

The Royal Horticultural Society

The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



Bulletin No. 65 - August 1997

Forthcoming Events

Sep.12-14 Harrogate Flower Show, Great Yorkshire Showground
Sep.16-17 Great Autumn Show, RHS Hall Westminster
Oct.17-19 Group Autumn Week-end

Oct.17-24 Dunedin Rhododendron Festival New Zealand
5 Nov Group Executive Committee Meeting, Westminster. 1.00p.m.

Chairman's Notes

Following my appointment as your Chairman on the 29th April, I fear that I have been able to give very little time to my duties. My excuse - I have been in the throes of moving home and even more dramatically, retiring after nearly 35 years involvement with the gardens in the Great Park at Windsor. However, I do expect to have more time in the future although I am by no means 'out of work' horticulturally, with numerous commitments particularly with the RHS and an almost empty large garden of my own.

I am indeed very pleased and honoured to have become your Chairman and I look forward to the challenges and I hope successes, of the future. One benefit that I believe will be generally helpful, is that the Chairman of the Rhododendron and Camellia Committee will also be the Chairman of the Group, at least for a few years, for this has been a source of some confusion, particularly overseas.

I have every intention to visit as many of the Branches as possible over the years, time and finances allowing, and have recently judged the Wessex Branch's small but very enjoyable Show and also visited Tony Weston's Group Information Stand at the new RHS show at Strathclyde. I would add that the exhibit at the RHS show was most attractive and informative and I understand kept Tony, Tessa Knott (Scottish Branch Chairman) and their helpers extremely busy.

And what of this year's spring scene in the woodland garden? Much of Britain produced one of the best ever March-early April displays and this certainly applied to the Savill and Valley Gardens which were without doubt the best ever since the gardens were developed in 1932. Then the devastating frost of April 21, followed in many areas by a further very harmful frost in early May. Much terrible damage mostly to young growth was caused, particularly to Magnolias, and only now, June 21, are they producing new growth, many rather half heartedly. So much joy and so much disappointment in a few weeks - that's gardening. However the successes and the excitement easily outweigh the setbacks.

Lastly and not least I want to say a big thank you to my predecessor, Bruce Archibald, who has done a tremendous job over the past years; to Cynthia Postan for the great amount of hard work she has been involved with as Yearbook Editor, and to Maurice Foster who failed to be re-elected in the ballot for the Committee, I hope we shall see you back on the Committee Maurice, before too long.

J.B.

Editor's Notes

Within the past few days has come the news that our Chairman Mr. John Bond has been made a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order in the Birthday Honours List. Many many congratulations from us all on this well deserved honour.

One of the interesting things that one learns from talking to gardeners from other parts of the U.K., is how much our climate can differ over a relatively small distance. Certainly my garden in West Wales, missed those devastating frosts that John Bond has mentioned, *Magnolia campbellii* did her splendid best for

me without damage and only a young M. "Elizabeth" had the edges of one or two emerging leaves slightly crisped.

The account of the N.W. and N.Wales Branch spring visit to Howick has reminded me of our Group visit there in 1994. Of all the gardens I have seen with the Group, this one stayed in my memory for its beautiful underplantings of bulbs and herbaceous plants. Even if the rhododendrons had not been flowering, the spectacle would still have been outstanding and I wonder whether many of us make enough effort to provide this 'carpet' under our trees and shrubs. I am trying, but find so many of the more special items hard to establish. *Glaucidium palmatum* in its lilac form I lust after in particular, and having grown some from seed I planted them out only to have them decimated by slugs, Uvularias and Trilliums are also beloved by them. Possibly the only answer is to wait until I have a large number of mature healthy pot grown specimens to try in the open ground all at once. Forget eggshells, holly leaves etc. gastropods just clamber merrily over the top on a damp warm night, and of course I am organic. Nematodes may possibly do the trick if only the manufacturers can get their act together and have them ready early in the year. Members with more suggestions please let me know, especially if you live in a mild damp climate similar to mine.

Autumn Week-end 17-19 October 1997

Our meeting this year is to be in mid-Wales, an area we haven't visited for six years. We shall break fresh territory and see two gardens new to us. The first is that of Gliffaes, a country house hotel, open under the National Gardens Scheme and which belongs to Mr. & Mrs. Brabner. This has a beautiful garden consisting of 33 acres of lawns, woodland and parkland and stands in the valley of the River Usk, midway between Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains. The trees planted in the C19 are among the most beautiful and rarest found in this country and a succession of gardeners have continued careful planting of rare trees and shrubs. Today the grounds are maintained to a high standard and great interest taken in their upkeep. The house overlooks one mile of left bank water of the Usk, and this is a favourite hotel for fishermen.

The second garden (the next day) is Bryan's Ground, nr. Presteigne; this belongs to David Wheeler and Simon Dorrell, who together publish the international quarterly gardening journal Hortus. The great interest of this garden is that after a 'resting' period of thirty years it is now being reclaimed and reconstructed into many different areas of botanical interest, including the planting of an arboretum in a 3-acre paddock and the development of improved plant propagating facilities. The restoration of the original Edwardian Greenhouse is underway with help from the European Union and Hereford and Worcester County Council who have recognised Bryan's Ground as a garden of national importance.

On the Saturday evening we shall have the pleasure and privilege of hearing Ivor Stokes give us a talk with slides on the construction and development of the new National Botanic Garden of Wales of which he is the Director of Horticulture.

Accommodation has been reserved for members at the Metropole Hotel Llandrindod Wells; we stayed here in 1991

and were very well looked after. (tel.01597 823700) The hotel has an indoor heated pool and sauna.

There will be a small plant sale during the week-end which will include unusual, young acers, dark blue meconopsis and asiatic primulas. If members have any contributions these will be welcome. Proceeds to go to Group funds.

The cost will be £110.00 for those sharing a twin room, and £130 for a single room. This includes lunch on Sunday, administration and hire of a room for the lecture, dinner, bed and breakfast at the Metropole.

If you wish to join the week-end please let me know soon and send £20.00 deposit to me at Starveacre, Dalwood, E.Devon EX13 7HH tel. 01404 881221 (Mrs. Valerie Archibold, Hon. Tour Organiser)

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday, 29 April 1997.

Chairman - Mr. Bruce Archibold, resigned, replaced by Mr. John Bond.

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Dr. A Edwards, Mr. C Fairweather, Mrs. R Foster, Mrs. J Idiens, Mr. M Jurgens, Mrs. T Knott, Mr. I Stokes, Mr. C A Weston and Mrs. E Wheeler.

There were 22 members present.

Minutes of 1996 Annual General Meeting, having been printed in Bulletin No.62 dated August 1996, were agreed to be a true record, and were signed by Mr. Archibold.

Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year ended October 1996.

Mr. Stevenson circulated copies of the accounts, which are subject to audit by the RHS. He explained that although the additional expenditure for the Jubilee Yearbook 'The Rhododendron Story' had been mostly covered from a £13,000 donation, we had been involved in more expense, and more had been spent on Bulletin despatch with two extra mailings, including the List of Members, which is not issued every year. Seed had been bought, and sold well. Although there is currently £17,000 in hand, debts to the end of the current year will leave the Group with about £14,000. Nevertheless Mr. Stevenson cautioned the Group to be careful because of uncertainty about the cost of producing the Yearbook after 1998.

Major Spring-Smyth proposed the adoption of the Accounts, subject to audit, seconded by Miss Perring, agreed unanimously. Mr. Stevenson was thanked.

Chairman's Report

Mr. Archibold welcomed those attending, in particular Lady Adam Gordon, thanking her for all her work for the Wessex Branch; Mary Forrest, thanking her for organising the Branch in Ireland, saying it has been necessary now to form two Branches in Ireland; and Mrs Carolyn Hardy, for her support of the Group.

Whilst there has been little increase in the membership we are, at least, holding the figure at about 700 and our Hon. Treasurer has been able to recommend that the present subscription of £15 will remain at the same level for the next twelve months. As you have heard our finances are in good shape which, in a climate of ever-increasing costs, must say a good deal for his careful housekeeping for which we should all be grateful.

Lady Cynthia Postan who has so very ably edited our Yearbook for a number of years has felt that she must now stand down and hand over this task to a new editor. Fortunately she has been able to secure the services of Philip Evans who, even now, is preparing the next issue. I am sure that every member of the Group would wish me to thank her for the immense amount of energy and expertise that she has put into the job resulting in such ever-improving publications. On behalf of the whole Group - thank you Cynthia.

The other matter which has gone from strength to strength is the Seed Exchange and for this notable achievement we have to thank Tony Weston who, in addition to his far from light duties as Membership Secretary, has found the time to produce not only a mouth-watering list but has also dealt with great competence with the resultant distribution to members. I only hope that his suppliers continue to visit those places from which comes such interesting seed.

I am pleased to say that my wife has agreed to continue organising tours for the Group for the time being following her very successful tour in Ireland. We are shortly to be taken on a trip to see gardens in Cornwall and she tells me that next year she hopes to organise a mini-tour for those people who feel that they cannot spare the time to attend the main tour which will be in Scotland.

Once again due to the valiant efforts of Tony Weston some new Branches have been opened notably two in Ireland, one in Scotland and a part-renewal of the East Anglia Branch which, when I last spoke to you, I feared might have to close; now we need someone to organise a Branch in the south of East Anglia. In addition David Farnes has set up a new Branch in the Peak District. Sadly Lady Adam Gordon has felt that the time was right for her to hand over her Chairmanship of the Wessex Branch which she has so effectively run for a number of years, but fortunately she has found a successor and the Branch will continue. All the other Branches still continue to make their valuable contribution to the well-being of the Group - a fact which is well appreciated by the Committee and, I suspect, by those for whose pleasure, entertainment and education they provide.

I have departed from my normal practice of not picking out members of the Committee for special mention because I feel that those I have named have given the Group special service. This in no way belittles the work done by others - Joey Warren, the Secretary and Alastair Stevenson, the Treasurer and all other members without whose work the Group would, indeed could not operate and I hope very sincerely, that you all know how very much I have valued both your help and friendship during my time as Chairman. This, of course, brings me to the matter which I mentioned at the last Annual General Meeting when I said that I would not again stand for re-election. If it can be said that I am glad to be leaving the Committee and all my good friends then it can only be because I am handing over to one in the very firm belief that I could not do so to anyone better qualified. It is now my pleasure to step down and hand over to John Bond.

Mr. David Farnes, as longest serving committee member, felt privileged to second Mr. Archibold's vote of thanks to the Committee and to Mr. Bond, and proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Archibold for chairing the Rhododendron Group and leaving the Group in such good heart, on which the Committee can build. Dr. Robbie Jack spoke in thanks and praise of Mr. Bruce Archibold as Chairman and made a presentation of a glass decanter, glasses and his favourite whisky.

Mr. John Bond then took the Chair

Election of Officers.

Mr. Archibold proposed and Major Spring-Smyth seconded the re-election of all the Officers, which was agreed unanimously.

Election of Committee Members

There was a ballot, caused by three members having served their three-year term of office and all seeking re-election, also a Branch Chairman seeking election to the Committee, and the reduction of one Committee place in accordance with the new Constitution; four people seeking election for two places. Voting papers were provided, to be signed and with RHS membership number; the tellers appointed were Lady Cynthia Postan and Bruce Archibold, both of whom had resigned from the Committee. Elected by ballot were Dr. Robbie H.L. Jack and Miss Cicely Perring, whom Mr. Bond welcomed to the Committee.

Election of Auditors - it was agreed unanimously to re-appoint the RHS as Auditors.

Date of next Annual General Meeting - Wednesday, 29 April 1998, at 3.30 p.m.

Branch News and Activities

N.W. England & N. Wales Branch.

The February lecture in 1997 was given by Alan Clarke who had been invited to speak on The Propagation of Rhododendrons. With excellent illustrations he demonstrated his methods of production, concentrating mainly on vegetative propagation. The selection of cuttings, preparation and subsequent treatment. Then on to grafting: the type of graft he employs was clearly shown, followed by the management of

the material. Many are already aware that Alan is a strong advocate of summer grafting; what may surprise many is that he carries out his propagation activity without any artificial heat. The results are there for everyone to see and possibly some will endeavour to imitate his methods.

The Group's local spring visit was to two gardens in Lancashire, firstly to Peter & Beryl Bland at Goosnargh where we saw a wide selection of species and some hybrids raised by the owner. Frost had damaged some of the blossom outdoors but in the greenhouse a selection of plants in the Madderia subsection was in perfect condition and *Rhododendron lindleyi* and R. 'Michael's Pride' were in full flower.

The second garden near Clitheroe is owned by Philip & Joan Lord, this is a garden of some six acres of deep gorge with an often swift flowing stream at the base. There is a suitable tree canopy and over a little more than twenty years Philip and Joan have cleared the scrub vegetation and replaced it with plants of high ornamental appeal. A specimen of *Rhododendron ambiguum* stood as a dome of yellow flowers, underneath which it was possible to ascertain it had leaves! There were good specimens of *R. rex ssp. fictolactum* and a number of other large leaved species. I was struck by *R. griersonianum* looking very healthy at this altitude.

The spring weekend visit this year was to gardens in Northumberland. We began with a visit to Moor Bank, the University of Newcastle Botanic Garden where they maintain a collection of rhododendrons from the late R.B.Cooke's garden at Corbridge. The plants are not in such good condition as one remembers them at Kilbride, how could they be without the unique micro-climate with which they had formerly been provided? It was still interesting to see well flowered specimens of *R. aberconwayi* and *R. wardii*. We went via Craggside through banks of *R. ponticum* and *Pinus sylvestris* and on to Howick.

The party was welcomed by Lord Howick and his Head Gardener Robert Jameson. Robert led the tour to the Silkwood section which is well populated by choice ornamental plants, among which rhododendrons are well represented and some have been in position since the 1920's. *R. decorum* was one example of such a vintage, it was covered with flower. At the end of May one realises that many species will have finished flowering but the later flowering plants provided plenty of colour. Most interesting to see were the forms and cultivars of *R. cinnabartnum* growing and flowering almost as if powdery mildew had never occurred. *R. cinnabartnum* Roylei Group had grown over to form a semi arch over the paths and one inevitably viewed the flowers in the classically recommended way with the sun shining through the petals.

The garden at Howick contains many surprises, who for instance would anticipate seeing a mature specimen of *Drimys winteri* in the North East? Most would acknowledge that the climate in this area is likely to be more favourable for meconopsis than in many parts of Britain but to see clumps of *Meconopsis punicea* displaying its pendulous maroon flowers was an unexpected delight. After viewing the part of the garden open to the public, we were taken behind the scenes to the propagation area and the nursery beds. The serried rows of documented plants were most impressive. Added to the quality of the plants was the realisation that the vast majority had been raised from wild collected seeds. Very many had come from expeditions in which Lord Howick had taken part. The nursery area was devoted to growing plants to a stage at which they could be planted out with a real chance of surviving. New areas are being developed at Howick and on present evidence it promises to be one of the most significant arboreta of Britain. The ambition to return in the future was repeatedly voiced by members of the party.

The last visit we made was to Belsay where we were shown round by the Head Gardener Paul Hannigan. Great improvements have been made in the ten years or so since English Heritage took the estate over. The hybrid valley in front of the main hall has been opened up allowing progress through the rhododendrons; in fact they are best viewed as a mass from a short distance away. The quarry garden has similarly been improved giving clearer views of the specimens of magnolia, cornus and parrotia. New planting has also been undertaken and the whole scene has been transformed for the better.

Norfolk Branch

The Norfolk Branch held its first meeting on May 17th. This took the form of a guided walk round the Wild Garden at

Sheringham Park. We are a very small group, but with families, friends and other interested parties we totalled a respectable thirty visitors.

We saw some glorious rhododendrons and azaleas and a few azaleodendrons. The camellias were largely over, but there were some delicate specimens of *Magnolia sinensis*. There was also a large halesia, which was at its best, and the curious 'pocket handkerchief tree' *Davdia involucrata*, was just coming out. Ironically in this very dry spring, we got drenched by a sudden downpour towards the end of our walk. Visitors fled, but the plants will certainly have appreciated it.

We plan to meet again in the autumn.

J.I.

South West Branch

On April 26 some 50 members and their guests visited two gardens in Cornwall. In the morning Mrs.P.Chope showed us round her large, very mature garden at Carclew. This garden is important for historical reasons as it received some of the first importations of Rhododendrons when the Himalaya were explored by Hooker. There was a good show of bloom best viewed from the terraces below the house. The Branch made a presentation of Rhododendron "Fragrantissimum". After lunch Barry Champion, Head Gardener at Treliassick, took us around this National Trust garden. We received a great number of garden hints. There was a long discussion on the methods of measuring the height of a tree! We looked at the new orchard planted with Cornish apple varieties. We presented *Rhododendron serotinum*.

The visits on May 17 took us to Dorset and Somerset. First to Hilfield Friary near Dorchester where Brother Vincent SSF is renovating the Secret Garden. During last winter in the late Geoff. Hamilton's series on Paradise Gardens there was a brief glimpse of this garden. Unfortunately the visit was shortened by rain. The presentation plant was Rhododendron "Angelo" FCC. In the afternoon we were luckier with the weather and were able to view Mrs M.Vlasto's garden at Coneygore, near Wincanton, at leisure. Probably this garden needs a day spent in it. It was first planted in the 1930's by Mr. Frank Jones who moved there from Pembrokeshire and subscribed to Kingdon Ward's expeditions. Some plants were found with the original label and collector's number still attached. There is present a good variety of species and hybrids. Mrs. Vlasto welcomes any suggestions as to names. The presentation plant was Rhododendron "Titian Beauty".

Members of the Branch will receive details of the Autumn meeting in the news letter to be sent out in August.

A.E.

S.E. Branch

The Branch paid a most interesting visit to Sandling Park this Spring at the kind invitation of the owners, Mr. & Mrs. Alan Hardy. Over the years the garden has been notable for fine collections of species and hybrids which were planted and nurtured by three generations of the Hardy family.

The garden was created by Alan Hardy's grandfather who planted many of the hardy (no pun intended!) hybrids that still survive today - and survive is the word, since Sandling Park has suffered two catastrophic set-backs. The first was during World War 2 when enemy bombers destroyed the original house and severely damaged the garden. The second was the notorious 1987 storm which felled much of the ancient oak tree cover and wrecked the species collection planted by Alan and his father, Major A.E. Hardy. Such was the chaos wreaked that it required a disposal bonfire that burnt continuously for two and a half years.

Because of this, we concentrated mainly on viewing the older and sturdier rhododendron hybrids. For those who have a feeling for them, there were many old favourites to see and perhaps outstanding among them were 'The Master', 'Jalisco Goshawk', 'Creamy Chiffon', 'Countess of Derby', 'Mrs. Lionel de Rothchild', 'A Bedford', 'Mrs. Carvalho', 'Frank Galsworth', 'Prima Donna' and 'Lady Gwendolin Broderick'. Of additional interest was a very mature specimen of *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Worley' and a large *Rosa brunonii* grown from seed received from George Sherriff.

The Branch was warmly welcomed by Mr. & Mrs. Hardy and most hospitably entertained to tea at the end of the visit, whereupon John Hilliard had great pleasure in expressing the Branch's thanks by presenting the couple with *R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum*.

The second South East Branch Show took place at Handcross School and enjoyed even greater success than last year's event. More entrants to more competitive classes produced an abundant and most colourful display of plants which must have been a delight to visitors and all those involved.

Luckily the Show was held a week or so before that devastating frost struck which meant we saw blooms of high quality. As the Show was open to other Group members it was encouraging that members of the S.E. Branch did well with their exhibits and several first-time competitors were awarded first prizes.

Best rhododendron was a mighty truss of *rex ssp. fctolactum* exhibited by Hascombe Court, best camellia an immaculate bloom of 'Inspiration' shown by Mr. & Mrs. Mansel and best magnolia was 'Spectrum' a *lilliflora 'Nigra'/sprengeri diva* cross staged by Rosemary & Maurice Foster.

Many thanks are due to the RHS, private individuals and the trade who generously provided prizes, and loaned many of the accoutrements needed to produce the Show.

Autumn Events - The Branch are planning a visit to Sheffield Park in October to see the autumn colour and a talk in November that will, we hope be given by Mark Flanagan who recently took over at Windsor Great Park from John Bond - details to be announced later.

Wessex Branch

We had a good attendance at our Annual Competition in May which was held at the Old House, Silchester, Reading, by kind invitation of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Jurgens, and was judged by Mr. John Bond. Mr. Graham Rankin won the cup for the Best in Show with a beautifully displayed arrangement of leaves, and also the Katherine Beadle Shield for winning the most points. In spite of the frost there was a good display of exhibits by the members.

The next meeting will be on October 17 in the Lecture Room at Wisley, when Mr. Jim Inskip will be talking on 'Azaleas From Seed to Flower'. As space is limited, please contact Mrs. Miranda Gunn for further information on telephone 01428 644422

Scottish Branch

As the new Branch Chairman, I thought it would be fitting to 'kick-off' with the new three day event, Scotland's National Gardening Show, on May 30th - 1st June. The Strathclyde Leisure Park was an ideal venue for this new venture of the RHS, attracting over 5,000 visitors (once they managed to sort out the traffic problems on the first day), and promises to be an annual event.

Our exhibit in Floral Marquee 4 was most attractive and informative, put together by Tony and Daphne Weston. A great deal of interest was shown and we took over £400 and 9 new members were enrolled, with many others taking home literature and information on the Group.

The seeds together with the map of the Yunnan showing where the plants grow in the wild was a great success with many people buying seeds to have a go at growing their own plants.

Our stand was happily situated close to the Scottish Rhododendron Society where in the course of the three days I was able to get to know the members and it was a great help having Peter Cox's expertise so close at hand! We agreed that our two groups should move together more closely in the future, and the SRS have kindly invited us to join them for their Autumn Week-end at Brodick, Isle of Arran.

T.K.

Scottish Rhododendron Society - Autumn Meeting Week-end Sat/Sun 4/5 Oct.

Proposed Itinerary:

Sat 4 October An afternoon walk around the gardens at Brodick, then an evening meal and a lecture, probably by Nigel Price, the Head Gardener at Brodick, illustrated with slides of his trip to Yunnan in 1996.

Sun 5 Oct. Another walk around the garden with a talk about the steps being taken by the National Trust for Scotland to enhance their species collection; also about some of the problems faced in a public garden, e.g. plant theft.

Anyone interested should apply to Mr. Matt Heasman, 2 Abercromby Place, East Kilbride, Glasgow, G74 3DF, Tel 01355 227913 who will have further details of the programme and accommodation.

Shows

Malvern Spring Gardening Show. The Group stand in the Specialist Societies marquee attracted a surprising number of people in spite of the atrocious weather which very quickly caused the ground outside to become a quagmire. Although not a resounding financial success, sales of books, seeds and new membership subscriptions producing a total of £98, it was considered a worth-while exercise from a publicity angle. We were awarded a plaque inscribed "VERY HIGHLY COMMENDED". and have now received our prize, a cheque for £25. The stand was manned throughout the 3 days by a relay of local members and their friends to whom we are most grateful. I later received a letter of thanks from the Show saying how much they appreciated our attendance at Malvern.

Tessa Knott has reported on the Strathclyde show where at least 9 new members were enrolled and many more took away membership application forms which at the time of writing are eagerly awaited. Unfortunately the judges here disqualified us for (a) not having our name displayed in the regulation size and style of lettering and (b) having an artificial grass skirt around our display table instead of the regulation black cloth. As the Regulations for Exhibitors ran to over 40 pages it is hardly surprising that such seemingly insignificant details escaped our notice!

T.W.

Our Stand at these two events, a sort of testing of the waters, has shown how much interest is aroused and we would like to increase our presence taking in as many other high profile shows as we can. Any members who feel they can help in any way however small, please make yourselves known either to Tony Weston, your Branch Chairman or myself.. We would like to have a small army of helpers, living in all parts of the U.K to call upon, so that the work - and fun - may be shared.

E.W.

Dunedin Rhododendron Festival, 17-14 October, 1997

This beautiful part of New Zealand boasts one of the finest climates for rhododendrons and every year the city hosts a festival to celebrate their favourite genus. There are displays, lectures and exhibitions, also visits to both the famous public gardens and no less excellent private gardens which abound. There is even an "Early Dunedin Home and Pub Tour" which may help to encourage reluctant spouses of either sex along too. Any U.K. members who think they may like to join some of these tempting items should contact The Dunedin Visitor Centre, PO Box 5457, 48 The Octagon, Dunedin, New Zealand, Phone 03 474 3300 Fax 03 474 3311. I have just one copy of the Festival Programme plus booking form, which I will be happy to send to the first member to contact me.

E.W.

Some Species Rhododendrons: A Field Guide to their Identification £10

Prepared by Kenwyn Clapp, put on computer by John Bodenham. The booklet has sold well and profits from sales are being donated to The Rhododendron Group.

A few copies of this 100 page pocket sized handbook are still available, from Mrs. Joey Warren, Netherton, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, Devon PL20 7NL, phone 01822 854022, to whom cheques should be made payable.

50-year Index to the Year Book

One of our members, Stephen Fox, has prepared a comprehensive index of the articles within the last fifty Year Books. At present this is on floppy disc and items can be researched under the headings:- Rhododendron species, R. hybrids, Camellias, Magnolias, Other specific plants, Plants in the wild and expeditions, Plants in cultivation (incl. propagation) Taxonomy, Specific gardens, Authors, etc.

We are hoping to be able to offer this on disc, printed copy of the whole index or possibly printed copy of specific groups. At present we do not know the price, but I will be very happy to hear from members who may like to acquire a copy in one form or another, it will help us enormously if we can determine what level of interest there may be amongst the Group. We realise that the Index will primarily concern students and other researchers, but probably a lot of us would like a quick way of finding that special article and it will of course cut the time needed to find things if you are visiting the Lindley Library. Contact me please if you are at all interested, Eileen Wheeler, address etc. at the end of the Bulletin.

A Personal View of a Plant-Hunting Expedition to the Yunnan

(Abridged from an article written by David Farnes for the British Dental Association News - Dec. 1996)

For many years my horticultural interest was in Rhododendrons but this has been extended to other shrubs and trees and most recently to the origins of the plants that we enjoy nowadays and the exploits of the pioneers who went to the remote and wildest places on earth to discover and bring back these plants for our gardens.

In early 1994 I received my first invitation to join a group of rhododendron plant-hunters and at once began preparing for the expedition planned for May/June of that year to Yunnan in south-west China. We were an international party of nine, led by Edward Millais and his wife Romy who had both been to China several times before. It was a privilege to be in the company of two of the world's leading authorities on the genus, namely David Chamberlain and Peter Cox. We were joined by two Americans, well versed in the use of GPS equipment for pin-point location of geographical features (and plants too, when appropriate); they were from The Species Foundation. Dr. Ross Hayter from Australia was invited to look after our medical needs and Roger Hyams, a post-graduate student from RGB Edinburgh made up the complement. Roger, working closely with David Chamberlain, was chiefly concerned with collecting herbarium specimens. Our Chinese hosts soon realised that I was the beginner of the party and renamed me "New Boy" to distinguish me from the other "David". To this day they still use this nickname in correspondence!

The main theatre of exploration was to be on the mountainous ridge that separates two of the great rivers of western China which give their names to the Mekong-Salween Divide, just south of the old town of Atuntze - now called Degen. To reach the latter we had to travel for eighteen hours by train from Chengdu to Dukou through Sichuan Province along the famous tunnel line and then two twelve-hour stints by mini-bus along rough tracks which form the basis of the road system in much of China away from the big cities. We did have one day's rest from travel and spent this botanising near the ancient city of Lijiang - scene of the most recent severe 1996 earthquake

From Degen we descended some 3,000ft into the Mekong Valley along a narrow mountain road bounded by high cliffs on one side and by precipitous drops of several hundred feet on the other. We had a good driver and a new vehicle, so with little oncoming traffic we had an uneventful journey to our rendezvous with our team of ponymen and some twenty-nine mules and a donkey. It was a very colourful scene at the Mekong Bridge with the families of our hosts and guides waiting to say farewell to their menfolk who had the task of sorting all our luggage and stores/rations for the three week trek, into evenly weighted bundles to be carried by the mules.

Finally when all was ready we set off across the narrow suspension bridge and along an even narrower cliff path with little or nothing to prevent us from sliding tens of feet into the Mekong below: one slight slip and however mules are incredibly sure-footed, and provided their packs are well fastened and not too wide there is little chance of losing one's

belongings or food supply for the days ahead. A comforting thought when for most of the trek we were walking or climbing along narrow precipitous paths.

For the next three weeks we travelled almost entirely on foot with the occasional ride on a mule - for me with little success as I was 'de-muled' quite early on by a low overhanging branch, impossible to duck beneath so I caught the bough on my chest and was left suspended by my armpits as the mule moved on in the train. This caused much amusement to our ponymen and I could only see the funny side too. We all had a good laugh and then proceeded - myself on foot for the remainder of the trek. We climbed steep hillsides, often to 12,000ft., and descended into deep valleys, always on the lookout for plants.

Several times we lost our way as the pathways were never more than herdsman's tracks which had become obliterated during the previous winter by leaf-fall and snow. Within the forested areas we had to stay close together: bamboo thicket and shrub scrub can be so dense and impenetrable that the only means of contact with one's companion is by voice even at a separation of only a few yards. Above the tree line where the dwarf shrubs cover the open hillside rather like heather does in Britain, we were able to wander more freely and to admire the breathtaking views of distant snow-covered mountains.

In such terrain it is very difficult to find suitable campsites which are reasonably level, not rock-strewn or waterlogged yet within easy reach of running water. When a site was found it was often better to stay for several nights and walk further in different directions on each days exploration. There is no artificial light so we were often in bed by 7.30 each evening but up and about before 6.00am to find our cook already busy with water boiling over the campfire and the rice gruel - our staple breakfast - already prepared. The Chinese do not make tea as we like it, those in our party who had been before had advised us to take our own tea-bags and also small pots of jam or honey to make the gruel palatable.

On days when we had to move on it was always a mad scramble to pack our kit-bags, eat some breakfast, dismantle tents and march well ahead of the mule train, which travelled at about one and a half times our walking speed whatever the gradient. With all this strenuous activity and the somewhat limited diet, it was not surprising that I lost over twenty pounds in weight, but I gained much in fitness and returned home a healthier person in both body and mind. It is impossible to describe the thrill and excitement at discovering a plant in the wild that one nurtures in a garden; and even more so to find a plant not in cultivation as we did on the trek, when after a gruelling morning's climb of more than 3,000ft we stumbled upon a yellow-flowered form of *Rhododendron sanguineum* (normally red) Tiredness deserted us at once as we swarmed around with cameras clicking furiously.

Of course there were disappointments and sadness too. One of the objects of the expedition was to cross into Tibet but persisting deep snow from the previous winter on the two mountain passes we attempted prevented the passage of our mules who would have sunk up to their hocks. We humans did manage to reach the second pass and travel a few yards down the other side but having had a quick peep into Tibet, we became shrouded in thick mist and cloud and had to retreat.

Sadly one of the mules stumbled and fell onto a spike of cut bamboo stem which perforated the poor creature's abdomen such that its intestines began to herniate. Our doctor turned vet, made a vain attempt to repair the damage but the mule died that night. At the end of the trek we reimbursed the ponyman-owner with funds sufficient to buy another, which he did on our return to the Mekong Bridge and proudly showed off his new charge.

Having experienced the exhilaration and splendour of the wild remote region on top of the world and enjoyed the loneliness and solitude but briefly, it was good to return to the company of people, who are after all, the most important part of life. I much enjoyed meeting the local inhabitants who are so friendly towards, yet curious of, westerners. Their children especially are so happy and such good fun. Our language differences were no barrier; the language of childhood is universal.

Early in 1995 the call for China came again and I was asked to join an expedition planned for the autumn to an area not visited by westerners since the beginning of this century. To our great joy when a cancellation place became available, my wife Eileen was invited to join the group; she has a special

interest in alpine plants and so added another dimension to the plant hunting. The hope of this autumn trip - indeed the strong possibility - was of finding plants new to cultivation. The full results of our efforts have yet to be evaluated but it seems likely that more than a dozen new trees or shrubs were discovered as well as several herbaceous plants.

Spring 1996 saw us in China again (also in Yunnan) with a group from The Alpine Garden Society and most recently I had the privilege of leading my own expedition to this remote area in May/June 1997 when we were able to reach The Doker La - surely a Mecca for all Rhododendronphilloi. A full report with photographs will appear in the next Yearbook to be published in January 1997.

Membership Information

Change of address

Mrs. Sonja Nelson, Editor American Rhododendron Soc. Journal, is now to be found at 1075 Josh Wilson Road, Mount Vernon, WA, 98273 USA, Tel & Fax 360 757 6957.

It is with regret that I have to report the death of the following members:

Mr. Richard A Banks CBE, VMH. whose obituary appeared in RHS News in The Garden April

Mr. David Benton

Professor James Bird

Dr. Robert Simpson

On a happier note, 77 new members joined the Group since 1 Jan 1997, and 25 resigned. The total membership now numbers 686 and I hope to be able to report that we have passed the 700 mark by next year. Please encourage your friends to join or send me the name and address of hopefuls so that I may send them an application form.

Please remember that subscriptions are due on 1 November and members who have not completed a bankers order are requested to ensure that payment is made promptly as apart from the expense, reminders are very time consuming. Members who joined after 1 April 1997 are reminded that they are not called upon to pay another subscription until 1 November 1998.

Seed Exchange Scheme

Contributions of seed should reach me by 30 November if possible or at the latest by 15 December as it all has to be re-packeted.

International Rhododendron Register

Please note this is no longer sent to overseas members free and automatically. Anyone wanting to order this should contact Wisley.

Notes for the International Branch - Summer 1997

The weather for Rhododendron enthusiasts in England this spring has been fickle to say the least. With no rain at all in March and April followed by a deluge in June, it has had us all in tears.

The Scottish Rhododendron Society (also a Chapter of the A.R.S.) - forty strong - made a tour of gardens in Hampshire in April. They visited, inter alia, The Valley Gardens of Windsor Great Park, Exbury, Heathersett and High Beeches. Unfortunately a devastating frost a few days before had destroyed almost all the blooms in the South of England but fortunately High Beeches was spared and Anne and Edward Boscawen had a superb display which was well rewarded at the RHS Show in London a few days later.

Should any groups of International Branch members like help in organising a garden tour of Britain please let me know and I will be glad to help. Similarly if any individual members would like to join the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group's annual tour - so ably led by Valerie Archibold - please either contact her direct or tell me.

Please see the notice at the end of the main Bulletin regarding the International Rhododendron Register which is available from RHS Publications, Wisley.

Michael Jurgens

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advertisement*

Please send comments, criticisms, suggestions and articles to :

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