



Membership News

May 2011

Vol 2, No 5

President's Corner

So the biggest event in the VRS calendar, the **2011 Show and Sale**, has come and gone. After much anxiety about the unavoidable change of date from the Saturday to the Sunday, concerns about changing to the long-considered one-day sale, and the unfortunate coincidence of other garden events, in particular the VanDusen Garden Plant Sale, it was both a relief and a joy to see how well the day went! The promise of a sunny day is always welcome, and the patient good humoured line up that formed 30 minutes before the opening also boded well for a wonderful day at Park and Tilford. I do not have the final numbers, but the Sale certainly seems to have gone well, and our faithful growers appeared to be quite happy with the day. The Show was certainly a challenge in this year of poor rhododendron blooming, but some diligent work by a few people ensured that we had an attractive display in the Rose Room. The raffle went well; we signed up one new member and garnered two renewals from lapsed members. All in all, it was a very pleasant way to spend Sunday at Park and Tilford Gardens.

The VRS executive will perform the usual post Show and Sale review to see what might be improved upon for the 2012 Show and Sale, and, as always, there will be decisions to be made about dates, duration, and location. The executive would welcome any comments or suggestions that you may have about the Show and Sale, and I promise to respond personally to your submissions.

The Show and Sale, like all VRS events, depends entirely on the effort of the members. It is only through the cheerful contribution of many hours of voluntary work, given in such good spirit, that the Show and Sale is always such a success, and, I must say, such an enjoyable experience.

Thanks to our patient and supportive growers ... Les Clay, Harold Fearing, Chris & Sue Klapwijk, and Vicky Willems.

Thanks to our show judges ... Gerry Heriot, Ted Ladd, Rosemary Pruffer, Kathleen Share, and Garth Wedemire.

Thanks to the volunteers and exhibitors ... Greg Brown, Meg Brown, Jacquie Clayton, Margaret Charlton, Alan Cheung, Dana Cromie, Vern Finley, Jasbir Gill, Norah Hall, Don Haslam, Carla Knight, Ron Knight, Frances Lam, Kathy Lau (and Paul and Emily), Brenda Macdonald, Jill Newby,

Sean Rafferty, Joanne Ronsley, Joe Ronsley, Karen Shuster, Suzanne Spohn, Bill Spohn and Bob Wright.

Thanks to Kate Stephens at Park and Tilford for being so welcoming and helpful ... and my profound apologies if I missed anyone.

Upcoming VRS Meeting

The next meeting will be on **Thursday, May 19**, when we will have a tour of the Ted & Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden, in Stanley Park. To allow time for picture taking before it gets too dark, the tour will start at **6:30 PM** ... for more information about the garden, the following link is recommended ... <http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/stanley/rhodos.htm>

The attached map, from the above website, shows the rhodo gardens, in olive green ... the road along the south side of the Pitch & Putt Course is one-way, from east to west ... all parking in the area is pay parking, which appears as the medium gray areas on the map ... the „Y“-shaped building in the middle of the map is the Fish House Restaurant, <http://www.fishhousestanleypark.com>

... an up-scale (read: expensive) place to eat before the tour ...



A Growing Affair

The Vancouver Rhododendron Society has accepted an invitation to participate in “A Growing Affair”, a new horticultural event taking place on Saturday, May 7, 2011, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the UBC Botanical Garden. The event will include workshops, and activities related to the garden, for adults and children, the sale of UBC’s perennials, and a cafe.

We plan to have several VRS volunteers available during the event to answer questions related to rhododendrons, to sell whatever plants we have left over from our Show and Sale on May 1, and to convince interested gardeners to join the VRS. There is a reduced entry fee to the garden for the day of \$2.00

Any VRS members wishing to participate in the event are asked to contact Norah Hall at (604) 266-8132 or hall_law@telus.net.

VRS 2011 Picnic

The VRS annual potluck picnic will take place on Sunday, June 12, 2011 at Philip MacDougall’s home in Surrey, starting at 3 pm. As in past years, there will be a plant auction.

Members, their families and guests are welcome and are urged to attend. The event is always fun and you will be able to wander around Philip's garden and see wonderful plants, such as those that he so generously donates to our raffle.

Please bring one potluck item to share, your adult beverage of choice, a chair and your contribution to the auction.

If you have not yet signed up for the potluck please contact Norah Hall at (604) 266-8132 or hall_law@telus.net.

For Philip's home address, please consult your membership directory.

The following field trip is being organized by Tom Carter, who will speak to us on September 29, on "The Rhododendron Forests of Nepal: a walk in paradise". Tom has been leading groups through Nepal for 20 years. This is an excerpt from his website, www.moonmountainadventures.com

Rhododendron Land & the Annapurna Sanctuary

March 29th - April 21st, 2012

15 day trek - moderately strenuous - high point 4100m

Land price \$2850 CAD

This trek explores the rhododendron forests that cover the shoulders of the Himalaya. With monsoon heat and rain, the rhododendrons of Nepal's Annapurna Range can grow thirty meters tall. In spring sun, we will walk under enormous canopies of pink, rose and scarlet. The pathways are carpeted with petals. From every hilltop an endless sea of blossoms flows down into terraces of wheat and barley. The snow peaks tower above.

Although requiring good fitness, this fifteen day trek has short walking days. Our focus is on relaxed enjoyment in a truly magnificent setting.

After two days wandering through Kathmandu's medieval bazaars and temples, our trekking begins in the steamy lowland rice paddies. Hiking up the Modhi Kholu River, we enter the rhododendron forests. Following the blossoms up the valley, our trail emerges suddenly into the Annapurna Sanctuary. We are surrounded by ice peaks soaring up to eight thousand meters. This is one of the Himalaya's most spectacular vistas.



Descent into the blossoms is quick. The villages of Ghandrung, Tadapani and Ghorepani are garlanded by the most enchanted forests of all. We leave this mountain garden and return to the subtropics below. Back in Kathmandu we party with our Nepali crew who carried, cooked and cared for us all the way..... It is hard to say goodbye.

Nima Sherpa and I invite you to join us on a culturally rich and magical journey in extraordinary landscapes.

Rhododendrons I Like ... by Alleyne Cook

❖ ***Rhododendron* “Yellow Hammer”**, with very small bright yellow flowers. It flowers twice a year, and, after the fall showing, there are masses left for the spring. For this reason, it was used to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, which took place on our wedding day.

At Sunningdale Nurseries we had a plant about 5 feet high, which used to provide cuttings for the propagation of new plants. It was also used as a feature in our displays in Vincent Square. On returning to the nursery, all flowers were removed, so as to encourage new growth for cuttings. By picking for a length of time, then counting the number of flowers removed, we were able to ascertain that the tightly-clipped bush carried about 4000 flowers. I give it 5 out of 5.

❖ ***Rhododendron williamsianum***, the Hu & Yu form, which was once sold by the Royston Nurseries, and is now to be found in a large planting at VanDusen (It is worthwhile to look around the base where the branchlets are touching the ground ... you might find a layer). The flowers are an exquisite soft pink, bell-shaped, lots of them, provided they are receiving lots of light. The new growths are red, and these develop into near-round leaves. If in shade, these are dark green ... in full sun, not so attractive.

In habit, they create the perfect mound. In VanDusen, where they are free-standing and are growing in the perfect location, in the past few years, they have been dying ... maybe a too-perfect area, maybe better on poor soil.



Glendale Gardens, Victoria

... photo by Calvin Parsons



Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden,
Federal Way, Washington

... photo by Garth Wedemire

We do not know how long a rhodo lives, as none of the wanderers in China will take an increment borer and bring back some cores. Then we would know how long those ancients live

The *R williamsianum* in VanDusen have been there for 50 years, so would be about 60 years old. Maybe they are a short-lived breed. They have one other great asset - they are a perfect parent. Even when crossed with the huge "Loderi King George", the result, "Olympic Lady", is a grand garden plant ... perfect flower, perfect foliage, perfect habit, perfect parent every time, regardless of the other parent. This is 6 out of 5.

❖ ***Rhododendron thomsonii*** is my favourite of the entire genus. Don't be in a hurry to see it flower. We bought one in California when our son was 5; he is now 45, and it hasn't flowered yet (that should stop anyone from growing it). Perhaps more light, better soil, and less root competition would have hurried it along.

However, the blue-green foliage, pale green on the underside, can be a feature in gardens where only the dull sameness of hybrids dominates. Each leaf has a curious feature that I've seen in no other species – the end looks as though it was folded or pleated within the bud, and when fully expanded, retains the markings up the leaf. As far as I can ascertain, only *R thomsonii* has these markings.

My introduction was dramatic. We had gone up to the old Hooker residence in Sunningdale, to name some of the magnolia collection. A shaft of the early morning sun came through a grove of scotch pines, and shone only on a drift of several *R thomsonii* which were in full bloom. The remainder of the hillside was in shadow, and these in the sun were an incredible scarlet.

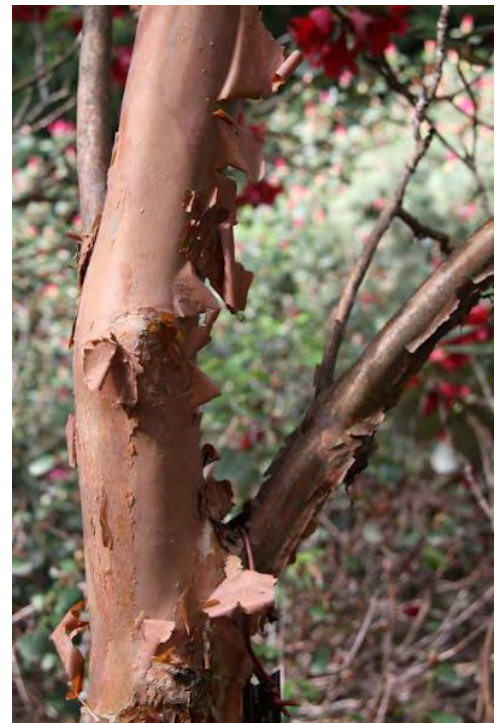
Red is not a stable colour. There are a mass of different shades. Always remember if raising seedlings, that dark foliage usually means dark flowers.

We had one specimen that came from Greer Gardens, and was called „compact“ form. The flowers are too dark until the sun lights them up, and then glory shines! They also have a red calyx. Fletcher wrote a book about the plant hunting journeys of Ludlow and Sherriff, and in it he mentions this feature. It's the only time I've seen it mentioned. They found it in Bhutan.



**Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden,
Federal Way, Washington**

... photo by Garth Wedemire



UBC Botanical Garden

... photo by Garth Wedemire

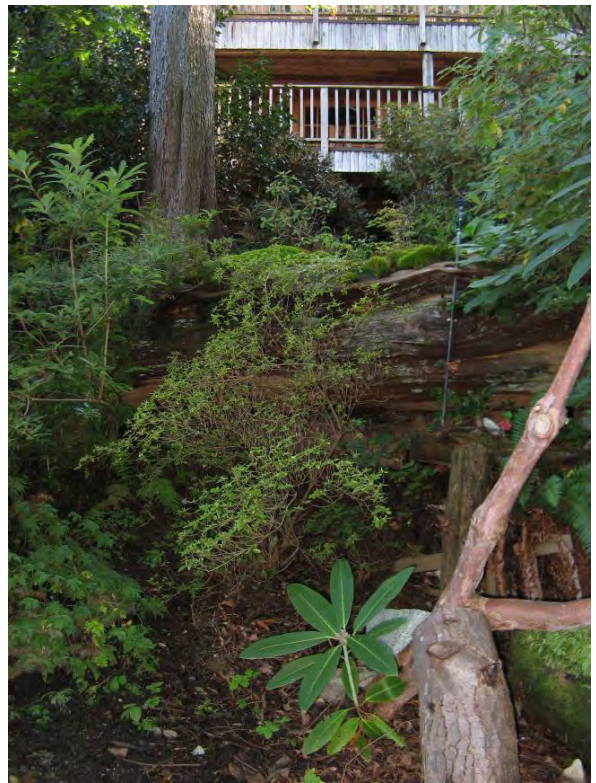
Another of our specimens came from Ed Lohbrunner's nursery in Victoria, as a gift, after I had valued all his species for income tax purposes. It was the best of about a dozen, and was finer in foliage and flower than the one borrowed when moving the Greig collection from Royston to Vancouver (I returned the Greig plant to VanDusen).

The red of these flowers is softer, purer, and more inviting. This, combined with the bluest foliage and the deep red stems makes for perfection, even if the waiting time is unfortunate. This is 7 out of 5.

Joe & Joanne's Enhanced Woodland ... Part 7 ... by Joe Ronsley

The overall guiding principle, of which the foregoing elements comprise its parts, is, in words used first by Virgil, then by Alexander Pope, to recognize and preserve the „genius of the place“. In fact, Pope, in the eighteenth century, in his „Epistle to Lord Burlington“, had the whole idea of a naturalistic garden pretty much sorted out:

*He gains all points who pleasingly confounds,
Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds.
Consult the genius of the place in all,
That tells the waters or to rise or fall,
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale,
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines,
Paints as you plant, and as you work designs.*



The house and garden is to take the form of a single environment, that of a natural, mountain woodland, humanized by its inclusion of the habitation. Clearly, though, this naturalness is controlled with some effort and contrivance. In fact, a real natural woodland is much more messy, not nearly so „civilized“, as is our „enhanced“ one. Leaving aside most larger logs, we do pick up small branches and other clutter from the forest floor. There is a pick-up operation following every wind storm. But the clean-up is only of what we consider excessive, leaving in place the natural effect and atmosphere. Its identity as a real garden being dubious, our enhanced woodland is even more so a long way from the relatively sterile neatness of a park. While certainly not able to take care of itself, this kind of garden is more trouble-free than any other kind, except perhaps one without plants, though it must be remembered that if it is neglected entirely the forest is anxiously waiting in the wings, ready to reassert itself.

The woodland garden is much more trouble-free than the kind of garden Des Kennedy discusses, with wit and with love, in his book *Crazy about Gardening*, where the gardeners, clearly much more serious as gardeners than we are, and admittedly mad, but „divinely“ so, have an all-inclusive garden, several gardens, in fact, in one. Theirs is a garden where, among other things, richly composted soil is needed in place of our native thin woodland soil, large and abundant perennials are cultivated, and even annuals, to say



nothing of fruit and vegetables, much of which must be replanted every year. Merely keeping up with the weeds in such gardens is relentless. From my basically lazy perspective I admire pioneer spirits and really serious gardeners like Des and Sandy Kennedy. But admiration takes very little physical effort, and I have no trouble in dispensing it freely.

A further, more important, advantage of such a garden as our woodland one, on the other hand, and it must be said, of such a mild climate as ours, is that it is never „put to bed“ for the winter. It is a beautiful place to walk, and in which just to be, not only during the main flowering time in the spring, or in the lushness of summer, or amid the vivid colours of fall, but at any time of the year, in almost any weather. And not necessarily to be there to work in the garden or even to examine

plants, but rather simply to wallow in the atmosphere of the place.



It is well recognized that gardening of just about any kind can be therapeutic when it comes to depression or stress. I have had headaches vanish when going to work in the garden, whether the work be hard or easy. The garden is a place in which to lose oneself, a place into which outside troubles have difficulty entering. Being in the garden, whether working or wallowing, is my form of meditation.

Even during the rain and mists of winter, the woodland with its leafless deciduous trees and shrubs, but with the bright green of evergreen ones, ferns and the mossy banks at their best and brightest green, and with the rush of the creek when it is at its most vigorous, has a compelling beauty. This is to say nothing of the subtle charm of winter blossoms - witch hazel in January,



Daphne bholua and *Cyclamen coum* in February, and toward the end of February, sometimes earlier, the first cherries, camellias, and rhododendrons. In the early winter, after the leaves have fallen and before they decay, the ground is covered by a stunning variety of colour, particularly beautiful when wet with the winter rain. It must finally be said that the garden is at its best when it is wet. And it is at its very best when still wet with rain and the sun comes out. And it is at its very, very best when it is still wet with rain and the sun comes out and the azaleas are in bloom or the leaves are in their autumn colour. I won't go on with this.

All in all, being in the garden, where art works in tandem with Nature, is uplifting to the spirit at any time. It is supreme in the late afternoon or early evening of a sunny day, during the final hour or two before the sun sets, when the tree trunks and the heavily-indumented rhododendrons glow golden.

The End

Thanks to the following, for contributing to the *Membership News*: Tony Clayton, Alleyne Cook, Nora Hall, Philip MacDougall and Joe Ronsley...

Bob & Jo Wright

Editorial ... As our contributions file is empty, this is the final issue of the Membership News. Thank you to all who took the time to contribute. It has been an interesting, sometimes enjoyable, year for both of us.

If any member has information that they wish to share with the membership, just send it to us as a reader-ready pdf or .doc (not .docx) attachment, and we will forward it to the current email list. We do not propose to forward items to our mail-out members, as it is very time-consuming and expensive ...