



# Membership News

October 2010

Vol 1, No 6

## Greetings VRS Members

This month's *Membership News* is a bit early, because we are off on a short holiday, ending up at the Western Regional Conference in Florence, Oregon. We hope to see you all at the October meeting.

The membership drive is well underway ... renewals started coming in a couple of days after the last newsletter. The numbers to date are as follows:

Thanks to all of you, for making this year's renewal process as painless as possible.

Category	2010	2011 to date
ARS/VRS Members	36	19
Chapter Members	49	24
Associate Members	21	12
Life Members	8	8
Independent Members	1	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>63</b>

## Upcoming VRS Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday, October 21, at the Van Dusen Floral Hall. We generally gather at around 7:00 pm, the meeting starts at 7:30 pm. Guests are always welcome.

The following note was sent to us by Philip MacDougall, Program Chair:

**„Hybrids and Hybridizers of the Pacific Northwest’** ... by Mike Stewart, Oregon nurseryman, and former ARS President

Our speaker is **Mike Stewart**, owner of Dover Nursery in Sandy, Oregon, <http://dovernursery.com/>, but much more than this. He didn't begin his working life, however, as a nurseryman. After working in the US Forest Service, he went back to school to receive a Master of Arts in Education degree, and was a high school music teacher from 1972 to 1979. He evidently „found himself“ in 1979 when he became the owner of Dover Nursery. In this position,

aside from running the nursery itself, he was on the Board of Directors, the Long Range Planning Committee, and the Industry New Technology Research Group of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

He has also been a Research Foundation Trustee, Membership Chairman, Vice President, and, from 2003 to 2005, President of the American Rhododendron Society. And he is currently Vice President of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. But, as he says in writing to me, I would probably be „more interested in knowing a bit about our nursery“ than about him. I'm not sure about that, but he continues,

My wife Maria and I own the Dover Nursery ... where we grow over 1,000 varieties of rhododendron, including deciduous azaleas, species and hybrid rhododendrons. We have been producing rhododendrons for the past 34 years. We supply 70 retail garden centers around the United States [and some in Canada], both east coast and west coast. Our emphasis is on growing rhododendrons that we consider to be very high quality varieties. We do a fair amount of testing of new hybrids for several of the west and east coast hybridizers, and we only introduce those varieties that we consider to be worthy. We do all our own propagation. Our facility includes 30 acres of field grown plants and over 2 acres of greenhouses. We produce both field and container-grown rhododendrons. Although we are a wholesale nursery, we always enjoy visitors and will gladly give tours through the nursery and display garden. Rhododendron Society members are welcome to purchase plants.

Mike's other interests - though it's hard to imagine his having time for them - are skiing, being a private pilot, music, and being the co-author of *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story*.

His subject in speaking to the VRS will be „*Hybrids and Hybridizers of the Pacific Northwest*“, a subject on which he is obviously very well qualified ... and I can vouch for his attractive, personable manner.

... Joe Ronsley

## Other Chapters

Guests are always welcome at these other chapters, and, as a member of the VRS, you can get a year's associate membership for \$ 10 or 15 ... a bargain !



- **Fraser South** ... Wednesday, October 20 ... 7:30 pm  
United Church Hall, 5673 – 200th Street, Langley  
Speaker ... TBA  
Topic ... TBA



- **Fraser Valley** ... Monday, October 25 ... 7:30 pm  
St. Andrew's Heritage Hall, 22279 - 116th Ave, Maple Ridge, off the Haney by-pass  
Speaker ... **Dennis Bottemiller**, Nursery Manager at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden  
Topic ... *Nurseryman's Nirvana*



- **Peace Arch** ... Tuesday, October 26 ... 7:30 pm  
Cranley Hall, 2141 Cranley Drive, White Rock  
Speaker ... TBA  
Topic ... TBA

## Plant Sale ... Arboretum and Botanical Society of Langley



Les Clay, VRS Associate member and Past President, is also President of the ABSL, [www.abslangley.org](http://www.abslangley.org), which was incorporated in 2009, and whose mission is to establish and maintain non-profit arboreta and public gardens for scientific, educational and ornamental purposes. They are presently working to raise funds for a sustainable horticultural centre at the Derek Doubleday Arboretum on Fraser Highway. It will focus on local wetlands, sustainable horticulture and urban agriculture as well as aesthetic display. Although some of the development is already completed, more funds are required to finish the initial phases of the project. To this end, the ABSL is holding a plant sale on **Saturday, October 2**, in the east parking lot of the Kwantlan Polytechnic University, situated on the corner of the Langley Bypass and Glover Road, from **10:00am to 3:00pm**. Les tells us that trees, shrubs, including rhodos, and perennials will be available.

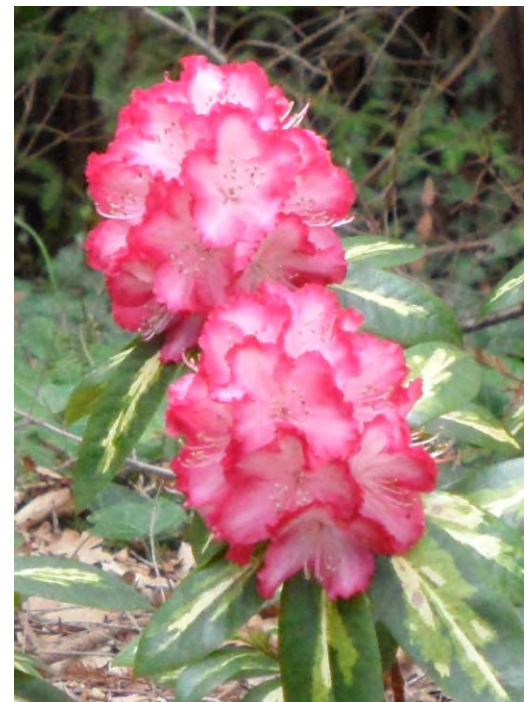
### Proven Performers List

The Proven Performers list was distributed in June, for discussion and updating, but so far, the response has been underwhelming ... let's deal with it, so that we can put it behind us, and move on to other things ...

### New and Past Members

At the September meeting, one of our guests decided to join our group ...

**Judy Poliquin** ... Judy contacted us this past summer, thinking that she might be living in Lillian Hodgson's house out at UBC, and wanting to know more about the rhodos in her garden. We encouraged her to come along and meet some of the senior members of the club, who knew Lillian ... unfortunately, Clive Justice was not there, but we hope to get them together soon.



**Rhodo 'President Roosevelt'**  
currently in bloom... in Australia

**Chris and Margaret Hodgson** ... We are pleased to have Chris and Margaret join our group, as Associates. Chris is a semi-retired geologist [*which, of course, makes him a very special person*] and Margaret is a retired teacher and librarian ... both are stalwarts of the Peace Arch Chapter, Chris being vice president and program chair, while Margaret is treasurer and, of course, librarian [*she has contributed a large series of book reviews, which will be published in the coming months*]. When he finds the time, Chris is an avid cyclist, having recently completed a trek across the Tibetan Plateau.

**Jacqui Lehto** ... Jacqui has been absent for a couple of years, but has decided to rejoin us. She currently volunteers at the VanDusen garden, and hopes to enlist the support of club members in the task of relabeling the plants along the Rhododendron Walk, whose older labels have become lost or jumbled over the years ... but more on that in future issues, as the Spring

blooming season approaches. [*Roy and Alleyne ... watch out for a gentle tugging on your sleeves in the next few months*]

Please welcome these new, and past, members to our club. Remember that we encourage guest visitors, so please make an effort to invite friends and fellow gardeners to our upcoming meetings. As always, if you give us their names a day or two before the meeting, we will prepare guest nametags, to facilitate their full enjoyment of club hospitality.

## Member News

A number of members are absent from meetings because they are travelling in exotic and/or faraway places. For security reasons, we can't say who they are [lest the information fall into the wrong hands], but suffice it to say, some of their arms have been gently twisted, and we can hope to see a few words, accompanied by some interesting pictures, upon their return ... watch this space ...

## Member's Garden Tours

We had one response on September's mystery garden photo ...



Jennifer Lamb correctly stated that it was the landscape garden at Petworth House, West Sussex, England ... built around 1700, and landscaped by „Capability“ Brown in 1750, complete with a large herd of deer, who roam freely about the place

... it is also home to part of the National Portrait Gallery.

This month's mystery garden, also English, boasts a „Himalayan Glade“ full of species rhododendrons, some dating back to the early English plant collectors. This photo was taken on a rainy day in October 2008, so the garden was not at its best... the ducks liked it though ...



Is it just me, or has anyone else noticed that there aren't a lot of member's gardens in the Member's Gardens feature? If you wish to rectify this anomaly, please consider opening your gardens to other club members, on an „appointment only“ basis ... otherwise, we will soon run out of mystery gardens, and there will be a big empty space in the newsletter. Remember that gardens are also interesting in the „off-season“, and gardening chit chat over a tea/coffee is an all-season pleasure.

Please note that no personal information will be listed, only names ... members will have to look up the email address and other details in the 2010 Directory, which is only available to other members.

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## Greenhouse Tours ... photos by Justine Murdy

On Friday, September 17, the Peace Arch Chapter made a field trip to two nurseries in the Aldergrove area, so we decided to tag along. We met in the parking lot of **Aldergrove Nursery Ltd**, and were met by Colleen Bojczuk, who manages the propagation side of the operation. Colleen gave us an excellent talk on propagation of rhodos from cuttings, and the different methods required for different hybrids, and for other plants like camellias and conifers. After a quick tour of the propagating facility, we were turned loose, to wander through the 15-or-so greenhouses, filled with pieris, heathers, Japanese maples, over 200 rhodo & azalea hybrids, and much more. After an hour of feeling like kids in a candy store, we assembled our treasures, which were generously discounted, loaded them into our car, and headed off for lunch. Justine Murdy,



who accompanied us on the trip, was sandwiched into the back seat among numerous rhodos, with no room to move ... but she wasn't complaining, as most of those plants were hers! ... ours filled the trunk ...



**Colleen**



After lunch, we reconvened at **Devan Greenhouses Ltd**, [www.devangreenhouses.ca](http://www.devangreenhouses.ca), where we were met by the owner, Pieter Debruin, who took us on an insider's tour of the propagation facilities, which are very modern and high tech, with temperature and humidity controlled by



computers. Devan specializes in annuals, like pansies, chrysanthemums, and many others ... many are grown from cuttings, which are flown in



**Chuck Floyd, Jo Wright, Joan Bengough, Pieter Debruin, Chris and Margaret Hodgson**

from Israel and Costa Rica [apparently, their stock is more vigorous, due to higher light levels], then potted up on a computer-controlled production line. One particularly fascinating feature was an overhead conveyor system, with thousands of hanging baskets, which move past a watering head, which is activated by sensors. For those of you who have done some propagating, we heard that everything is grown in a 100% peat moss medium, the peat moss coming from Latvia, because North American sources harvest it by vacuum, which produces an inferior product, requiring perlite to increase permeability. The retail store attached to the greenhouse complex has an interesting assortment of annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees, bulbs, and gardening accessories, at very reasonable prices ... most of this material is not, however, propagated at this facility.

### **Stories from Greig Garden... a note from Roy Forster**

As a follow-up to Alleyne's amusing account, in the September *Membership News*, of the rhododendron move from Stanley Park to Van Dusen, I would like to add the following ... Some might conclude from Alleyne's comments that he was instructed to cram the rhodos into the designated area, but to my knowledge, this was not the case. Having already planted a rhododendron garden in a past life, I could never suggest "cramming" more plants into an already-designed area, except on a temporary basis only. I cannot, however, speak for the "engineer and assistants" who were the senior staff of the park board at the time. These gentlemen were engineers and administrators with little or no knowledge of plants.



**Napoleon**

An embarrassing, but hilarious, incident occurred during the administrators' visit. An Australian black swan from a nearby pond took umbrage and attacked one of the visiting staff who fled down the hill with the swan in hot pursuit.

The fracas ended in the mire at the foot of the slope, when a stalwart gardener came to the rescue and chased the beast back to its watery lair. The male swan was henceforth nicknamed Napoleon. The incident resulted in the exile of the swans to an isolated island out of harm's way, like Napoleon himself. Subsequently, a proposal to replace them with a flock of flamingos was, fortunately, vetoed.

In designing the Sino-Himalayan Garden with input from Bill



Livingstone and Keith Wade, I devised a layout of mounds and valleys to best provide shelter on a rather exposed site quite different from Stanley Park. The layout was arranged more or less in keeping with the section - subsection classification system (series). I planted about 30 *Ailanthus* trees to provide quick shade on an otherwise rather bald site (years later, I saw

giant *Ailanthus* on Omei Shan, forming a canopy). Even so, many



***Ailanthus altissima*, at Kew**



of the plants suffered from exposure during the first two years, and at times it was a struggle keeping them alive. Subsequently, with the able care of Gerry Gibbens, I planted a greater variety of tree species, and for the past decade, he has carried on this work admirably.

And speaking of plant congestion, the hybrid collection in the Rhododendron Walk, planted in 1972-3, admittedly rather closely, because of time and space constraints (not to mention the large number of plants donated), will hopefully receive some attention in the near future. Over time, the identity of many plants has become confused, staff time being severely limited because of fiscal restraint. With the help of Vancouver Rhododendron Society experts, it is hoped that some improvement will result.

### **Stories from Greig Garden... *a note from Karen Shuster***

Here are a couple of the web pages associated with the work Alleyne & co did on the Greig Garden in Stanley Park:

<http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/stanley/rhodos.htm>

<http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/stanley/pdf/50Rhododendrons.pdf>

### **Propagating Workshop ... Victoria Chapter**

Ken and Madeleine Webb, of the Victoria Chapter, and Associate members of the VRS, sent us the following note about the upcoming workshop at their home in Saanich, north of Victoria. Anyone interested can contact us, and we will forward your names ... or you can contact Ken directly, at [kenwebb@live.ca](mailto:kenwebb@live.ca)

The Victoria Propagating Group is a very successful monthly group that has about 25 active members. We will be holding a hands-on propagating seminar on **October 30<sup>th</sup>**. We plan to start around **10 am** to let people from up island and the mainland get here. We will have a full day planned with an early group dinner so everyone can still get home that evening. We will discuss all types of propagating with a very loose agenda so we can go just where everyone leads us. Many members of our club will be on hand to offer their views about cuttings and seeds and alternative methods. We will have a hands-on session in the garden - propagator where all attendees will actually be able to take their own cuttings and stick them in my propagator with hopefully some of their own "babies" next spring and several lectures about seeds, cuttings and nurse grafting etc. You should bring warm and dry clothes as we will be working in the garden. A nominal fee will be charged for lunch so that we can continue the excitement throughout the day. Due to room constraints we might have to limit or cut off the number of attendees - first come, first served. Please contact Ken or Madeleine Webb at [kenwebb@live.ca](mailto:kenwebb@live.ca) or (250) 744-1785.

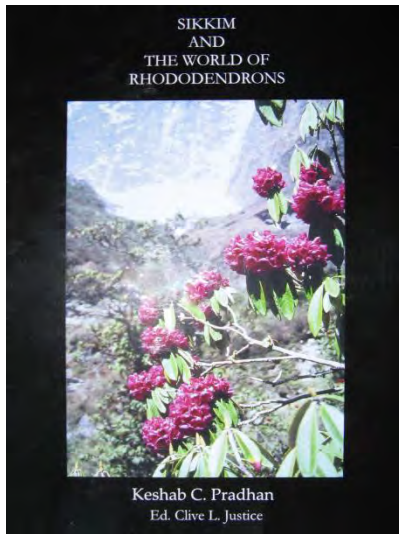
### **Book Review ... *by Joe Ronsley***

#### **Sikkim and the World of Rhododendrons**

**... *by Keshab C Pradhan ... edited by Clive L Justice***

This is a very beautiful book. It is also an informative one. But most important, it is an eloquent tribute to a small country that has set in place extraordinarily serious and enlightened policies to protect a special natural heritage - where such a heritage is among the richest of its kind in the world. The conservation measures it has taken, moreover, may be the most enlightened in the

world too. The book is also a testament to the people, in Sikkim and elsewhere, who made it happen.



Europeans take pride in their ancient buildings, while in the North American Pacific Northwest, we have giant trees. In Sikkim there are rhododendrons. Actually, in Sikkim and in a very large area surrounding it, there is probably the greatest overall biodiversity in the world, but rhododendrons must surely rank very high in that biodiversity - for their beauty, and for their diversity of form, foliage, and flower.

Following an „Editor’s Foreword” and author’s „Prologue”, and two very short chapters on geology and ecology and a „History and Geographical Distribution of Rhododendrons”, is a longer chapter dealing with „A History of Garden Rhododendrons”. This chapter is devoted essentially to a summary of rhododendron plant exploration and collection in Asia by westerners, beginning with Joseph Dalton

Hooker in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing with the notable figures through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with occasional glances forward to more recent personalities and activities. There are whole books devoted to each of these figures, so this is a most useful compact history.

In fact, people play almost as large a role as do plants. The book is dedicated to the American Britt Smith, the first westerner in recent history to discover and spread the word about Sikkim and its rhododendrons, and who, with Canadian Clive Justice, was instrumental in forming the Joseph Hooker Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society in Sikkim. The book contains pictures of many of the people, both Sikkimese and westerners, who have had an interest and a part in the exploration and preservation of rhododendrons in this part of the world. These are the people who encouraged the Sikkim Government, and Royal Family, to value and preserve its national heritage, both for practical reasons - ecotourism - and for its own sake, as a matter of national pride.

The book would be outstanding if for nothing else but its page after page of superb photographs of gorgeous rhododendrons in their spectacular natural habitats. One could spend a long time poring over these scenes, as one would over the paintings in an art museum by the French Impressionists.

Author Keshab Pradhan, who, in the family tradition, was head of the Sikkim forest department at the time, was mandated by the King and Queen to create what is essentially a huge rhododendron preserve ... 41% of the land in Sikkim is now designated as a „Protected Area Network”, where rhododendrons have a „safe haven”. This book is about rhododendrons in Asia, but it focuses on those in Sikkim, and is, rightfully, a work of beauty, of praise, and of pride.

*[editor’s note ... this volume is currently available from the ARS, at a member’s price of \$85 US]*



## News from Oz ... Springtime in Australia

Milton and Christine Bowman, our correspondents in Adelaide, South Australia, agreed to brighten up our gloomy Fall days, by sending pictures of what's blooming down under [we *plan to reciprocate in 6 months time*]. The first two pictures, with Milton for scale, are from the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden, outside Adelaide ... a white *Camellia* and a deep rose *Rhodo* ...



The remaining photos are Magnolias in a neighbour's yard ... clearly, the recent rains have been beneficial to gardens ...







Milton and Christine also included the following news ...

### ***Camellia 'Donation'***

This is [a] note from South Australia to bring the Chapter up to date with our Spring. The winter has been cold, wet, and we have had recurring storms almost weekly for the last 3 months. By cold, I mean 5-10°C max (warm by BC standards) and we have had 950mm rain so far this year [Vancouver gets 1200 to 1600 mm, depending on location, according to Wikipedia]. The ground is saturated and when the storms happen the neighbourhood is full of fallen trees and the sound of chainsaws.



***Rhododendron 'Anne Teese'***

However this is fantastic for the garden and at the moment most of our camellias are flowering and we have masses of colour in most areas. We planted a *Gordonia* 6 years ago and whilst it is over 3 metres tall it has not flowered, but this year it has 3 large buds and I check it every day!

The Rhodos are full of buds but because of the cold season they are flowering late this year. So far we have had „John Waterer“ in August and „Sir Robert Peel“ and „President Roosevelt“ in September. An Australian cultivar by the name of „Anne Teese“, which is a favourite of Chris, is about to burst bud and I am sending a photo of her because she is not available in North America.

When we get sunny days and some warmer weather the rest of the Rhodos will come into flower and I think that it will be a great spring. We will keep you posted.

Regards ... Milton and Chris.



### On the Rhody Road [The Grand Tour] ... Part III

In our last instalment, we spent Saturday at the Nanaimo sale, and visited Bob and Jean Rhodes on Gabriola Island, before returning to Nanaimo for the night. The next morning, we arose late, and headed south to Victoria, to the home of **Theresa and Bill McMillan**. Bill is a



retired geologist, and has been active in the Victoria Chapter, as a President, and currently as a newsletter committee member [they actually have a committee?!?!] ... they live in Langford, just west of Victoria, and have turned their



residential lot into a „suburban jungle“, with about 200 rhodos, and a large variety of companion plants. An interesting feature in their front yard is a collection of heathers of every form and colour, arranged so that they bloom in a „wave“ from one end of the bed to the other [see photo]

Tucked away behind the house, Bill has

a small greenhouse, with seedlings of Vireyan and other rhodos that he cultivates from seed. Exiting the greenhouse, we looked up at a blaze of red colour overhead ... a 10 foot *R cinnabarinum* in full



bloom [see photo]. Bill and Theresa have succeeded in creating an oasis of form and colour, and are, I think, justifiably proud of their efforts ... we came away with lots of ideas for dealing with our front garden, particularly the use of heathers to complement the lepidote rhodos in sunnier parts of the garden ...

We left Bill and Theresa, and headed back to the hotel for supper and a hockey game ... the Canucks lost ...



photo by Bill McMillan



In the morning, we headed up the Saanich Peninsula, and stopped at the Firwood Nursery, [www.firwoodnursery.com](http://www.firwoodnursery.com), owned by **Norm and Jean Todd**, who are also active members of the Victoria Chapter, and past members of the VRS. Their property is located on a rocky ridge, just



west of the Highway 17 corridor. Norm gave us a tour of the garden, which consists of meandering trails through the coniferous forest, with many mature species rhodos, and hybrids, as well as a large variety of companion plants, including a large *Acer shirasawanum* „Aureum“ [see photo]. Scattered through the forest are several clearings with large numbers of rhodos in pots, ready for sale. We purchased several hybrids, including a „Rubicon“ [best of show at Nanaimo], and a „Pepperpot“ [*budget? ... what budget?*] ...

Norm also has a large greenhouse, stuffed with cuttings from many of the plants on his property, including difficult-to-obtain hybrids from New Zealand, Scotland, and elsewhere. As our car was already filled with plants, we reluctantly decided to call it a day, planning to return for a better look, next time we are in the Victoria area.

We drove around the lake, to the nearby property of **Ken and Madeleine Webb**, whom we met last year at the Everett conference. Their garden is located on about 1 acre of forested land ... the house is set well back from the road, with a long driveway lined on both sides by rhodos. We only had time for a quick visit, as they were packing to leave for the New York and Germany conferences, the next day ...

Some of the rhodos which stood out during our visit were „Nancy Evans“, one of our favourite yellow hybrids [see photo] and an impressive specimen of *Rhododendron stenopetalum linearifolium* [see photo]. Ken is a member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and has a







***Rhododendron 'Nancy Evans'***



***Rhododendron stenopetalum linearifolium***

wonderful selection of large leaf and other species rhodos ... his propagating facility is filled with seedlings grown from RSF and ARS seed. During our tour, Madeleine took us to a spot in the



***Rhododendron 'Melba Johnson'***



**Ken and Madeleine Webb**

*photo by Ken Webb*

garden to show us a clematis, of which she was obviously proud ... we arrived to find 2 or 3 leafless twigs protruding from the soil, thanks to a hungry deer [*do they have a preference for special plants? ... or does it only seem that way?*] To add insult to injury, as we were admiring the *stenopetalum linearifolium*, we looked up to see the likely offender, not 20 feet away ... completely unconcerned by our presence, and intent on a lunchtime „snack“ ... Ken and Madeleine take a rather relaxed attitude to the whole situation ... I suppose that's best, when you know the deer are going to win anyway... One of the particularly interesting hybrids in their garden is *Rhododendron* „Melba Johnson“, an unregistered cross, by Harold Johnson, between *R* „Lem“s Early Yellow“ and *R williamsianum*, resulting, essentially, in a pale yellow *williamsianum*, complete with the compact, bronzy brown new foliage and small rounded leaves, for which *williamsianum* is so highly prized.



We left Ken and Madeleine to get on with their packing, and headed north, to visit **Les and Radojka Harris** ... they are longstanding members of the VRS, who recently moved to the Saanich area, after Les retired from BC Hydro, where Jo knew him ... it was good to make/renew our acquaintance over a cup of tea, and Jo and Les kindly refrained from talking



***Les and Radojka Harris in their garden***

*photo by L&R Harris*

shop ... too much. Anyway, they have recently completed courses in garden design, and master gardening, and are applying their skills to the development of their new garden. They are also members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, so their garden is filled with species rhodos, as well as companion plants like hostas, and a wide assortment of Japanese maples. We look forward to visiting Les and Radojka in the future, when their garden has matured a bit ... although the recent picture they sent us suggests that this wet, cool spring has done wonders in filling out the vegetation.

The final stop on our Grand Tour was intended to be the garden of **Evelyn and Nick Weesjes**, VRS life members who live only a few hundred metres from Les and Radojka. We were unable to organize a visit beforehand, mainly because they don't have email [*and we don't like to invite ourselves by phone, because it puts people on the spot, without the option to mull over their response*]. In any event, we were told that the perimeter of their garden is open to the public ... the 5 acre garden is shaped like a wheel, with the perimeter path around the rim, and a series of spoke paths radiating out from their house, in the centre of the property. As many of you will know, Evelyn (née Jacks) was the propagator, at UBC, of the rhodos that came over from Europe when the UBC Botanical Garden and the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, in Federal Way, were set up. [*the Rhododendron Species Foundation 2011 Annual, which will come out next spring, will have an in-depth history of the UBC garden, by Douglas Justice ... so we won't get further sidetracked*]



***Weesjes Garden ... perimeter path***





**R 'Haida Gold'**

We headed into town for a quick supper, then caught the ferry to Tsawassen ... on the drive home to Lions Bay, we recounted the many wonderful garden features that we had seen, and the many acquaintances that we hope will become lasting friends. Already, we were planning our next trip to „The Island“, and deciding where to plant the many treasures filling the back seat of the car ... next time, I'll take the truck ...

*... the end ... for now*

As you can see from the photos, Evelyn's garden is an open coniferous woodland, underplanted with numerous hybrid and species rhododendrons, as well as English bluebells, hostas, and other companion plants.

We hurried around the perimeter of the garden as the afternoon light faded ... at one point, we saw Evelyn, as she hurried by in her pickup truck, intent, no doubt, on moving that last plant, or pulling that remaining weed ... we did not have the heart to disturb her work, so we resolved to return another time to introduce ourselves.



**Weesjes Garden ... creek**

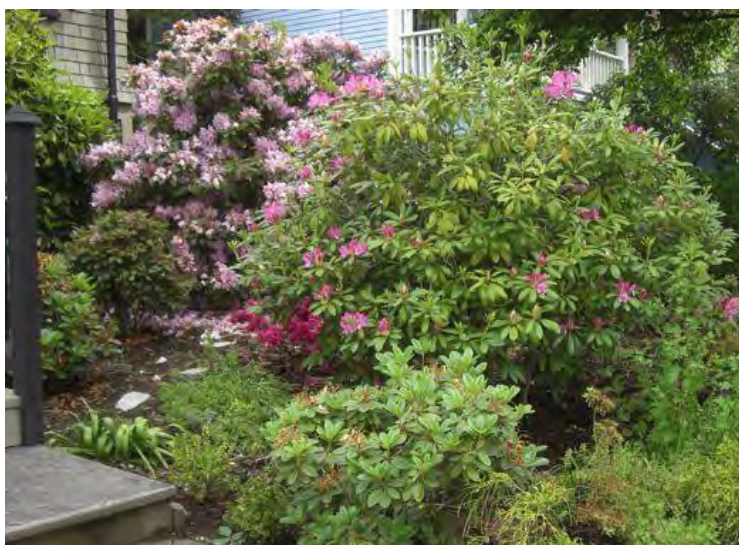
## MEMBERS' FORUM

*The response to Justine's questions in the June edition was quite remarkable. In addition to the helpful ideas from a number of members, Alleyne's article last month was clearly, in part, responding to Justine's questions about plant spacing. And now, the ARS is planning to include the June Members' Forum in the next ARS Journal. We are therefore pleased to have a follow-up from Justine, addressing important questions that many have pondered, but few have voiced ...*

- Quoting a partial answer to one of my earlier questions "...with a bit of judicious pruning, you can produce a more upright, open habit (I believe it's called "limbing up")". I understand that pruning of rhodos should occur in spring after blooming, but *how* do I make decisions about pruning rhodos?. For instance, I have one hybrid rhodo that has a mass of inner branches, no clear "first order" branches (for want of a better way to describe typical tree branches). It's beautifully dense but rather wild and amorphous as far as overall form goes. The rhodo blossom in Figure 1 is the one in full flower toward the back (Fig 2), although the hybrid rhodo in front of it is in a similar amorphous category in my opinion.
- Those hybrids look very healthy, and I am not sure that I would do any pruning - so I'll leave that one to the experts ... *Bob Wright*
- Justine, it's great that you have definite pruning goals in mind before you start chopping. In the case of „Blue Ensign“ and its neighbour, you want them to be tidier and not so "amorphous", and with *R fortunei* you would like a less leggy appearance. However, „Blue Ensign“ and its friend look extremely healthy in your photo and have a normal, rounded, shrub-like growth habit. Why do you want to change that natural appearance? They seem to be quite tall growing plants and perhaps they are getting a bit crowded in that location near your house. If that's the case, you can easily move them if you have more space elsewhere in your garden. (There's an article on "How to Move Giant Rhododendrons" on my website: [www3.telus.net/rcknight](http://www3.telus.net/rcknight))  
Relocation is preferable to hacking back a rhodo that has grown too large for its current space. I always kick myself if my pruning goal is merely to reduce the size of a rhododendron, because it means I made a mistake in my original choice of planting location.  
If you're worried about branches crossing each other inside the shrub, you can remove those by using thinning cuts ... ie. remove a lateral branch right back to its point of attachment to a larger branch. The same suggestion would apply to any "unruly" branches that have grown beyond the normal canopy ... *Ron Knight*



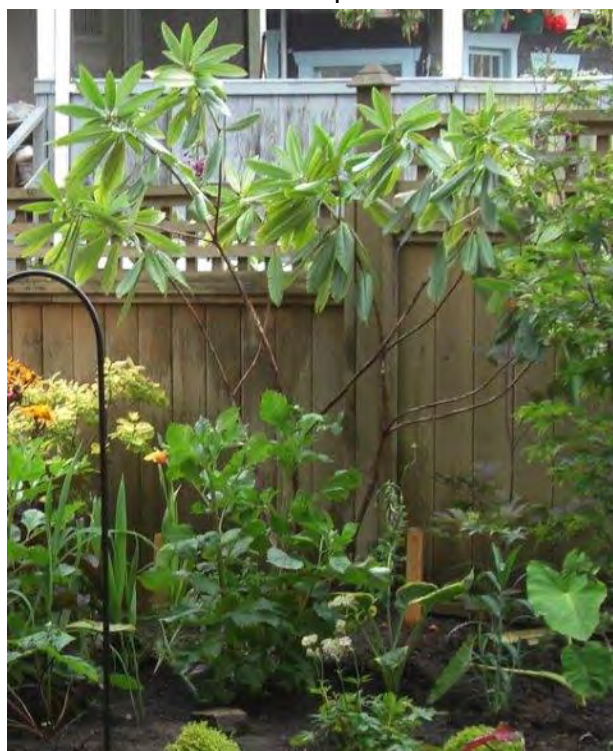
**Fig 1** *R 'Blue Ensign'*



**Fig 2** *pruning candidates*



- I have another rhodo, species *fortunei* (Fig 3), that is *very* leggy. When I bought it at the rhodo sale last May it had more leaves. The trip over the Second Narrows Bridge, although made on its side in a pickup, proved to be too stressful and it lost *many* leaves in the next 3 weeks. The plant has a few leaves at the end of very long, thin branches ... The fact that the stems are so long but not very thick (maybe 3/4 inch diameter max) means it's especially vulnerable to winds (due to the big leaves). All its leaves are at the end of long limbs. If I pruned leaves at the ends I would be left with just leaf-less branches! I see nubs along the length of the stems, suggesting nascent buds, but I don't want to ruin this rhodo by misinformed pruning.



**Fig 3** *R fortunei*

- I would try to protect it from wind damage by installing 4 stakes around the perimeter, and tying cord around the stakes, to provide a loose enclosure to keep things from whipping around in the wind, and remove it in the Spring ... as for the pruning, the plant looks healthy, if a bit scrawny, so you can just pinch off the top buds (the vegetative ones, not the flower buds, if any) in the spring, before they open, and the adventitious side buds should kick in. The stems will also fill out, but you will still need wind protection for another year or two ... *Bob Wright*
- With *R fortunei*, you have a more serious problem. It looks a bit like a palm tree. In contrast, the *R fortunei* in my garden is about 3 metres tall and although it is in a shady area, it has a nice dense growth habit similar to your „Blue Ensign“. Unfortunately, I do have a few leggy rhodos in my garden and most of them were donated to me by a friend who had grown them for over a decade in very dense shade. I've tried pinching and light pruning each spring but most of these plants have retained their palm tree growth habit, especially those that had only one main stem. They refuse to bush out from the base and when I've tried a more brutal approach, cutting the single stem back to half a metre in early spring, the plant has died without ever popping a new bud. But some rhododendrons seem to be able to sprout new buds from the stem base even after they have been cut to the ground. This happened last February when an enterprising beaver crawled under my fence and chewed my metre tall „Good News“ rhodo back to ten centimetres. In June, new growth appeared at ground level and since then, the plant has bushed out and is now well on the way to recovery. Perhaps the ability to regenerate like this has something to do with juvenility or the particular variety involved ... I don't have an answer for that one. Anyhow, your *R fortunei* appears to have three stems coming from the ground, so you might try reducing one of those next March and watching what happens. If you get new buds, then you might feel confident in cutting back one of the remaining branches each year over the following two years. You really don't have a lot to lose, because the rhodo's appearance is not to your liking and *R fortunei* is easy to replace at a club sale ... *Ron Knight*
- These two rhodos require different approaches to pruning. Is there a rhododendron pruning reference you can suggest, or can you recommend how I proceed to make the hybrid even more lovely, or the species rhodo stronger and more leaf-laden?



- The Spring 2010 issue of the ARS Journal (vol 64, no 2) had a short article on pruning by Don Wallace ... basic stuff, but it will get you started ... there are also several books on pruning in the club library ... check the club website [www.rhodo.citymax.com/page/page/129491.htm](http://www.rhodo.citymax.com/page/page/129491.htm) ... *Bob Wright*
- Regarding good references: Any pruning book will probably give you all the information you need. There is nothing particularly special about rhodo pruning. A little, easy-to-read book that really helped me when I was first learning about pruning was the Ortho guide to pruning which I picked up at a building supply store ... Good luck ... *Ron Knight*

Many thanks,

....."Green" Justine

*[As much as Justine and I enjoy these conversations, I am sure that many of you have useful ideas to contribute ... feel free to jump in ... any time ... ]*

We got two responses to Moira Leishman's query about the rhodo, pictured, which she encountered in her new garden. Patricia Henderson and Bill McMillan both suggested that it could be „Tofino", a Jack Lofthouse hybrid



Thanks to the following, in alphabetical order, for contributing to the *Membership News*: Milton and Chris Bowman, Roy Forster, Les & Radojka Harris, Patricia Henderson, Ron Knight, Jennifer Lamb, Philip MacDougall, Bill & Theresa McMillan, Justine Murdy, Joe Ronsley, Karen Shuster, Ken & Madeleine Webb.

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*R „President Roosevelt"*

Chris and Milton Bowman

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Attribution will be given for all contributions, which may be edited for spelling, grammar, and length.

Bob & Jo Wright