

**Saturday 22nd April**  
Autumn Spectacular  
At EVRG 10-3pm

**Sunday 14th May**  
Mother's Day Luncheon  
At EVRG—book now

**Saturday 14th October**  
Spring Festival  
(Coincides with Conference)

See us at: [emuvalleyrhodo.com](http://emuvalleyrhodo.com)

## General Manager's Report

### **FIVE SHIPS TO GO!!!!**

I started to think about this month's newsletter not long after our last visitors from the *Norwegian Spirit* had left the garden but it was not until the next morning that I got my thoughts together.

As of 6 March there are only five cruise ship arrivals left for the season which started back in October. On Thursday from 7.30 in the morning volunteers were busy setting up in town, the tea room, kitchen, function room, buggies and buses. Our first visitors started arriving at just after 8 and at 9.20 we had five buses on site — 147 people. While this was going on our outdoor team were busy as usual, and even more so as there was a large wedding in the garden the next day.

At 5pm the cruise ship was well and truly dusted—the ship had sailed, all of our gear packed away and ready for the next one in four days time, kitchen, tea room and toilets all cleaned AND the function room transferred from a meet and greet, and souvenir area to a wedding reception venue. So 7.30am to 5pm = 9 ½ hours by one group of people, many of whom would be back the next morning.

Am I having a whinge? — definitely not. I am simply pointing out that this cannot continue. The cruise ships have been a financial rescue short term. To people who tell me that we should be holding more functions, extending hours of operation or increasing our Tea Room menu — you have your head in the sand. A way must be found to employ more paid staff and to make the garden a truly year-round operation. We cannot continue to exist too much longer operating as we do at present.

Having got that off my chest 😊, what else has been happening?

### **Rhododendron Society Visit**

From Wednesday 8th to Friday 10th March, four Rhododendron Experts from South Australia and Victoria will be with us. The purpose of the visit is summed up in an email received when the visit was first muted.

*“EVRG has arguably the stand-out rhodo species collection in Australia, much of which is down to Maurie Kupsch’s foresight in securing and propagating seed from overseas. We are now at the point where it is becoming extremely difficult to get seed in from overseas, so our priority needs to be to better conserve what we have in cultivation in Australia. To that end I thought a worthwhile project is to replicate as much of the species held at EVG at other gardens (Olinda and Mt Lofty are the obvious choices).”*

The visit will also hopefully be of assistance to Mary McConnell in her mammoth quest of identifying and coding all of the plants in our garden.

### **International Rhododendron Conference — 13 / 14 / 15 October 2023**

The visit of the Rhododendron Society team will also allow for the list of guest speakers for the upcoming conference to be sorted. Conference Coordinator Nicole Maxwell and Admin Officer Sophie Clements will then be able to roll out registration details etc.

Have we gone crackers holding the conference on the same weekend as Emu Valley’s Spring Festival? Probably, but it will be fun. It will have a two-fold effect. It allows conference participants to see our garden at its very best (i.e. Rhododendrons will be in flower and our Cherry Blossoms will be out at this time of year) and it allows members of the public, attending our Spring Festival, to access specialists within the field of Rhododendrons for planting advice.

We have people interested in coming from the U.K, Canada, New Zealand and America!



**A Funny One!!!**

It sometimes pays not to know anything. I took a group on the buggy for a tour of the garden. They were off a cruise ship and one very “naughty” lady failed to tell me what she did for a living. At the end of the trip she came up to me and said very loudly “You don’t know much about plants do you?” My response — “You don’t have to be a genius to come to that conclusion” to which she responded, with a smile, “No, but as a Botanist, from some of your answers it was pretty obvious .” I got a big cuddle and a \$20 donation!!!

**Autumn Spectacular**

Volunteer numbers permitting, Saturday 22 April is the day. Please get the word out that any help on the day will be very much appreciated. Watch out online and in the April newsletter for more information.

**Sunday 2 April — THANKYOU THANKYOU THANKYOU**

To say thankyou for all that has been done over the Cruise Ship season we are having a get together from 3pm Sunday 2nd April. It will be catered for, to allow our Catering Team to kick their feet up and not worry about anything — including washing up!! Bring your partners / family. Indoor, outdoor whatever team you are in — you are invited.

But it is really important that you put your name down if you will be coming. Do this by emailing me at [geoffreywood@me.com](mailto:geoffreywood@me.com)

**Garden Temporary Closure**

Due to TasNetworks carrying out work in the area, Emu Valley will be closed on Tuesday 21st March. We are trying to let people know. It would be great if you can distribute this on any social media sites that you can. [geoffreywood@me.com](mailto:geoffreywood@me.com)



*Here’s something you don’t see every day! This snake climbing up the wall to take a peek into our office! Don’t worry though, they are just curious and don’t hassle anyone.*



*Meanwhile, on the other side of the building, Eric Weeks, Trevor Walmsley, Audrey Weeks and Maurie Kupsch take a break. Well over 100 years of volunteering between this illustrious group!*

## *Around the Garden with Neet*

Well it won't be long until the footy season is here—cooler days, shorter daylight hours along with of course all things autumn, but for now just trying to enjoy the last month of summer. The bore has been given a go at least once already this season, but only for a short amount of time. Really only needing it to top up the lakes and add a little fresh water to them. Tanks are full and the irrigation system is holding itself reasonably well. I still need to make time to get around all of the sprinkler heads and drippers to ensure everything is in working order but we can't be in ten places at once.

Brush cutting is high on the agenda. Around the main areas where our visitors explore is under control pretty well but are in need of spending some time up on those hills that we all dread so much. Spraying has been near impossible as it has just been far too breezy and it's not worth risking the chemical drift on our wonderfully rare collection of rhodos and other garden worthy plants, so we are persevering with the brush cutting for now. Thank you to those who have braved the conditions up there of late and have been close and personal with a few joe blakes whilst going about their brush cutting business. I can definitely see where you have been working and it's looking much better for your efforts so thank you.

School has just gone back but while it may have been a relaxing time for some children to unwind and have a sleep-in 7 days a week, my two kiddos came to work with me. Aren't I lucky to have children with green thumbs who enjoy being outdoors and helping. I taught Stella (5 years old) to deadhead rhodos and Spencer (10 years old) how to take cuttings. This is what they are doing here in the photos below. They have been a great help and loved learning along the way. Spence has been asking 'how are his cuttings going?' so it very rewarding when they can show such enthusiasm at young age and it will always be something I will encourage them to do. Maybe I need to watch out in a few years' time to make sure they don't try and take my job from me, but would rather many hands make light work!



The moon gate is taking shape now and is in the final stages so won't be far from completion. Volunteers Tess and Baz have spent many hours working on it from home in their workshop and here on site and is looking fantastic. Once completed, it will be an amazing addition to the garden structures, first of its kind at EVRG as it is constructed from sandstone. I can't wait for people to have their photos taken with the moon gate for everyone all over the world to see.



This project was made possible all thanks to funds donated by family members of the garden in which we were able to then source and purchase products for construction. Well done all involved. Your attention to detail, time, blood, sweat and tears (I don't think there have been much of this but it makes for a good read 😊) have not gone unnoticed, thank you!

Now is a great time to prepare a list of those plants that you are wanting to find a spot for, as autumn is just around the corner and the ideal time for planting so plan in advance and stop putting this job off.

Mulching your garden now will help keep the soil cool and will conserve water. To maximise the best bang for your buck when mulching, give the

soil a good turn over with a fork before adding the mulch. It will create and allow air flow through to the roots of your plants easier and will allow water to soak through with ease.

Avoid mowing your lawns too short. The longer you can keep the length without looking scruffy, the better your colouring of your lawn will be. Too short and you will see faster browning and bareness, so prolong this look for as long as you can by keeping a bit of length in them and don't forget to give them a bit of a feed just to help them a long a bit better in these drier times if possible.

Keep up the dead heading, especially the roses to encourage new growth and even a second flush of flowers. Also now is a good time to be pruning the hedges, as the growth from spring time has now eased up.

Happy gardening, Neet 😊

## *Vale Frank Medwin*

Members will be saddened to learn of Frank Medwin's passing on December 19th.

Frank was a staunch supporter of Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden in so many ways, including a time as our President in 1991/92 and many hours on gate duty alongside his wife Beris. Members will recall he and Beris's regular attendance at our monthly social meetings, where we looked forward to the arrival of their floral blooms for judging, which usually won a prize. And they were always there to help with visiting cruise ships.

What a loss – so much time donated over many, many years – thank you Frank.



*Rita Maxwell, Alan Maxwell and Nicole Edwards — they were still laughing 7 hours later when cruise ship passengers all departed.*



*John Englund and Chairperson Ant Dry down near the Sea of Japan — not sure what they were up to!*



*Geoff (centre) and this lovely couple from Victoria had a lot of laughs going for a tour (and getting lost).*



*Toowoomba-based Stonestreet Travel paid us an early morning visit in February. We had a lot of fun. Despite our suggestion, they wouldn't take our John Englund (fourth from the right) back with them!!*



*Looking across the garden to distant fields.*



## Rhododendron sutchuenense

Subsection Fortunea contains some beautiful species. The delightful perfume of decorum and fortunei certainly let the visitor know they are in flower, the interesting leaves of *R. hemsleyanum*, or the unusual wavy edged leaves and the long tailed buds of *R. auriculatum*. *R. sutchuenense* is a member of this subsection.

*R. sutchuenense* was discovered by A. Henry 1888 in western Hupeh and by other collectors in Hupeh and Sichuan, growing in bamboo and ever-green Oak thickets. The species was first introduced by Wilson in 1907 from west Hupeh. It can grow into a large shrub to 6m in the wild. Our plants are growing well but I do not expect them to reach near that.

*R. sutchuenense* has oblong-obovate, oblong-oval or oblanceolate dark green leaves, upper surface matt, undersurface pale green with minute hairs along the midrib. Flowers are widely campanulate light or deep rose, white tinged pink or mauve-pink with crimson spots and are presented in a truss of 9-12 flowers. Our plants at Emu Valley can be seen on the right hand side of the middle road just after *Betula luminifera* and before *Ginkgo biloba*. *Maurie*

*The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is proudly sponsored by:*



**Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Inc.**  
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