



March Program

Norma Senn, our speaker for the evening of March 19th, is currently a member of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society, which she has served as president, though she has recently moved to Victoria.

Norma has recently retired from her position as Director of the Dept of Agriculture at the University College of the Fraser Valley. During her career of over 20 years at UCFV, she taught a wide variety of courses in horticulture, biology and even agronomy, and served as head the department. Previous to that, she was an urban horticulturist and nursery specialist with the BC Ministry of Agriculture. As part of her responsibilities in this position, she set up the first Master Gardener programs in Canada, and continued to work with the VanDusen Master Gardeners as a regular lecturer in botany and plant propagation.

As far as Rhododendrons are concerned, Norma says that she hasn't met one yet she didn't like, but as she has just moved to a new and (sadly) smaller garden in Victoria, she thinks she will have to specialize in dwarfs that can be tucked into existing beds. She is, however, looking forward to trying to grow some of the slightly more tender types, since she now has a true Zone 8 garden.

Norma has a reputation as an excellent speaker. She will offer VRS members a brief history of horticulture in the Pacific Northwest. Her talk is entitled 'Walking in the Sasquatch's Footprints'. This presentation was originally prepared for the 2006 western regional fall conference at Harrison Hot Springs. She was extremely well received at the time, and while some of you may have heard her, you will not want to miss the updated lecture. For the rest of you, it should be a new treat.

visit us at : www.rhodo.citymax.com

The Vancouver Rhododendron Society is 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. Guests are most welcome to attend and participate.

VRS EXECUTIVE

President – Don Haslam
Vice-president – Sean Rafferty
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Membership – Philip McDougal
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Members-at-large – Tony Clayton
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R. glaucophyllum



Hamamelis mollis 'Pallida'

In Memorium of Gerard Picher By Barbara Cook

On February 7th, 2009, our city, our world lost a very great personality. More than just one for Gerard was so expansive in his thinking, his knowledge and his creative abilities. He was born on the Caribbean island of Martinique in 1952 and later lived in New Caledonia and Reunion. He said, "my youth was spent on tropical islands. Then I went to France, where I spent two years in a private Arts and Decoration School under a 'Compagnon du Tour', followed by three years of Art School at Marseille Luminy University.' This is important to know, for first and foremost, Gerard, in everything he did, was with an artist's eye. Anyone who saw his large paintings of wild animals and vibrant flower portraits, knew instantly that here was a professional and no dabbler! His work with wood showed the same meticulous attention and result, whether for finely crafted pieces or rustic garden furniture. Although he was a Canadian citizen, we all thoroughly understood that Gerard was a proud Frenchman!

In 1985, Gerard began his Horticulture Apprenticeship and in 1992, took over the care of The Ted and Mary Grieg Rhododendren Gardens in Stanley Park. Here his expansiveness and artistry showed, in the lovely little stone bridge and live willow fencing, in the stand of giant bamboo in the glade and the increased number of new magnolias. He enhanced all he touched. There his last and huge contribution, was when very ill, with a team of three, to be the authoritative voice, in naming every tree and shrub.

Bill Herbst worked with him and this is his account." I first met Gerard when I was despatched

to work with Alleyne in Stanley Park, in the final months of my apprenticeship. It was apparent from the start that this 'larger than life' character and I were going to get along well.

Gerard was the most unique person I met in the Vancouver Park Board, with his easy laugh, quick wit, and fund of great stories. I loved his flamboyant style---the kerchief around his neck and the jaunty beret. He had a confidence about him which I admired and I chuckled to myself as he would tell a tale, gesticulating with arms in the air. He always smelled good and to this day I use a dab of Cologne every morning, for as Gerard would say "smelling good at work is better than smelling bad---especially when you work in the dirt!" Our work ethic was similar and it was a pleasure to be with someone who could match my physical abilities and share the sense of a job well done.

After Gerard's diagnosis, some of that exuberance left him, but we would always have a good chat and cross reference some of the plants sparking our interest. I last saw him at a retirement party. He was somewhat reserved until the stories were being told and then we saw the old Gerard again. We have all lost a special something in his going."

Thankyou Dane, for sharing more of your husband. Thankyou Bill. Thankyou to the man himself, Gerard. Thankyou for the beauty, the wonderful stories, and the laughter you brought us. Thankyou for your passion for life, for Rhododendrons, for good food and wine, for great art and for good traveller's tales. Thankyou for teaching us how to endure terrible odds with dignity, determination and enormous will power. We are proud of the legacy you have left forever in our hearts and gardens.



Clematis heracleifolium

President's Message

Our March meeting will fall on the evening of the last full day of the terrible winter of 2008/2009. No post - modern ironic T-shirts will be sold.

There are signs of Rhody blossoms opening and buds taking on colours in my garden. I am told that marmots and muskrats are becoming active, and Great Horned Owls are laying their eggs. The juices of our members are becoming excited by gratuitous and wanton displays of "hort porn". But most of our gardens have been heavily damaged by snow, and ironically also by lack of snow, during extended below normal freezing periods.

Before our featured guest speaks, we will address at our March meeting the immediately pressing question of how we are to tell if a rhody is dead or so damaged that it should be dead; how long should Big Leaves be given to recover; and in the future, how can one protect tender plants when one knows a cold snap is coming, or as this winter, that it won't be leaving soon?

On a happier note, Bill Spohn reports that our club website is averaging 29, 000 "hits" a month. Now it is your Executive's turn to try to convert 1% of these hits into active VRS members

Happy Discoveries in the Garden. But go armed with a pitch fork.

Don Haslam



Rhododendron barbatum/Wallich ex G. Don
1834

Steve Hootman

Rhododendron barbatum is another of the numerous fine species collected and introduced to western gardens by Joseph Hooker during his historical two year expedition (1848-1850) into the Sikkim Himalaya. Although this species was first scientifically recorded by Wallich in 1829 and introduced on a small scale possibly around that time, J. D. Hooker is rightfully given credit for bringing this outstandingly ornamental plant into general cultivation. *R. barbatum* is one of the finest of the red-flowered species for all-around garden worthiness. With full rounded inflorescences of bright scarlet to crimson flowers in early spring, smooth and peeling reddish-brown bark, and attractive deep green foliage, this species has remained one of the most widely grown and sought after of all of Hooker's introductions.

Rhododendron barbatum is native over much of the Himalayan Range, from Uttar Pradesh, India in the west, through Nepal, Sikkim & Bhutan to western Arunachal Pradesh, India in the east with populations in adjacent areas of S Tibet. This species is quite common in the wild, sometimes occurring as solid stands in forest openings but more commonly seen as scattered individuals in coniferous and mixed forests. It is found from 8,000 to 12,000 feet (2,400 to 3,700m) in elevation and typically grows as a large upright shrub or small tree.

In cultivation, this species generally forms a large upright shrub or small tree up to 20 or 30 feet (around 9m) in height (after considerable time). The attractive and colorful bark ranks among the finest in the genus and is one of the outstanding ornamental attributes of this species. On older stems the smooth and shiny bark is peeling and reddish or purplish in color, providing beauty and color through the often rather dull winter season. The younger stems and leaf petioles are more or less covered with bristles or "barbs" which add to the overall ornamentation of the plant. The glabrous (smooth) deep green leaves are elliptic to somewhat lanceolate in shape with heavily impressed veins on the upper surface. This attractive foliage nicely offsets the tubular bell-shaped deep crimson to scarlet flowers in late winter or early spring. These are borne in a dense rounded inflorescence and are usually long-lasting if no heavy frosts occur. In a "good" spring without hard freezes here in the RSBG, plants of this species have been known to remain in flower for up to five weeks.

This species is a member of the small subsection *Barbata* which also includes the species *erosum*, *exasperatum*, *succothii* and *argipeplum*. There has been a great deal of confusion over the correct name for the latter species which is still most often seen in collections as "*R. smithii*". This species is very similar to *R. barbatum*, but is easily separated from it by the presence of a loose indumentum on the undersides of the leaves, otherwise, they are virtually interchangeable in the landscape. A taxon known as "*R. imberbe*" is often seen in cultivation and is virtually identical to *R. barbatum*, differing only in its lack of bristles on the branchlets and petioles. This plant is often considered to be a natural hybrid but is more likely just an unbarbed *R. barbatum* and has



Prunus Mume

accordingly been lumped into that species. During an expedition to Sikkim in the spring of 1997, I was able to observe numerous populations of *R. barbatum* and *R. argipeplum* in their native habitats. In many of these populations I noted individuals matching the descriptions for *RR. barbatum*, *argipeplum* and "*imberbe*" all growing side by side. In these same colonies one could also observe plants showing varying degrees of intermediate combinations of the features used to distinguish between the taxa mentioned above. Plants with varying degrees of indumentum and bristly petioles, plants with no indumentum or bristles, plants with indumentum but no bristles, etc., all clearly illustrating large variable populations. This is, of course, a limited perspective on the taxonomy of these two species which do occur as distinct, fairly uniform populations in many parts of their respective ranges. It is probably best to interpret the taxonomy of these taxa as correct for the time being, keeping in mind that intermediates do occur where the ranges of the two species overlap.

In the garden, *R. barbatum* is an easily cultivated, long-lived and usually free-blooming species. Primarily a woodland species in the wild, it performs best in similar conditions under cultivation, preferring the light overhead cover of larger trees. This protects the plant from the hot afternoon sun and heavy winds as well as light frosts which can otherwise damage the early flowers. As always, a well-drained organic soil with adequate moisture through the growing season is best for good growth and health. Although rated as hardy from 0° to +5°F., this species is often considered to be too tender for even the maritime Pacific Northwest. This is simply not true if high altitude or selected hardy forms are cultivated. Numerous plants have attained heights of 10 to 15 feet here in the garden, surviving but suffering damage to the foliage and flower buds in a particularly bad year when it reached +4°F. The members of this subsection are said to be susceptible to powdery mildew but we have seen little evidence of this on *R. barbatum* in our area.

This species won an Award of Merit when exhibited by Winterfold House, Surrey in 1934. Probably due to its early bloom season, *R. barbatum* has been little used in hybridizing programs. There are several hybrids in the trade featuring this species as a parent however, including 'Brightwell' (x *forrestii*), 'Appleford' (x '*Portia*') and the well-known 'Nestor' (x *thomsonii*).



Rhododendron
fargesii

UPCOMING PARS TOURS (see also the tours
summary table)

Chris Hodgson

Tel 604 541 2382
11 Feb./09

Species Foundation Tour

As the snows recede and days lengthen, we are reminded that a new season of gardening and exciting PARS garden tours is almost upon us. Our first tour will be to the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington (about 35 kms south of Seattle) on **Saturday, March 21**. This will be an all-day event.

We have arranged minibus transportation for maximum 20 participants, departing South Surrey Park and Ride (off King George Highway near Highway 99) at 7 am sharp on Mar 21. We will be met at the Foundation by Executive Director Rick Peterson who has personally guaranteed that almost all the species will be in full bloom for our visit! We tour the grounds in the am and lunch at a local restaurant. In the afternoon we tour the propagating facility and make our rhody purchases (see below), departing for home around 3 pm. Return e.t.a. at South Surrey Park and Ride is 6 pm. Individual cost is \$25 for the bus ride. Being ARS members, we

have free admission to the grounds. Lunch of course will be extra. Oh, and **don't forget your passport and out-of-province medical insurance!** You might check with Mountain Equipment, as they offer free out-of-province insurance to members for trips up to 48 hours.

Due to the limited capacity, bus seating will be on a first-come, first-served basis. **You will be required to pay \$25 (cash or cheques payable to PARS)** at the upcoming PARS meeting on **February 24** to secure your seat. Your payment receipt will be your bus ticket, so don't forget it on March 21. The bus service requires a minimum of 12 passengers. Any unsold seats following the February PARS meeting will be offered to members of the Fraser Valley or Fraser South clubs. Those who think they can drive





down and back cheaper than that can find driving directions to the Species Foundation at www.rhodygarden.org.

For those who wish to make purchases, in order to avoid any customs hassle at the border Steve Hootman of the Foundation will deliver our plant purchases to UBC the week of April 20-24. Members will be notified by UBC of their arrival and details for pickup. More details during the tour.

Fearings' Farm Nursery, Abbotsford

Please note that the date for this event has been changed to **Saturday, April 18**. This will be another all-day blockbuster, a triple- or even quadruple-header event, starting at 9 am at Harold and Ginny Fearing's species rhody farm near Abbotsford. Next we visit the nearby Bradner Daffodil Festival and enjoy a sit-down lunch (about \$5 per person) at the Community Centre and perhaps even a private tour of organizer Audrey Satkin's daffodil farm. After lunch we tour the five-acre garden of Anna Burian's parents in Aldergrove. Time permitting, we may also visit Rain Forest Nursery in Langley on the way home. For those who wish to carpool, we'll meet

at South Surrey Park and Ride, departing at 8:15 am. Further details and guide maps will be provided at the March PARS meeting.

SIKKIM

STATE TREE: RHODODENDRON

SIKKIM IS A LANDLOCKED STATE NESTLED IN THE HIMALAYAS. IT IS THE LEAST POPULOUS STATE IN INDIA, AND THE SECOND SMALLEST IN AREA AFTER GOA. SIKKIM WAS AN INDEPENDENT STATE RULED BY THE CHOGYAL MONARCHY UNTIL 1975, WHEN A REFERENDUM TO MAKE IT INDIA'S TWENTY-SECOND STATE SUCCEEDED. THE THUMB-SHAPED STATE BORDERS NEPAL IN THE WEST, TIBET TO THE NORTH AND EAST, AND BHUTAN IN THE SOUTH-EAST. THE INDIAN STATE OF WEST BENGAL BORDERS SIKKIM TO ITS SOUTH. THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE IS NEPALI, AND THE PREDOMINANT RELIGIONS ARE HINDUISM AND VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM. GANGTOK IS THE CAPITAL AND LARGEST TOWN.

DESPITE ITS SMALL SIZE, SIKKIM IS GEOGRAPHICALLY DIVERSE, OWING TO ITS LOCATION AT THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS. TERRAIN RANGES FROM TROPICAL IN THE SOUTH TO TUNDRA IN THE NORTH. KANCHENJUNGA, THE WORLD'S THIRD HIGHEST PEAK, IS LOCATED IN SIKKIM, STRADDLING ITS NORTHERN BORDER WITH NEPAL. SIKKIM HAS BECOME ONE OF INDIA'S MOST VISITED STATES OWING TO ITS REPUTATION FOR UNTOUCHED SCENIC BEAUTY AND POLITICAL STABILITY.

ORIGIN OF NAME

SIKKIM (OR SIKHIM) MEANS /CRESTED LAND/ IN NEPALI. THE TERM, WHICH WAS COINED BY THE INVADING GORKHAS, IS DERIVED FROM THE SANSKRIT WORD SHIKHIM WHICH MEANS "CRESTED", AND IS THE MOST WIDELY ACCEPTED ORIGIN. SIKKIM WOULD THUS OWE ITS NAME TO ITS ALMOST ENTIRELY MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN. THE TIBETAN NAME FOR SIKKIM IS DENZONG, WHICH MEANS THE "VALLEY OF RICE".

GEOGRAPHY

THE THUMB-SHAPED STATE OF SIKKIM IS CHARACTERISED BY WHOLLY MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN. ALMOST THE ENTIRE STATE IS HILLY, WITH THE ELEVATION RANGING FROM 280 METRES (920 FEET) TO 8,585 METRES (28,000 FEET). THE SUMMIT OF THE KANCHENJUNGA IS THE HIGHEST POINT. FOR THE MOST PART, THE LAND IS UNFIT FOR AGRICULTURE BECAUSE OF THE PRECIPITOUS AND ROCKY SLOPES. HOWEVER, CERTAIN HILL SLOPES HAVE BEEN CONVERTED INTO FARM LANDS USING TERRACE FARMING TECHNIQUES AND IS USED FOR CULTIVATION. NUMEROUS SNOW-FED STREAMS IN SIKKIM HAVE CARVED OUT RIVER VALLEYS IN THE WEST AND SOUTH OF THE STATE. THESE STREAMS COMBINE INTO THE TEESTA AND ITS TRIBUTARY, THE RANGEET. THE TEESTA, DESCRIBED AS THE "LIFELINE OF SIKKIM", FLOWS THROUGH THE STATE FROM NORTH TO SOUTH. ABOUT A THIRD OF THE LAND IS HEAVILY FORESTED.

THE LOFTY HIMALAYAN RANGES SURROUND THE NORTHERN, EASTERN AND WESTERN BORDERS OF SIKKIM IN A CRESCENT. THE POPULATED AREAS LIE IN THE SOUTHERN REACHES OF THE STATE, IN THE LOWER HIMALAYAS. THE STATE HAS TWENTY-EIGHT MOUNTAIN PEAKS, TWENTY-ONE GLACIERS, 227 HIGH ALTITUDE LAKES, INCLUDING THE TSONGMO LAKE AND KHECHEOPALRI LAKE, FIVE HOT SPRINGS, AND OVER 100 RIVERS AND STREAMS. EIGHT MOUNTAIN PASSES CONNECT THE STATE TO TIBET, (CON'T APRIL)



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