



Indumentum

The Monthly Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

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<https://miralanna.deviantart.com/art/Rhododendron-ledebourii-Altai-682890186>



VANCOUVER
Rhododendron
SOCIETY

This newsletter is brought to you by the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, purveyors of fine rhododendrons and florid news.

Presented for your delectation, an assortment of current and historical items gleaned from divers sources, scientific to leisurely, all with a smattering of Ericaceae.

Welcome to the re-established 'Indumentum' newsletter. As the new editor, my aim is to provide a monthly publication featuring local and international gardening topics, the history and cultivation of rhododendrons and horticulture in general, seasonal rhododendron blooms, and with your participation, local articles on gardens and garden events.

An earth scientist and Vancouver resident, my horticultural experience pales in comparison to the vast majority of members, but as an amateur gardener with a very small downtown 'acreage', I hope I can hold your interest with this melange prepared from occasional forays into real gardening, related interests and travel experiences.

Please provide feedback on style, content, and overall quality. Submissions are greatly appreciated, be they articles, images, or notices.

Toby Hughes

The next meeting of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society is scheduled for January 18th, 2018, at VanDusen Gardens - Floral Hall, 5251 Oak Street (37th and Oak) Vancouver, BC. This will include the Annual General Meeting and members' slides. If you wish to present a slideshow at the AGM, please contact *****, and provide a brief note on your topic. We do appreciate if the topics are rhododendron or at least garden related.

Doors open at 7.00 pm.

<http://www.rhodovanbc.org>

UPCOMING EVENTS:

20th January The Stanley Park Ecology Society is holding a day of invasive plant removal. For more details, go to:

<https://stanleyparkecology.ca/event/ecostewards-january20/>

5th February For those travelling to the Island, Norma Senn is speaking on the topic of Gardens of South Africa at the Victoria Rhododendron Society monthly meeting. With any luck, she will include some of the hundreds of indigenous Ericaceae species. They have changed their day and location: See <http://www.victoriarhodo.ca/>.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation & Botanical Garden has its Spring Catalogue available online: <https://rhodygarden.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2018-Spring-Catalog.pdf>

The BC Council of Garden Clubs regularly lists events one to three months in advance. Go to: <https://bcgardenclubs.com/wp/events>.

The Australian Rhododendron Society announced several months ago, a possible trip to Borneo and Brunei, organised by one of their members. I haven't any further information though you can try the link:
<http://www.rhododendron.com.au/article/ars-sabah-tour-2018/>.

I should save my pennies.

The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group is organising a tour of Northern Ireland gardens, from April 10th to 18th:
<http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/services/tours/>

On this day in history, 1st January, 1811:

■ Thomas Andrew Knight was elected President of the Royal Horticultural Society. Esteemed botanist and horticulturalist, he pioneered work in the study of plant physiology, breeding and growth, including geotropism, and was awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society. Bestowed for achievements in scientific research, experimentation and discovery, other recipients included Louis Pasteur, Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking. Creation of the RHS was originally a suggestion of John Wedgewood, son of Josiah. (Image: Wikipedia.org)



His work on grafting and transmission of disease was particularly important as older fruit varieties were in decline and overseas trade was complicated by poor cropping techniques. His 'Treatise on the Culture of the Apple and Pear and the Manufacture of Cider and Perry' was a landmark text. When he came into possession of his brother's estate, Downton Hall, he increased the scope of his work with considerable plant breeding of potatoes, peas, cabbages, strawberries and fruit trees. Ultimately, his work covered some 4,000 hectares. Knight published many reports and papers for the Society including

his second major work, *Pomona Herefordensis*, published in 1809 which was similarly received, leading to his election as President, a position for which he was annually re-elected until his death. The volume is a splendid illustrated text with original paintings by Elisabeth Matthews and Frances Knight, his daughter. The pages were printed using the aquatint process with plates engraved by the famous illustrator William Hooker, (no relation to Sir William Hooker), official artist of the RHS.

A rare text, with many volumes 'dissected' for prints, it fetches over \$10,000.



Left: Redstreak Cider Apple (from commons.wikimedia)

He was held in high regard by contemporary practitioners and writers, notably Charles McIntosh, who wrote in 1826 that 'To the exertions of Knight...we are indebted, for many of our best fruits, and not only the improvements of our native sorts, but also for the introduction of several foreign kinds'.

Professor John Lindley, delivering his introductory lecture to the University of London on 30 April 1824 was yet more fulsome in his praise for Knight: 'Nine-tenths of

the most important discoveries that have been made in modern Horticulture, especially the art of regulating and adapting artificial climate to vegetation, are due to the botanical knowledge of the most distinguished vegetable physiologist of this kingdom; whose successful attempts at applying science to practice have recently been crowned, if I may so express myself, by the complete subjugation of the unmanageable constitution of the Pine-apple'.

■ With eastern Canada enduring an historically typical winter, I'm reminded of early Canadian exploration not to mention my fond memories of showshoeing on the job in northern Canada. Even in the depths of winter, explorers were afoot. On January 1st, David Thompson, regarded as Canada's greatest 'land geographer', was attempting to open up routes to the Pacific from Alberta, this on news that Lewis and Clarke were already searching in the USA. Ploughing through a mere metre of snow at -30⁰ C., starving on a diet of pemmican, grease and flour, he departed from Rocky Mountain House in late December, 1810, reaching the headwaters of the Athabaska River less than a fortnight later. Pity the sled dogs with each hauling 60 lb.

Born in London, England, his family was poverty stricken early in life, with his father dying when he was two. Raised at a school for the disadvantaged and effectively forgotten by family, he proved to be a highly intelligent pupil, graduating from their mathematical school. He left for Canada to work for the Hudson's Bay Company, reporting to Samuel Hearne initially, and spent nearly all of his teen and adult life working for the North West Company, mapping one sixth of Canada, and travelling over 55,000 miles.

Despite his efforts, he was largely overlooked for more senior roles, received little compensation and died in poverty, near Montreal. His wife, Charlotte died twelve days later. Married at age 13, she often travelled with him despite having 13 children. Poor investments reduced their income and the couple were forced to move in with their children. Personal maps and manuscripts were sold off and used by companies to correct or embellish their work with no accreditation.

A statue of the couple was erected in Invermere, BC, honouring their work. Other statues are in Idaho, Dakota, Lac la Biche and Montreal. He also appears on a 1957 five cent Canadian stamp. The Thompson - Okanagan region and Thompson Valley are named after him. It's a shame he is almost forgotten today, though I was more than pleased to read the Research Vessel David Thompson entered service in 2016 and is scheduled to carry out research work on HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, this year.

His biography is well documented in:

http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html

These days people in exploration camps complain about lack of 3G wireless in their tents. We've come a long way.

■ As was more customary in the early nineteenth century, gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day; (The Netherlands continues this to some extent). Overseas, you can fully enjoy poinsettia, as trees:



If you're thinking of a New Year's floral gift, may I suggest snowdrops to add to the garden. After a few years, they can be split and propagated. As for winter flowering rhododendron species suitable for this region, several are relatively hardy. Unless you have exceptional shelter, I'd recommend central or Northern Asian plants, proven to withstand regular exposure to frost, wind and bright sun. *R. ledebourii*, once considered by many scientists to be a subspecies of *R. dauricum*, was officially recognised as a separate species some years ago. It's native to the Altay Mountains in Russia



<http://www.mustila.fi/en/plants/rhododendron/dauricum/ledebourii>

The Finnish Mustila Arboretum site describes it as: “The small herb-scented oval leaves remain on the shrub through part of the winter, changing to a dark red-brown. Early in spring violet-red flowers appear at the ends of the shoots; individual blossoms may be 2-4 cm, with 3-8 in a cluster. In the wild the species survives as a creeping sub-shrub among lime-rich rocks or may even grow to about 2 metres on moist peat in birch and mixed forest.

“In Finland, it has proved one of the hardiest of the rhododendrons, though sometimes the early flowers may be spoiled by spring frosts. In really mild winters the shrub may try to flower as early as Christmas; when this happens the spring flowering is poor.”

Mine does quite well in a very exposed area and has bloomed annually from January to February and rarely, into March.

It's named after the German-Estonian botanist Carl Friedrich von Ledebour, 1786-1851. Relatively little known in western Europe and certainly in North America, he carried out considerable work in Russia, co-publishing with Alexander von Bunge and Carl Anton Meyer, the *Flora Altaica*, (Flora of the Altay Mountains) in 1833, and between 1841 and 1853, authored the four volume *Flora Rossica*, the first complete flora of the Russian Empire. Text only, it covered 6,500 specimens, with its completion just days before he passed away.



Above, an apple forest in Zhingir-Alatau National Park, Kazakhstan

(By Yakov Fedorov - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=61479656>)

Within his *Flora Altaica* includes the first description of the wild ancestor of the cultivated apple, *Malus sieversii*. It's listed as vulnerable, with sparse apple woods scattered in the 'Stans, notably within Kazakhstan, whose capital Almaty, is derived from the word for apple, Alma. The Soviet-era name for Alma, Alma-Ata means 'Father of Apples'.

The genus of the mainly African perennial herbs, *Ledebouria* is named after him as is the Altai larch, *Larix ledebourii*. For a wee touch of Altai, you could transform a portion of your garden to include the rhododendron with tamarack, cedar, peonies (one species is native to the region), and erythronium. You might want to pass on the wild hemp. Go one further and plant apple trees. The Salt Spring Apple Co. <http://www.saltspringapplecompany.com/>, grows over 300 varieties, including cider apples.

Holidaying in the Czech Republic? The Ledebour Garden forms a portion of the five historic gardens comprising the Palace Gardens situated on the South slope of the hill on which was built Prague Castle. It is a terraced baroque garden dating from the early 18th century. All the gardens fell into near ruin but were restored in the eighties and noughties.

Garden - Praga (c) Karppanta

<http://mw2.google.com/mw-panoramio/photos/medium/44956463.jpg>

