



A Chapter of The American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at VanDusen Botanical Gardens
5251 Oak Street, Vancouver., on the 3rd Thursday
of each month except July, August and December.

President - Don Haslam
Vice - president - Sean Raffertey
Past President - Joanne Ronsley
Treasurer - Dana Cromie
Secretary - Jasbir Gill
Membership - Philip McDougal
Program - Joe Ronsley
Members - at - large - Tony Clayton
- Nora Hall
- Alan Cheung



Our speaker for the evening of February 18th will be **Fred Whitney**, currently the President of the American Rhododendron Society. His title: **‘You Grow Rhododendrons for the Blooms?’** Since *Rhododendron* is a genus probably having more beauty and diversity than any other in the plant kingdom, Fred will undoubtedly be talking about aspects that contribute to that beauty and diversity other than the flowers.

Fred and Ann Whitney reside in rural King County, south of Seattle, Washington, on five acres of wooded property. A two acre section has been ‘reclaimed’ from the forest and planted with 1,500 rhododendrons, along with companion plants, but no grass! Not surprisingly, it is a woodland collection, not a formal garden. Fred is a Past President of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and in the second year of a two-year tenure as President of the American Rhododendron Society.

He also has a special fascination with Australia and New Zealand—both these countries’ plants and their people. Fred and Ann are members of the New Zealand Rhododendron Association, Christchurch and Dunedin groups, the Australian Rhododendron Society (another ARS!) and Members in Perpetuity of Pukeiti. They have visited New Zealand, usually lecturing and attending rhododendron conventions, twelve times.

It does appear, then, that if he can be so involved in Australia and New Zealand, Fred Whitney’s Canadian involvement should come naturally. Clearly, his involvement in horticulture, especially concerning rhododendrons, is manifest in many ways, and we will want to welcome him most heartily to Vancouver.

Joe Ronsley

Book Review

Ornamentals Cherries in Vancouver

Doug Justice

UBC Botanical Garden

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival

There are only a few books that bring us close to Vancouver's gardening history. Gerald Straley's *Trees of Vancouver* portrayed the finest specimens that grow in Vancouver. With this publication we are given a look at the multitude of flowering cherries that grow throughout our city. Douglas Justice shows us thirty five cherries, each shown in flower and a close up of the flower, which make for easier identification. In addition markers indicate month of flowering. The Vancouver Park Board has for many years planted flowering cherries throughout the city as street trees. This is a well organized and handy field guide to one of Vancouver many delights. The Cherry Blossom Festival has been celebrated every year since 2005. They are a non-profit society which encourages everyone to enjoy the beauty of our city.

Gerald Gibbens

Rh. Macrophyllum (The White Form)

About fifteen years ago, while vacationing at Mercer Lake near Florence on the Oregon coast, I found a plant of the white form of *R. macrophyllum*. It was in full bloom in quite dense shade although the pink form had been in bloom four weeks. The plant was about 3 feet tall and had a 4 foot spread.

We dug the plant and moved it to our home, where it has grown and bloomed well each year. It seems to be slower growing than the pink form and is now about 6 feet tall. Its leaves are smaller and it consistently blooms from two to three weeks later than the pink type. It seems to me that the flowers may be somewhat smaller but trusses are very full. The flowers are pure white with a thin line of pink edging.

We think the plant very attractive and well worth growing. While the white form is not very common

Rh. macrophyllum (the white form we hear of it occasionally being found along the coast and in our mountains. My brother-in-law, who spent his boyhood on a farm in the Coos Bay area recalls that fifty years ago the white form was numerous along the coast and that he often dug and burned them in clearing land.

Gertrude Bovee

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(Editors' note)

I would be interested to know if the white form of *R. Macrophyllum* has been found in Washington or B. C. as it relates to Ron Knights' article in the previous newsletter.



Rhododendron albiflorum
by Al Campbell
Cowichan Valley Chapter
November 2005

Most members of the rhododendron society are aware that 90% of the known rhododendron species grow naturally on the Asian continent on the mountain ranges within the Nepal, Yunnan, Burma triangle.

Here on Vancouver Island we can claim at least two native species. *R. macrophyllum*, the more well

known

species, grows only at two known locations on the Island, one at Rhododendron Lake west of Nanoose and the second location being on the San Juan Ridge west of Shawnigan Lake.

The lesser known species is *R. albiflorum*. Perhaps *R. albiflorum* is not as well known than its larger cousin because it grows in more sub-alpine locals. *R. albiflorum* has been documented as growing at various altitudes from 4000 ft. on Mt. Brooks in Strathcona Park, 3500 ft. on Mt. Arrowsmith near Alberni and on Mt. Brenton near Chemainus, 3300 ft on the San Juan Ridge and at the 2300 ft. level on Mt. Benson near Nanaimo.

Many seed collectors and rhododendron species growers, such as the Rhododendron Species Foundation at Federal Way Washington, have tried growing *R. albiflorum* from seed collected from these higher altitudes with dismal success. Perhaps seed collected from the lowest growing forms on Mt. Benson could meet with more success.

In the book *Wild Flowers of the Pacific Northwest* by Lewis J. Clark and edited by John Trelawny of Victoria, *R. albiflorum* is noted to be found at the 800 ft. level near Muchalat Inlet. It is this observation that has caused quite a stir with the Rhododendron Species Foundation as well as the members of the Western North America Rhododendron Species Project. I realize that near Muchalat Inlet covers a lot of territory from its entrance at Nootka Island to its head at Gold River but this low level form of *R. albiflorum* needs to be verified and seed collected.

Surely some hikers, hunters, loggers or other nature buffs familiar with the area or who know of people familiar with or live in the Gold River area could get the word out there and track down this elusive low-lander. This note has been sent to all ARS Chapters on Vancouver Island with the hope that a member in one or more of these local societies will have more information or knowledge of this low altitude form of *R. albiflorum*.

George Forrest, Mr Bulley and Professor Balfour

by Norman Todd
April 2005

“And flowers azure, black and streaked with gold,
Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.”

No doubt flowers figured larger in the psyches of Isaac Bayley Balfour and George Forrest than did gold but that sometimes-noble element was instrumental in bringing these two disparate men together. George Forrest, *R. forrestii* who was probably the greatest plant collector of all time, had spent ten of his oat-sowing, formative years roughing it in Australia. He had grown up in Scotland. He was the youngest of thirteen children, only eight of whom made it to adulthood. In 1903, George, at age 30, was back in Scotland living with his widowed mother and fairly desperate for work. The gold connection followed from a previous one concerning bones.

George had a huge curiosity about the natural world and spent most of his time outdoors. He was keen on fishing and shooting and knew all the plants and birds of his neighbourhood. On one outing he noticed an unusual stone protruding from an eroded bank. His careful scraping uncovered more of the stone, which proved to be a lid for a coffin. There were bones inside.

George took some of the bones to the Keeper of the Museum of National Antiquities in Edinburgh. They proved to be about 1500 years old. The Curator of the museum was impressed by this stalky, intelligent, independent and ambitious young man and took it upon himself to write to the Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Isaac Bayley Balfour (*R. balfourianum*), asking if he knew of anyone looking for a botanical collector. In his short letter he noted the Forrest had some experience roughing it as a gold digger. Balfour, who was twenty years older than Forrest, had also done some plant exploring but perhaps, more importantly, had a trace of gold fever in his system. He had been induced by a friend flakes of gold as big as a man slicing it off with cold chisels.

By jingo more like Arabian nights than modern gold mining, and had invested £100 in a mining venture in Queensland. He felt disposed to offer Forrest a job in the RBG herbarium at 10/- a week. In those days there was no Minimum Wage. Balfour offer was probably about the very least that could be offered. Nevertheless, Forrest jumped at it. So began a relationship that was deep, sincere and enriching not in terms of gold but in their shared knowledge of the natural world. Most of the gold went into the pockets of others. One who so profited was Aurthur Kilpin Bulley.

A.K.Bulley was a complex man. He was a wealthy cotton broker whose legacy now lives on in the Ness Gardens at Liverpool, England. His mother had 14 children all of whom survived. He had a wonderful nose for business and a competitive but sincere love for plants. He was an atheist, and an evangelical socialist. Among his other political endeavours, he tried, unsuccessfully, as a Women Suffrage candidate for a seat the British House of Commons. In the days part of the uniform of the business tycoon was a bowler hat; he wore a fedora. From his reading and business contacts he knew there were undiscovered treasures aesthetic and financial in southwest China. He was loath to compromise his socialist principles by exploiting his love of plants and his skill at growing them for monetary gain. So at first his collecting strategy was to write everyone and anyone who was in these foreign parts (including the Papist missionaries) soliciting seed. This did not produce many tangible results only more mouth-watering descriptive enticements of what might be found there.

Dr. Augustine Henry when stationed in Szechwan, did send some seed to Bulley who wisely sent some of these to Isaac Bayley Balfour. Balfour had the facilities to grow plants but had no mandate or funds to sponsor a professional collector. Bulley was still merely a private gardener. Meanwhile, in the south of England, the multi-generation Veitch nursery had sponsored Henry Wilson to go to China. Wilson was instructed to bring back, among other things, seeds of Henry discovery the handkerchief tree (*Davidia*

The Veitch name was on the tips of the tongues of the loftiest and wealthiest of British horticulturists. Bulley was prominent in this group but regarded by it with distancing reservation. Slowly, he came to realize that to have the newest and rarest plants he had to engage his own collector. Swallowing some of his socialist doctrine he decided to send a collector to Yunnan. Augustine Henry had told him, don't waste money on postage - send a man. He also decided to set up his own nursery in direct competition with Veitch. He established A.K. Bees (*R. beesiana*) but to assuage his scruples he called it a cooperative with the motto 'All to Gather - all together.'

A. Henry had picked up on Yunnans great plant wealth from Abbé Delavays pioneering discoveries. Delavay, a French missionary, had been sending herbarium specimens and a few seeds back to Europe. This was a country on a grand scale. Three of the worlds deepest gorges, the Salween, the Mekong and the Yangtze coursed through Yunnan and the variety of material was breath taking; the climatic range being so wide that conservatory gardeners and alpine plant enthusiasts were all salivating at the thought of savouring its flora. Henry proffered the menu and the Veitches and Bulley ordered the seven-course meal.

Bulley bought space for a small advertisement in the Gardeners Chronicle. It read, Wanted, a Young Man well up on Hardy Plants, to go out to the East and Collect, 212; Box 15, G.P.O., Liverpool. Balfour responded with a short letter which concluded with, He is a strongly built fellow and seems to me to be of the right grit for a collector. Bulley wasted no time in hiring Forrest; after all Veitch had a five-year start by having sent out E. H. Wilson (later known as Chinese Wilson).

Forrest left Edinburgh on the 14th May 1904 and was soon on board the SS Australia bound for Bombay. He traveled by train to Madras. The voyage from there to Rangoon was ghastly on a filthy, mechanically unsound, storm tossed steamer that had to be towed into Rangoon by a rescue boat. Forrest wrote that a baby died on the ship and was thrown overboard like a

bundle of brown paper. His route through Burma

to Yunnan was largely unknown to westerners. The rigours he faced were a mere foretaste of how he was to spend the next three years. Forrest thought his stay was to be for two years.

The agreement between Forrest, Bulley and Balfour seems to have been a loose, verbal one. It seems Forrest received about £600 a year to cover everything. Agreements for subsequent expeditions spelled out a salary and detailed support costs. Balfours understanding was that he was to get all the herbarium collection; Bulley thought he was to get all the seed and photographs; Forrest thought he could keep some of the seed and duplicates of the herbarium sheets.

The disagreements arose in earnest after Forrest return to Edinburgh. The saga of this first (there were seven) Forrest expedition is one of horrendous hardship, success, elation and the deepest of despair. (In July 1906 Balfour wrote to Bulley there is little doubt that Forrest has been murdered. This stranger than fiction tale is told in many books but the best account is in Brenda McLeans 'George Forrest Plant Hunter'. Here, it is only the relationships between these three forceful personalities that are being discussed so readers are encouraged to read McLeans book: it is in our library. Each of these men was highly principled, highly intelligent and highly motivated. Each was egotistical and tenacious.

Balfour found a spot for Forrest in his old job at the herbarium of the RBG. The pay was now £2 a week. Before leaving for China, Forrest had become engaged to another herbarium worker, Clementina Traill (*R. clementinae*, *R. traillianum*). On his return they were married much against her mother's wishes: she was not much impressed with George's occupation. Of course, Clementina had to give up her job. George was not in good health as a consequence of his three grueling years in China and often missed work. Working hours were inflexible and the newly married Forrests lived six miles distant from the RBG. George had always walked to work but when ill was unable to do so and the only train did not get him to work in time. Balfour was an understanding man

but had to administer a large staff and couldn't make exceptions. Forrest's immediate supervisor was not at all sympathetic.

Forrest thought he owned one set of the herbarium specimens. Balfour thought otherwise and sent a truck to collect them. Bulley thought he had complete ownership of all seed and Forrest had kept some, which he was selling. Forrest felt compelled to offer his resignation and Balfour accepted it. Would a modern high priced contract lawyer have prevented this outcome by having the three signatures duly witnessed on a 20-page document?

Forrest did keep in touch with Balfour and was still sending him plant identification lists the result of long hours of work but their relationship was icily strained. Forrest wrote to Balfour, 'Any indebtedness which may have been due to the Garden by me I consider to be more than repaid by the collections I have already presented.' At heart, Balfour still considered Forrest his protégé and was a man of reasoned compassion. He invited Forrest to come and have a free and open discussion of the difficulties. They ended up shaking hands.

Forrest never forgot how understanding and avuncularly supportive Balfour had been. His respect for Balfour never wavered again. Simultaneously, Bulley and Balfour became the closest of friends and remained so. Balfour always seemed to be able to build friendships on an individuals strengths, ignoring their weaknesses.

Forrest could not do that and his respect for Bulley had changed to wariness. Forrest had not forgotten that Bulley had insisted that Forrest take a camera with him as an essential item in his kit. In the early 1900s, photographs were taken on plates in a large box mounted on a tripod. Imagine trying to scale the precipitous chasms lugging a camera to photograph a two-inch primula. The first set of plates that Forrest took with him was ruined. The precautions needed to protect the plates in such an inhospitable climate had to be learned the hard way. Bulley demurred at the cost of replacing them, refused to provide paper and developing material. Forrest wrote Mr. Bulley ...said there was no necessity to take photos. This after telling

me to take a camera with me. He is a rather peculiar individual.

Forrest seems to have been constantly fretful of not being able to meet Bulley's expectations. He wrote, I might as well be scuppered as go home a failure. Bulley seems to have been unable to give his collector the encouragement and reassurance that he needed although he was loudly praising Forrest discoveries to others. It was a feudal master-servant relationship and the collectors free spirit was compromised.

Forrest, following his resignation from RBG Edinburgh, was in limbo. He wanted to go back to his old hunting grounds; he had learned the local language; he had trained some of the local people to collect and had gained their respect and loyalty. Bulley, however, was lukewarm despite having promised never to let Forrest sink into the ranks of the out of works. A little later, he wrote, But the simple facts are that I can see it costing less than £600 a year, and I am a comparatively poor man.

Twelve days after Forrest quit the RBG, his mentor, Balfour, wrote him to tell him that Professor Sargent from America had visited him and was looking for someone to go to China. Sargent was Director of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Forrest and Sargent met at the Veitch nursery. The American wanted plants for New England. He wanted hardier stuff than Forrest had collected in Yunnan. Forrest was loath to go further north; he was sure there were still great riches in the Mekong-Salween divide. Balfour encouraged Forrest to accept Sargent's offer of £300 a year plus expenses. Forrest asked for time to consider and stalled, mainly because Clementina was pregnant with their first child. He missed his opportunity.

In the meantime, some of Forrests seeds were germinating for Bulley. *Primula malacoides*, an arable weed to some observers; however, J.C. Williams, one of Forrest later sponsors, did call it an unfailing delight was selling at 7s 6d a plant. Bulley was advertising, somewhat untruthfully, During the past five years or so we have spent large sums of money in sending out

collectors to China. We now have an enormous stock of new plants on trial in our nursery. These we shall exhibit and offer for sale, as they prove of merit.

Primula bulleyana had been named and it too was fetching high prices. (Bulley preferred the name *beesiana*. But he wrote, However I am indifferent. *Beesi*, *Beesorum*, *Beesensis*, *Beesium*, *Beesica*, *Beesiana*, anything which brings the name in.....) There were 22 species named after Bulley from Forrest's first expedition. He did think that *Gentiana veitchiorum* sounded hideous. Bulley 'beastly money' became less beastly, and knowing Forrest had not agreed to Sargents demand that he leave before the birth of his child offered him £200 plus expenses to go back to Yunnan. Forrest, having been present for the birth of his son, was now in no position to refuse and left for China in January 1910.

As soon as he arrived in Rangoon, he was within a hair breadth of returning home. Bulley had failed to send the money for equipping the expedition. Forrest had to beg the ships captain to let him stay on board until Bulley had cabled £150. Bulleys unapologetic explanation was that there had been a mix-up in Bees office. Forrest was now sorely angered and disillusioned. Further delays in payment followed; it seems inexplicable that a man of Bulleys business acumen would let his collector go without resources. Forrest decided in Rangoon that he could not work again for such an employer but he would honour his contract and see it out. He let it be known that Bulley was a cad of the first order. He had a hate on for nurserymen, particularly English nurserymen. There is a lot said about the meanness of the Scotch but in my time I have met more stingy English than Scotch, and Bulley and Veitch, the great Sir Harry, are types, extreme types. Bulley called Forrests bluff and wrote him, I shall not want any formal notice of your desire to go. Forrest did finish his term, introducing many of our most treasured garden plants. Baileys one-inch thick catalogue listed 67 species of Asiatic *primula*. His business was prospering and he offered Forrest a two-year extension to his contract. This was immediately turned down,

This story is, of course, incomplete. It is just a

glimpse into the lives and affairs of three men who played immensely important roles in British horticulture. Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour was the scientist and the statesman. His classification system for rhododendron was used for the best part of a century. He, himself, knew it was only an expedient but I, like most older gardeners, still use it. Forrest undertook another five successful expeditions. He died of a heart attack, suddenly, in January 1932 while out collecting bird specimens with three of his Chinese employees. During his first two expeditions he had developed a great love for rhododendrons. We, who grow them, should toast his memory.

K.C. Bulley had little time for rhododendrons and had in fact sold all the rhododendron seed from the second expedition to J.C. Williams of Cornwall. Fortunately, Forrest developed the same kind of rewarding relationship with Williams as he had with Balfour. Bulley continued to sponsor plant hunters in the Sino-Himalaya. He was hugely instrumental, not only in introducing new plant material, but also in making it available to everyone. His one-penny seed packages were designed for those with only a windowsill of space. Although he was an uncommon man, his second great love was for the common man and woman. Bulley died in 1942 after 44 years at Ness. His widow wanted his epitaph to read Bulley, his fortunes and misfortunes. His daughter, Lois, presented the whole Ness estate, along with a large endowment, to Liverpool University.



