

# THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

September 2004

Published by the  
Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)  
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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Our last couple of General Meetings have been well attended and enjoyed a good presentation from our Guest Speakers from Grow Better on fertilizers and their new product "X" Factor, which could be a boom, then there was Anne O'Connor with her beautiful water colour paintings and a very informative talk on the history of Australian water colour paintings in horticulture.

The Retail Nursery has been restocked with a good variety of plants from wholesale nurseries and our own wholesale stock, grown on by the volunteer group with still more to come. So here's hoping the season is on our side with plenty of interested buyers. On that note, if you can afford time on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to assist prospective purchasers in their selections, it would be much appreciated. When all said and done, it is to the benefit of our Society.

As I sit writing this report, there is some of that much needed rain coming down in a very nice steady soaking, after  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch overnight, beats watering.

Don't forget our show season is approaching fast and we will need every member to assist and enter the shows competition. Also we will be missing one of our staunchest supporters in Ken Cathie.

It has been great to see our old friend Jack O'Shannassy coming up on the odd Tuesday, being chauffeured by one of his daughters or his wife, Carmel.

Some vireya seed has been received from the Species Foundation in Seattle, sent back by Simon Begg. This has been sown, so we will just have to wait and see.

I have a *superbum* in flower for the second time. The first flowering two years ago, was white, this time it is a beautiful pink. Don't ask me why, but it is now in the ground, whether this has anything to do with it.

On our sick list is Dr. Bob Withers, who is unwell in Epworth Hospital and Jack Wilson is in the same hospital, to have an amputation of part of one of his legs. Best wishes to both and hopefully a good recovery.

**Bill Taylor – President.**

## GENERAL MEETINGS

### July

#### ***Grow Better Organic Fertilizers:***

Grow Better produce quite a large range of organic fertilizers for a wide range of plants including Rhododendrons and Azaleas.

The talk was presented by Chris McQuade and Geoff Carswell, explaining the formulation and ingredients contained in the individual fertilizers.

Then came the “X” factor. This is a new product which compliments all fertilizers, that means not so much fertilizing is needed.

The Benefits of X Factor:

Root development is improved

Improves soil structure

Releases nutrient locked up in the soil

This improves plant health and growth

Makes less susceptible to pest and fungal infestation

Improves water retention in potting mix and soil

Safe to use and biodegradable.

X Factor works by :-

Releasing nutrients locked up in soils and potting mix because of its association with the microflora within the X Factor which attach to the root system of the plant and produces fine hairs like roots, which increases the uptake of nutrients to the plant.

#### **X Factor decreases:-**

Watering, excess fertilizing, insect pests and fungal problems.

#### **X Factor increases:-**

Use of nutrient, root growth, general health of plants and soil structure.

Grow Better would like to hear of results on this product from Members.

### Bill Taylor

### August

*Anne O'Connor*

Our Guest speaker for August was Anne O'Connor. Anne provided members with a most interesting account of the history of Australian botanical watercolor art. Anne illustrated her talk with digital photographs including her own vireya series that won the RHS Gold Medal. See July 2004 Newsletter.

Anne also brought a number of original watercolors and prints with her. Anne's prints can be purchased at the National Rhododendron Gardens entrance Office.

**Ed.**

## General Meetings Bench Displays

### July

It was good to see a full bench display with some very good blooms but we only had eight exhibitors. This is not good enough.

Vireyas were shown in all classes. Entries of note were - Bill Taylor's *tuba* and *laetum*, Mike Hare's Pink Delight, Murray Mc Alister's Bulola Gold and Colin Livingston's Pindi Pearl, Highland White Jade ,and, wait for it – *zolleri* x *christianae* x *konori* x Gardenia. This latter was awarded the bloom of the night. Alan Walker displayed a very good log vireya, *saxifragoides* x.

Azaleas on the bench were sparse. Len Sloggett got the judges nod with Seagull, Anna Kehr and Orchid Gem. Alan showed another good potted plant, azalea Charlie.

It was a little early for rhododendrons though a few were shown with the following mentioned in dispatches. Bill's Max Sye, Alan's Christmas Cheer, Len's *emasculum* and Mike Hammer's *grande*.

### August

We are certainly coming to the flowering season. The bench was quite full.

The vireyas were shown in every class. A notable exhibit of the night was Margaret Johnson's *loranthiflorum* which won the best small species. Margaret is a new member and brought the flower to the vireya group meeting at Simon Begg's house the week before, to show and clarify its identity. It was still looking fresh a week later so Simon entered it on her behalf. Congratulations Margaret.

Other notable vireyas were – Bill's Red Tubular, Ivory Coast, *laetum* and Simbu Sunset, Walter Lobbezo's *hellwigii*, Barry Stagoll's *buxifolium* and Len Sloggett's plant of Pindi Peach.

The wet weather probably hindered a large azalea showing though it did not stop Alan Walker picking up points with Hino de Giri, Kirin and Coconut Ice. Bill had some very good plants in pots with the following three being selected – Kirin, Aye Kommura and Miyagino.

There were excellent trusses of rhododendrons. Simon won the exhibit of the night with Cornubia. Others of note were – Bill's Takasayo, Murray's *emasculum* and *spinuliferum*, Barry's Melba and Alan Kepert's *yak* x *arboreum campbelliae*, *veitchianum*, *cubittii ashcombe*, *arboreum campbelliae* and R.W.Rye.

Marcia Begg's vase of Tete-a tete daffodils was the non rhododendron winner of the night.

**Len Sloggett**

### The Species Column

*This is the first of a new, regular, series of articles on the Rhododendron species in the National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda written for the Newsletter by Alan Kepert. Members, and especially the editor, are very grateful to Alan for sharing his expertise with us. Ed.*

### **Rhododendron arboreum.**

Rhododendron *arboreum* is one of the best, and easiest to grow, of the rhododendron species. It is a long-living plant in Melbourne and Dandenong ranges' gardens and has been extensively used in hybridizing.

### **Name**

*arboreum* means "The tree rhododendron".

**Distribution**

A wide distribution on the foothills and lower slopes of the Himalayas; India, Northern Thailand, Burma, to Western China.

**Number in the N.R.G. Olinda:**

*arboreum*--An amazing 263 plants.

Subspecies *delavayi*--114

Subspecies *zeylanicum*--47

**Characteristics:**

The main characteristics of this species are the thick leathery leaves, the indumentum on the lower leaf surface, and the tight many-flowered truss (up to 20 flowers)

**Different Forms and Subspecies:**

Selected forms of *arboreum* include:

- "Bennett's Form" An old blood-red variety.
- "Sweet's Form"
- "Donvale" A good form grown by Jack O'Shannassy from seed collected in Kathmandu.
- "Sir Charles Lemon" A white-flowering form. The leaves have a chocolate-brown, seude-like indumentum.
- "Variety cinnamomeum" has pink flowers and a cinnamon-coloured indumentum.
- "Variety peramoenum" has very narrow leaves with a silvery indumentum. The blood-red flowers are generally smaller in a tight truss.

**Delavayi**

Now regarded as *arboreum ssp. delavayi*. This species differs from *arboreum* in its dark green veined leaves and thin spongy indumentum. The flowers are usually an intense deep red.

A form grown by the late Ted Woolrich can be seen in September at Cloudehill Nursery. The original plant is probably 80 years old. We have two plants of this in the N.R.G.

**Zeylanicum**

Originating from Sri Lanka, this subspecies differs from *arboreum* in its strongly bullate (puckered) leaves with recurved margins. The best forms have deep blood-red flowers.

**Where to See these Plants.**

At Olinda, the main *arboreum* bed is located off the main road about 100 metres past the Camellia Garden. If you continue North to the Mathias Road boundary there are about 50 plants of *delavayi* planted along the fence-line. Don't delay because the flowers will be finished by October.

**A.K.**

### Letter to the editor

The Editor

#### **A response to the article “Joys of Gardening” (July edition)**

As a new member I received my first newsletter and would like to congratulate you on your effort in keeping everyone informed.

I read with interest the difficulty of growing flowers with the birds that like to sample the sweet buds. Perhaps bird net over the bushes in the dormant stage and bird seed well away from the bushes could help. (Best of Luck!)

As a farmer in South Gippsland for many years I found even to plant trees one had to put up net guards to beat the rabbits, then, in the last few years I spent farming in Northern Victoria, hares were the problem.

Now I am retired and living in Williamstown I have possums to contend with. They love Camelias with Fuschias for desert, so it would seem to be succesful there's a lot of truth in this old saying..."No pain, no gain"

Best of Luck,  
George Winterton.

*The editor is grateful to receive feedback! In our garden Marcia and I contend with rosellas, possums, rabbits, foxes and wombats. For the most part we co-exist happily with them. The possums, mostly, leave our camellias, magnolias and fascias alone. The rosellas share our raspberries, blueberries and plums and prune the nothofagus but they do eat all the all the cherries and apples. The rabbits feed the foxes and prune the odd shrub. The foxes, generally, come at night, when our poultry is behind electric fencing but occasionally they surprise us, and the poultry. The wombats are no respecter of fences but, so far as we can see, do no damage.*

### OLINDA PRIMARY SCHOOL MEMBERS

The Olinda Primary School group have been putting down a variety of plant material this year.

Activities have included -

cuttings of *Rh. Saffron Queen*, *Princess Maude*, *fragmentissimum* and *tuba*.

Seed of *Daphne longaloba*

Rhizomes of *Lily of the Valley*.

Shortly they will be able to pot up their struck cuttings and after a settling down period they will take them home.

We need to decide on some form of display the children can be involved in at our approaching shows. Suggestions would be welcomed.

**Alan Walker**

## LOSS OF A GREAT PLANTSMAN

Oz Blumhardt, whom Murray McAlister and I were privileged to meet in New Zealand in 2003, passed away in July 2004.

We were saddened to hear of Oz's death, He was an internationally renowned plantsman.

He was an amazing man with exceptional knowledge of plants, including rhododendrons, camellias, vireyas and magnolias, plus a wide range of other plant varieties. He will be a great loss to horticulture.

Oz collected extensively, going to many countries where camellias, rhododendrons and vireyas grow naturally in the wild. One tree he found in Vietnam near the Chinese border with a great perfume, he named "Dang Kwang". He also collected in Borneo and New Guinea.

Oz developed camellias "Night Rider" and "Sleeping Beauty", vireyas "Saxon Glow" and "Saxon Blush", and rhododendron "Hot Flash", just to name a few.

Oz will be missed in horticulture in New Zealand.

**Bill Taylor.**

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

## Vireya Interest Group

In absolutely atrocious weather conditions, about 15 members met at Simon and Marcie Begg's.

It was reported:

(1) The NZ collection is holding at about 80% success rate "**Shepherd's Warning**," "**Aleksandr**", "**Goldfinger**", and *ericoides* have all put out early flower. Propagation and potting on into coir mix will be scheduled for spring.

(2) *warianum*, ex Lyn Craven is in full flower.

(3) The ABC Gardening Show on the last weekend of September, at the Caulfield Racecourse will feature vireya grower Anton Vandervyl from NSW. Anton has a large selection of his own hybrids, as well as some sourced from S. Saperstein, and G. Snell which he will offer for sale. The show runs from Sep 30 to Oct 5, and is located in the grandstand.

Because of this opportunity, and the pressure of ARS commitments with our stand at Caulfield, the National Council Convention, and the Azalea and Rhododendron Shows, it was agreed to waive the next meeting of the vireya group in favour of visiting the above show.

(4) Simon and Marcia showed slides of their US trip; in particular to the American Rhododendron Society Species Garden, and to that of White Smith and Lucy Sorenson in Portland. Simon had already mailed vireya seed home from the Species Garden for us to propagate. It appears that sp. *radians* is beginning to sprout - a nice bonus.

(5) John O'Hara brought a specimen of petaloid *beyerinckianum*, and Margaret

Johnson, a magnificent spray of *loranthiflorum*, which was subsequently displayed at the August general meeting, and won the best species of the evening.

(6) Ken Cathie's draft manuscript of Australian Hybrids includes a comprehensive listing of vireya hybrids, and, when published, will include many photographs thanks to the expertise of Ron Moodeycliffe. It should become quite a useful adjunct for "vireyaholics".

Footnote:

We have also made contact with Russel and Sharon Costin, from Limpinwood Gardens NSW, who are establishing a mail order vireya business - hopefully by the end of October.

Their web address then will be: [www.vireyasonline.com.au](http://www.vireyasonline.com.au)  
The Costins are members of the ARS, so I will keep you informed when more details are available.

**M. McAlister**

**ASIATIC SPECIES FOR SALE , 2004**

*Members who wish to purchase plants should contact a Committee member at National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda, on any Tuesday morning*

Aberconwayii	Elecantulum	Lindleyi	Rhabdotum
Adenopodium	Elliottii	Ledoides	Sapa
Arboreum	Eximium	Lilliflorum	Scopulorum
Augfast			Scottianum
	Fastigiatum	Morii	Sesteranum
	Formosum	Moulmainense	
Bureavii	Fortunei	Miroleucum	Trichocladum
Brevinerve	Fauriei		Triflorum
		Nakaharae	Tatsienense
Camelliiflorum	Glaucophyllum	Niveum	Thomsonii
Carolinianum		Neriiflorum	
Crassum	Horlickianum	Nuttallii	Valentinianum
Ciliicalyx			Veitchianum
Chrysomanicum	Irroratum	Oreotrephes	
	Polka Dot	Orthocladum	Wardii
Dalhousiae	Irroratum Yellow		
Dendricola		Pemakoense	Yunnanense
Decorum	Johnstoneanum	Prunifolium	
Desquamatum			
	Lanigerum	Racemosum	

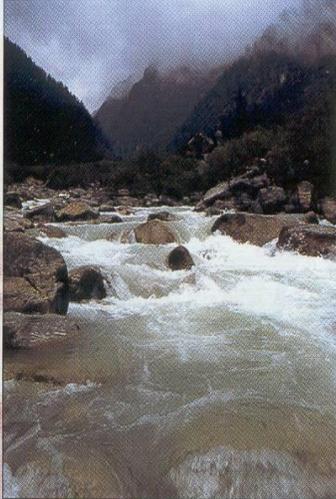
**ASIATIC HYBRIDS FOR SALE, 2004**

*Members who wish to purchase plants should contact a Committee member at National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda, on any Tuesday morning.*

Aust. Sunset	Dunloe Tasha	Nuttallii x Lindleyi
Aust. Cameo		President Roosevelt
Aust. Gold		Pink Pearl
Apricot Road	Fortunei x Wardii	Perri Cutten
Angel	Fragrantissimum	Ramapo
Apricot Sherbet	Florence Mann	Rosa Harrison
	Goldfinger	Ring of Fire
	Ginny Gee	Snow Cap
	Grumpy	Saffron Queen
Bramerton Bronze	Happy	Seta
Bastion	Hotei	St. Breward
Beauty of Littleworth	Ilam Cerise	Tilly Aston
Corolinianum	Ilam Violet	
Cunninghams White		Tristan Esposito
Cream Crest		White Pearl
Canada	Janet Blair	Williamsianum Hybrid
	June Bee	Whitneys Orange
	Karen Triplett	Wee Bee
Donvale Cherry	Kiwi Magic	Yak x Bureavii
Donvale Pearl	Lady Primrose	Yak x Erioginum
Donvale Ruby	Macabeanum	Yak x Zeylanicum
	Markeetas Prize	
	Midnight	
	Marion x Shilsonii	

# Hooker's journeys in Sikkim and Nepal 1848-9

CHINA (TIBET)



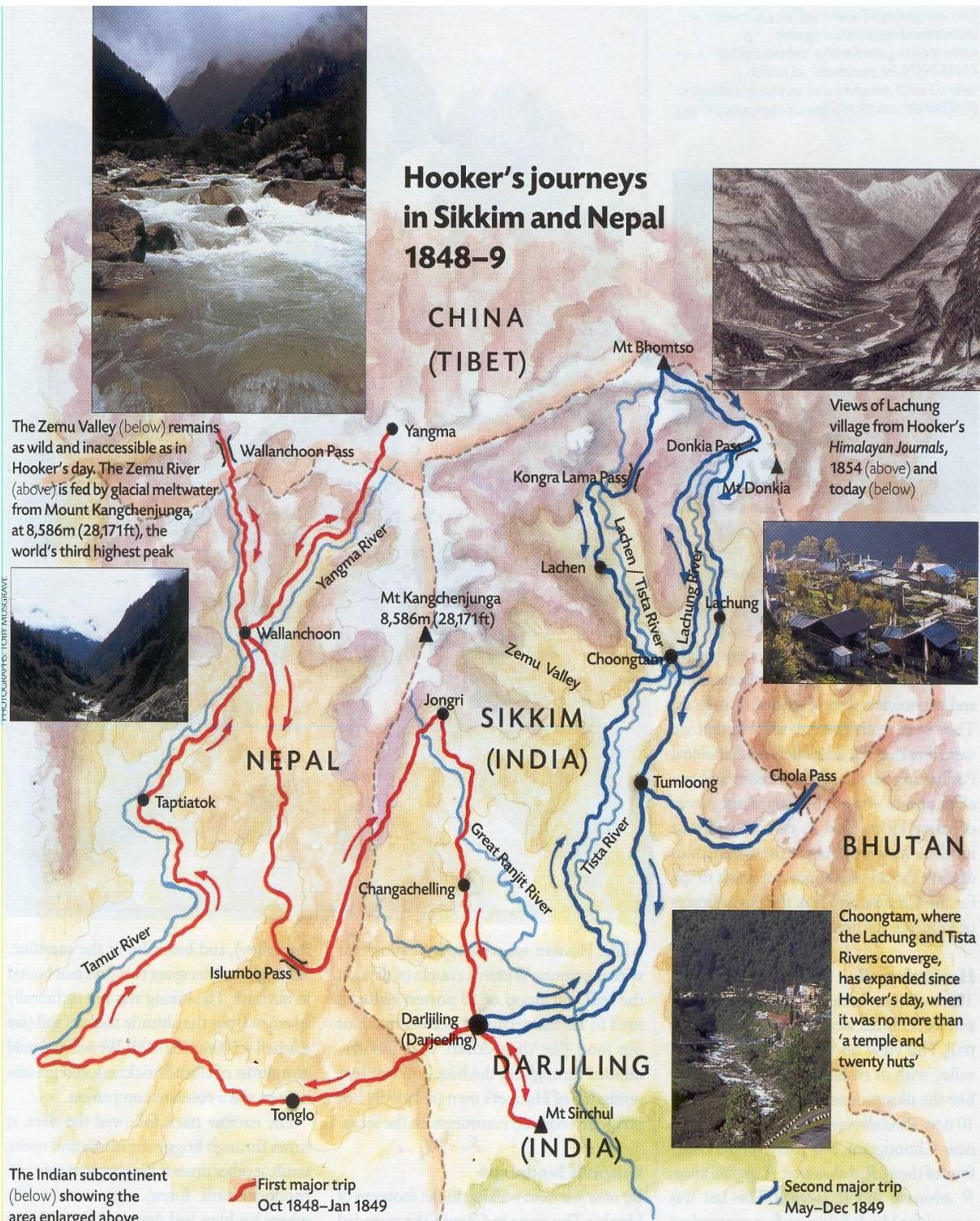
Views of Lachung village from Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*, 1854 (above) and today (below)



The Zemu Valley (below) remains as wild and inaccessible as in Hooker's day. The Zemu River (above) is fed by glacial meltwater from Mount Kangchenjunga, at 8,586m (28,171ft), the world's third highest peak

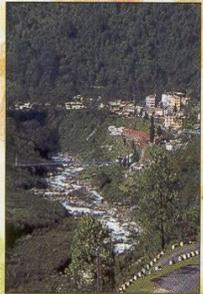


PHOTOGRAPHS: TORBEN FRIEDRICHSEN

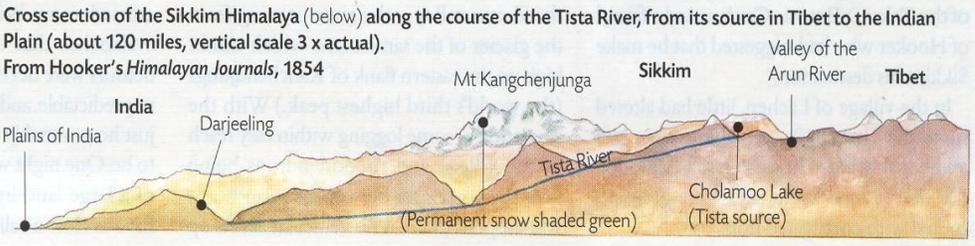


BHUTAN

Choongtam, where the Lachung and Tista Rivers converge, has expanded since Hooker's day, when it was no more than 'a temple and twenty huts'



The Indian subcontinent (below) showing the area enlarged above



Cross section of the Sikkim Himalaya (below) along the course of the Tista River, from its source in Tibet to the Indian Plain (about 120 miles, vertical scale 3 x actual). From Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*, 1854

PHOTOGRAPHS: TORBEN FRIEDRICHSEN

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SIR JOSEPH HOOKER

*Reproduced from "The Garden", Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society, October 2003 with kind permission of its editors.*

SIR JOSEPH HOOKER: botanical child prodigy, the second Director of Kew, friend and confidant of Darwin, and one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's most revered, intrepid (but relatively little-known) botanist-adventurers has fired my imagination since 1997, when I researched Hooker's travels for *The Plant Hunters* – a book I co-wrote. In 1848, he became the first Westerner to enter the then remote, mysterious Himalayan mountain kingdom of Sikkim.

Here, for nearly two years, he had a series of hair-raising (and meticulously recorded) adventures, the subject of his best-selling *Himalayan Journals*, published in 1854.

"Sikkim", he wrote, "consists of a mass of mountainous spurs, forest-clad up to 12,000 feet, there are no flat valleys or plains in the whole country." Perhaps the most important of the 6,000 specimens he returned with were 28 new and spectacular *Rhododendron* species, that kick-started "rhododendromania" and provided the early hybridisers with some of their most valuable parent plants.

I promised myself in 1997 that I would walk in Hooker's footsteps, and in spring this year, together with co-authors Chris Gardner and Will Musgrave and another friend, I was finally able to go to Sikkim.

Hooker had carefully chosen this area of "ground untrodden by traveller or naturalist" as he wanted to compare high-altitude species from low latitudes with the high-latitude, low altitude flora he had seen while assistant ship's doctor and botanist on James Clark Ross' Antarctic expedition (1839-43). Sikkim – mountainous yet only a few degrees above the Tropic of Cancer – was perfect.

### **Delayed entry**

On 16 April 1848, the 30 year old Hooker arrived in Darjeeling (now Darjiling). Sikkim remained an independent kingdom at this point, and the Rajah or king, who did not want Hooker in this country, delayed his entry until 27 October.

Bureaucracy has not changed much in more than 150 years: Sikkim is now an Indian State (it became the 22<sup>nd</sup> in the early 1970s), but permission to visit the north remains difficult to secure. Even with the invaluable assistance of Vinod, our Mr Fix-it, it took us seven months (a month longer than Hooker, who had the Viceroy of India working on his behalf!). Final assent was only granted the day we landed in Delhi.

In late April, and dripping with official forms, permits and visas, we arrived in the state capital, Gangtok. We knew Sikkim would have changed greatly since Hooker's day, but our first experience of the natural landscape was not encouraging: at Tsomglo Lake, which we had envisioned as a placid expanse of water mirroring the mountains, encircled by verdant wildflower

meadow, we were met by hawkers offering yak rides, packs of tourists and fast-food stalls, and a crooked, forlornly-hopeful sign informing visitors that this was, in fact, a holy site.

### **Navigable route**

Travelling north, we mostly followed the route that Hooker took – here are only a certain number of navigable ways through the mountain valleys – riding the single-track metalled roads in a Tata jeep, frequently driven alarmingly close to the 1,000-m (3,300-ft) plus drops that lined the way. This was far easier than the footpaths Hooker had to scramble up, but the scenery lost something seen through clouds of exhaust fumes from ancient lorries and 4x4s in front.

Yet this is nit-picking. North Sikkim is amazingly beautiful: the landscape is majestic, and except for some deforestation, there has been little visible environmental damage compared with other parts of the Himalaya, such as Nepal. The limited degradation is partly due to the precipitous landscape which naturally limits population pressures, but is mostly due to the relative prosperity resulting from large Government grants post-statehood, and Sikkim's position as buffer state between India and Chinese-occupied Tibet. There is a large military presence, and much land remains "off limits".

### **Military staging post**

Half a day's drive and three checkpoints later, we reached Choongtam, a village at the confluence of the Lachung and Tista (also known as the Lachen) rivers. The grassy triangle where Hooker camped is still here (picture opposite), but the village has since grown from "a temple and twenty houses" to a staging post for the military and Indian tourists heading for Lachung. The frequent friendly-but-odd looks we received suggest that Europeans remain an uncommon sight.

Of the area around Choongtam, Hooker wrote, "the scenery much resembles that of Switzerland... especially in the great contrast between the southern and northern exposures, the latter being always clothed with a dense vegetation."

At a final checkpoint, we were interviewed by the local military commander and two soldiers were seconded to "help" us. They were really there to see whether we were breaking the restriction on the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) receiver and satellite phone – the most important pieces of safety kit we had in case of a serious incident. We were forbidden to take them, in case we should take it into our heads to spy for the Chinese and leak the co-ordinates of *Rhododendron cinnabarinum*.

### **Hooker's trail**

The road soon became a narrow dirt track and we really felt we were now on Hooker's trail. The view up the steep, conifer-clad valley with its rushing torrent was exactly like the illustrations in his *Journals*. Of the 10 new *Rhododendron* species Hooker found near Choongtam, our party spotted only four of them: *R. dalhousieae*, *R. griffithianum*, *R. arboreum* and *R. falconeri*. This last was named for Hugh Falconer, Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Gardens and a friend of Hooker who had suggested that he make Sikkim his destination.

In a village of Lachen, little had altered since the late 1840s, and there were still traditional wooden houses on stilts, although the newer ones were of concrete blocks roofed with corrugated iron.

Like Hooker, we were to have problems with provisions. Within a couple of days on the trail, our troop of 18 porters reduced itself to 12, the departees stealing much of our food. The "dirty dozen" were bloody minded throughout the hike, and we were reminded of Hooker's own (decidedly not politically-correct) comments on the locals.

## Unspoilt landscape

By now we were walking in the footsteps of Hooker. The route to Green Lake ascended the Zemu valley – the river coming from the glacier of the same name which climbs high up the eastern flank of Kanchendjunga (the world's third highest peak). With the exception of some logging within easy reach of the village and rhododendrons being felled by porters for firewood, the landscape was unspoilt (there is no vehicular access up the valley), and beautiful in the sunshine, although we later spent two days tent bound in blizzards. The hiking was not technically advanced, but the altitude took its toll (we reached 4,500m/15,000ft). We suffered mild symptoms of altitude sickness, and breathlessness was a constant companion.

The narrow track followed the river, at times through boggy meadows and rocky scrub, at other times scaling spurs of pine and rhododendron forest, and occasionally, where landslips had destroyed the path, we crossed snow bridges – the remnants of avalanches that covered the river. These detours were nerve-wracking; the snow was unpredictable, and looking up, one could see just how unstable the valley sides continued to be. One night we heard the booming roar of a large landslip, but thankfully did not have a close call as Hooker: “My tent was pitched near the base of the cliff, and so high above the river, that I had thought it beyond the reach of danger; but one morning I found that a large fragment of granite had been hurled during the night to my very door,” he matter-of-factly stated.

### Hooker's rhododendrons

“Rhododendrons occupy the most prominent place, clothing and mountain slopes with a deep green mantle glowing with bells of brilliant colours; of the eight or ten species growing here, every bush was loaded with as great a profusion of blossoms as are their northern congeners in our English gardens”, is how Hooker described the upper Lachung valley in June.

To our joy, we had timed it right, and further up the valley, we found Hooker's rhododendrons. I had high expectations, but seeing them in the wild was even more spectacular than I had ever imagined. Here, beside the track was a perfect specimen of yellow-flowered *R. campylocarpum*, and when we had finished drooling, around the corner were the red, waxy bells of *R. cinnabarinum* (above). Nearby, was a single specimen of *R. dahousieae*, a species often growing as an epiphyte with creamy-yellow flowers hung from a branch over the river (always on the other side!). Often, the deep green of the pine forest was shattered by the bright scarlet of *R. thomsonii*, which it has passed on to many hybrid offspring. Walking through the forest of *R. hodgsonii* with their twisted, moss-encrusted trunks above us “dripping” trusses of pink flowers, glimpses of the valley side opposite revealed solid masses of colour.

Even at 4,500m (15,000ft), a dawn walk yielded up tiny *R. anthopogon*, its delicate sell-pink petals rimed with ice. The thrill and delight of finding such beauty gave me a small insight into just how elated Hooker must have felt when he first encountered “his” rhododendrons. We did well; our tally of 24 almost doubled Hooker's of 13 species for the valley, although one or two such as *R. campanulatum* were not his discoveries.

It was not just rhododendrons in flower: there were carpets of *Primula denticulata* and *P. gracilipes*, and bizarre-looking *Arisaema griffithii*, *A. propoingquum* and *A. nepenthoides*. We also found *Primula sikkimensis*, *Euphorbia sikkimensis* and *Betula utilis* – all “Hooker's”.

It is an over-used word, but following in Joseph Hooker's footsteps and finding his rhododendrons was indeed an "awesome" experience. But I have also come away with a sense of awe for the man. I made the trip with the advantages of motor vehicles, antibiotics, GPS, satellite phone, maps, hi-tech clothing and camping equipment – and three good friends.

I have to admire Hooker's self-reliance and self-determination to spend nearly two years, largely alone, as an unwelcome visitor in an unknown and unmapped country, armed (by today's standards) with primitive equipment, and still to achieve so much

### **The Malaysian Rhododendrons and the Taxonomic Revolution**

David G Leach, No. Madison, Ohio. Originally published in the Quarterly Bulletin of the American Rhododendron Society, January 16, 1961, Vol. 15 No. 1.

*This article, and the next, contemporary reviews of Dr. Sleumer's major contributions to knowledge of vireyas, are reproduced from "Vireya Rhododendrons", an anthology of articles from the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society 1954-1998, with kind permission of E White Smith, Lucie Sorensen-Smith and the Society.*

*The current interest in Vireyas and Australians' good fortune to be able to grow them in their gardens makes frequent reference to Dr Sleumer's book essential. Dr Sleumer's biographical details, supplied by Frank Doleshy, are very interesting. Ed.*

In the era of Victorian conservatories and hothouses the so-called Javanese Rhododendrons had a great vogue. The Mauve Decade produced from the arched glasshouses of the wealthy innumerable hybrids which have now passed out of existence and today there are only a few collections in either Europe or America. The species from which they came have remained, by and large, a group of mystery, intriguing and baffling to those who have sought a systematic understanding of their distribution and botanical relationships.

The group includes many scaly leaved Rhododendrons of extraordinary interest. The "lost" species with the largest flowers in the entire genus, *R. toveranae*, belongs here. It was discovered in the Horseshoe Mountains of New Guinea by Hunstein in 1884. The fragrant white flowers were seven inches in diameter and about five inches in length.

In 1959 the Rev. Mr Cruttwell of the Anglican Mission collected it on Mt. Dayman and it is once again in cultivation. *R. superbum* has great five-inch Carnation-scented pink flowers. *R. maius* and *R. archboldianum* are also outstanding ornamentals among those with large fragrant white or pale pink blossoms. *Aurigeranum*, *zoelleri* and *brassii* are conspicuous in the group with yellow to orange flowers. *R konori* is highly regarded by Dr. H Sleumer at the Rijksherbarium in Leiden and it has been successfully grafted on ponticum understock so that it, too, is now in cultivation.

This whole class of Rhododendrons springs suddenly back into the limelight as a result of several expeditions to New Guinea in the last couple of years and the subsequent publication of Dr. Sleumer's masterly classification of the more than 250 species.

It seems unlikely that the influx of new species from recent explorations in New Guinea will contribute to gardens in the northeastern United States, although some may prove to be acquisitions for the mildest parts of the Pacific coastal region. A few originate as low as 400 feet but the majority of the New Guinea Rhododendrons come from the middle elevations and subalpine forest below 13,500 feet of the high mountains. Perhaps the small group which is found on open grasslands a thousand feet or more below the snowfields, such as *R. stonori* and *R. saxifragoides*, which are truly alpine, will be amendable.

The required adaptation is formidable. I scouted some of these Rhododendrons in nature in the Indonesian islands and in Malaya, Cambodia and Viet Nam last spring. In the equatorial climate there is little variation

in temperature winter and summer, and almost equal day length the year around. In New Guinea the frost line is between 7,000 and 8,000 feet on some mountains, according to Dr L J Brass of the Archbold Expedition, and frosts occur there every clear morning throughout the island. In the warm greenhouse in America these Rhododendrons grow and flower more or less continuously throughout the year.

The recent publication in Indonesia of Dr Sleumer's monumental study of the Rhododendrons in Malaysia probably foreshadows a complete reshuffling of our whole classification of the genus. It seems likely that we shall once again be thinking in terms of subgenera, sections and subsections in a change that is almost inevitable on the basis of logic and usefulness.

The species collector had better begin thinking right now of Rhododendron also as just one subgenus in a group of subgenera which includes *Azaleastrum*, *Anthodendron* and *Hymenanthes*. There will be some familiar names in the sections and subsections of the revised classification but the fraternity had better brace themselves as well for such strangers as "*Choniastrum*," "*Viregya*," "*Pseudovireya*," "*Phaeovireya*" and many others that sound equally alien.

In 1958 Dr Sleumer published *The Genus Rhododendron L. in Indochina and Siam* in which he first mentioned the discovery in Sumatra of a non-scaly Rhododendron in the Irroratum series, a new species subsequently described as *R. atjehense*, taking its place with Miquel's *R. korthalsii* on the island. In this same publication Dr. Sleumer demonstrated that elepidote Rhododendrons formerly regarded as exclusively southeastern Asian in their distribution extend as well into the Malay Peninsula. Species allied to *R. javanicum* occur all the way from Indonesia into Viet Nam.

Perhaps most surprising of all, the group of which *R. vacciniodes* is typical covers a vast region from the eastern Himalaya and southwestern China eastward into Malaysia and even into New Guinea, a tremendous sweep of almost 4,000 miles.

All of this changes entirely our ideas of the distribution of Rhododendrons. In *The Species of Rhododendron*, published in 1930, which has formed the general conception of the genus, the Rhododendrons of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia were simply omitted, and those of Thailand were passed over lightly. The editor observed, "It has been judged expedient to reserve the Malayan and New Guinea species for future consideration."

Now it is apparent that the Maddenii group extends into North Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand and that a massive reduction in the number of species, from 51 to 22, is in order. Now we know that the beautiful scarlet flowered *R. delavayi* represents the Arboreum series in both Thailand and Indochina, and that the Fortunei group, through *R. serotinum*, extends southward and eastward into Thailand, where, incidentally, this species is described as blooming in April. The Rhododendrons in the class we now call the Irroratum series acquire six new species which occur in Viet Nam, the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. Rhododendrons of the Lacteum series are found in Viet Nam. Rhododendrons of the Stamineum series occur in an immense area embracing Burma, southern China, Formosa, Indochina and Thailand. Even a species of the primitive Falconeri group inhabits North Viet Nam.

The Azaleas of the *Obtusum* subseries (subgenus *Anthodendron*, section *Tsutsusi*, in Dr. Sleumer's treatment) occur in Thailand, Laos, Viet Nam and in the Philippines.

It is apparent now for the first time that there is a gigantic overlap in the distribution of Rhododendrons from their two evolutionary cradles on continental Asia and in Malaysia, and that their geographic and taxonomic relationships are quite different than we had supposed.

Dr. Sleumer has followed this revelation with the publication this spring of *the Genus Rhododendron in Malaysia* in which, for the first time, the so called Javanicum Rhododendrons, primarily from Indonesia and New Guinea, and the group which we now know as the Vaccinioides series are gathered into an orderly and logical classification under section *Vireya*. This monumental work provides a systematic identification of the Malaysian Rhododendrons encompassing 261 species and 55 varieties and forms of which 96 series and 29 varieties are newly described from recent collections by members of the Archbold Expedition, the Dutch expeditions and others in New Guinea, and by Eyma in the central Celebes.

It would scarcely be possible to exaggerate the significance of Dr. Sleumer's work. Until the present time more than a quarter of the known species in the genus have been lost in limbo, their relationship unknown and the whole group divorced from the remaining three-quarters of the species which inhabit the earth.

Now, at last, we have an ordered identification of the Indonesian and New Guinea species in a system that encompasses all of the world's Rhododendrons. Their relationships are clarified and the whole genus shifts into a new perspective in distribution, taxonomy and phylogeny.

For the first time we can say that there are about 925 known Rhododendron species in existence and assign each to its proper place in a botanical classification. A taxonomic revolution is impending and we should welcome the enlightenment that will accompany it.

I can not conclude this brief tribute to Dr. Sleumer's work without remarking on some of the names he has selected for his new species. Among them are *R. goodenoughii*, *R. obscurum* and *R. perplexum*. Dr. Sleumer is a taxonomist with a twinkle in his eye.

### **Book Review: An account of Rhododendron in Malesia**

*Also reproduced with kind permission of White Smith and Lucie Sorensen-Smith and the American Rhododendron Society Ed.*

H.Sleumer. 202 pp. Illus. Published by P. Noordhoff Ltd. P.O. Box 39, Groningen, The Netherlands.

The review is by Frank Doleshy, Seattle, Washington and originally appeared in the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society October 1966, Vol. 20 No. 4.

For 36 years *The Species of Rhododendron*, edited by J. B. Stevenson, has been the standard work of reference for those Rhododendrons which occur in Europe, America, Japan and the more temperate parts of mainland Asia. Revisions and studies by various botanists and horticulturists have expanded this information, and it can hardly be said that the Rhododendrons from these lands suffer any lack of attention. However, the remainder of the genus, ie, the Malesian Rhododendrons, remain practically unknown to most growers. 283 presently-recognised species, or about 1/3 of the world-wide total, come from this great area, which extends from the Malay Peninsula east to the Solomon Islands and from the Philippines south through New Guinea to Australia.

Fully organised and comprehensive information about these latter species becomes available for the first time in Dr. Sleumer's new book, which should take its place beside *The Species of Rhododendron* in the library of every serious grower. Although a professional study, it is easily usable by the amateur, who will especially appreciate the numerous drawings and photographs. The language is English.

From popular literature, some growers have doubtless picked up an inadequate and stereotyped impression of Malesian Rhododendrons and are not aware of such plants as the following: One with large, thick, rounded leaves, easily mistaken at first glance for *R. mallotum* or *R. falconeri*, but with carnation-scented flowers, and with lepidote (scaly) instead of hairy leaves. Another lepidote which looks like a creeping tangle of club-moss, with deep crimson trumpet-shaped flowers at each terminal. Another with flowers more than four inches long, perhaps considerably more. (Or, if you insist on a pure golden-yellow, only about half that long).

Unfortunately, these are not plants which most of us can set out in the front garden. The numerous species from 10,000 to 14,000-foot elevations withstand much frost but are accustomed to exotic patterns of season, rainfall and day-length. Dr. Sleumer does not encourage any hope

for outdoor planting in the northern parts of Europe or the United States, but he suggests that this may be practical in coastal areas of California and the southeastern states or in Hawaii. The northern grower, then, can only expect to use these *Rhododendron* as glasshouse subjects or as parents for hybridising, and he may wonder if he should remain interested. A partial answer is supplied by experience in Seattle. Grown from small cuttings in an ordinary cool-house, *R. gracilentumi* flowered in 3 ½ years, when only a few inches tall, and *R. rarum* followed a year later. The flowers are different from each other but, in each case, could be said to look like a small, brightly-coloured bloom of *R. cinnabarinum*. Successful and very beautiful flowering of other species at Boskoop is reported in an article by F. Schneider, published in the April, 1966 issue of this Bulletin, page 107. Dr. Sleumer emphasises the potential of these plants as hybrid parents, and it seems that the sky is indeed the limit. With infusion of more tolerance for temperate seasons and day lengths, as from *Lapponicum*s or *Lepidotum*s, we can start toward hardy lepidote crosses, which may look like the *Thomsonii* or *Neriiflorum* groups, and there is reason to expect a range of yellow colours, which outshines the daffodils.

Some doubts have been expressed concerning the ability of these plants to mate with the Asiatic lepidotes. But, with only 30 to 40 of the 283 Malesian species introduced as yet (most of them within the past few years) it seems premature to suppose that there are any serious crossing difficulties. [A hope, sadly, not realized- Ed] Returning to the book itself, further comparison with *the Species of Rhododendron* suggests itself. The older work was a major achievement. However, because of limitations of knowledge when written, little could be said about ecology, relationships between species and groups of species, or the range of natural variation within a species. The greatest deficiency, perhaps, was the inability to provide a botanical key to the somewhat arbitrary groupings, or “Series”, of species.

Dr. Sleumer’s treatment of the other 1/3 of the genus is particularly strong in these respects. Notes on ecology, plant habit and flower colour are explicitly to an extent seldom seen, having benefited from his own field observation in Malaya, Sabah (North Borneo), Luzon, and several parts of New Guinea. Equally important is the inclusion of keys, which enable the user to start with flowering material of an unknown *Rhododendron* and work his way down through Section and Subsection to the names of the species. These keys cover the entire hierarchy of decisions which are required for the identification of a particular *Rhododendron*, and they are part of the system which Dr. Sleumer has developed for the entire *Rhododendron* genus (first published in 1949). Unfortunately, most US growers are not yet familiar with this system, and they therefore follow the old procedure of guessing at “Series”, as a point of departure for further efforts at identification. In short, this monograph is essential to the serious *Rhododendron* grower, and it is to be hoped that current knowledge of the non-Malesian *Rhododendrons* will soon be brought together into one or more comparable volumes.

### **About Dr H Sleumer**

Dr Sleumer, pharmacist and botanist, was born in Germany, 1906. Ph. D., Freiburg, Germany, 1932. Assistant, Botanical Museum, Berlin-Dahlem, 1933-1949, Professor of Botany and Pharmacognosy, Berlin University, 1946-1949. Same position at the National University of Tucumán, Argentina, 1949-1953. Botanical trips in southeastern Brazil, in the high Andes from south Bolivia to Argentina (Mendoza), and in Patagonia. Staff Member, Flora Malesiana Foundation, 1953-1956. Since then, Senior Curator, Rijksherbarium, Leyden, The Netherlands. Expeditions to the Philippines and New Guinea in 1961-1962, and to Thailand, Malaya and Borneo (Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah) in 1963. Taxonomic studies have included Ericales, Proteaceae, Flacourtiaceae, and various minor groups.

## The Editor's journey to Portland and Seattle

Marcia and I have just returned from a six week trip to Oregon and Washington State, USA, British Columbia and Alberta, Canada, Alaska, USA, and the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone, Wyoming USA.

The scenery in the Cascades, Oregon and Washington State, the Canadian Rockies, the fjords and Donali National Park, Alaska and the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone, Wyoming is so stunning as to be almost beyond description. Highlights included a trip by train, "The Rocky Mountaineer" from Vancouver to Calgary and by boat along the "inside passage" from Vancouver to Whittier. We return with memories that will last our lifetimes and several thousand photographs to make sure they do.

Along the way we visited many gardens and nurseries as well as seeing many annuals and perennials, common in Australia, in their native habitat.

Of particular interest to rhododendron growers were our visits to Portland and Seattle. I ought to mention also Butchart gardens on Vancouver Island.

We were privileged to stay with E White Smith and Lucie Sorensen - Smith at their nursery Bovees in Portland and Fred and Anne Whitney in Kent near Seattle.

White and Lucie are vireya specialists with, possibly, the largest collection of vireya species in USA. They are editors of "Vireya Rhododendrons, an Anthology of Articles of the American Rhododendron Society 1954-1958". Many of the articles are written by Australian and New Zealand authors. In this Newsletter, with their permission, I have reproduced two contemporary reviews [1961 and 1966] of Dr Sleumers seminal classification and description of vireyas. This builds on Lyn Cravens talk to our April meeting [see the May, 2004 newsletter]. Fred and Anne are both rhododendron experts. Fred is president of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and is guest speaker at the Australian Rhododendron Congress in October. Fred introduced Marcia and I to the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Seattle. It is fair to say RSF main interest is Asiatic rhododendron and azalea species. It has a magnificent rhododendron and azalea collection and resources to maintain it. Its resources extend to sending executives on collection trips. It also has a very impressive vireya collection and propagation equipment very similar to Andrew Raper's. State of the art.

Winter temperatures in Portland and Seattle are often significantly below freezing so vireyas are, of necessity, grown in pots and protected from the cold in winter. Subsection Maddenia rhododendrons are also not hardy.

Unfortunately I did not bring with me a list of species grown at NRG Olinda nor the vireya species recently acquired from New Zealand and Lyn Craven in Canberra. So I had no list of what we are lacking at Olinda. Marcia and I were on holiday rather than a systematic study tour.

Both the Species Foundation and Bovees collections of vireyas are magnificent. Both maintain meticulous records of the source of their plants and all the pots are labelled in detail. It is a shame that quarantine restrictions in Australia make the import of cuttings and plants from USA impossible.

Among the vireya species we noted in flower at Bovees were *R. rubineiflorum*, *R. gracilentum* [a parent of "St. Valentine"], both rose pink and red, *R. suaveolens*, *R. praetervisum*, *R. stenophyllum*

and *R. macgregoriae*. White and Lucy also had a magnificent selection of hybrids. At RSF vireyas we noted, in flower, were *inter alia*, *R. celebicum*, *R. burtii*, *R. santapau*, *R. rushforthi*, *R. variosum* [was *lochiae*] and *R. calignis*. I photographed these. I attach some photographs to the email edition.

Marcia and I visited gardens, not always or even usually rhododendron gardens, nearly everywhere we went on our trip. We enjoyed them all. I must give special mention to Butchart Gardens near Victoria on Vancouver Island. It was celebrating its centenary as a garden this year. It is open all the year around. This was our second visit to Butchart. The first was in May, 5 years ago, when rhododendrons were in full bloom. In mid July, this year, summer perennials and annuals, and roses, were in peak season. It was simply stunning. All the world knew it, too. There were as many tour buses in the car park as Olinda would see cars in its car park in a whole week in peak season. No wonder Butchart can afford 50 trained gardeners, with a further 30 in peak season!

**Simon Begg**

**Urgent Reminder**  
**Australian Rhododendron Society Annual General Meeting, and Congress Saturday, and Sunday, 16 and 17 October 2004 at Olinda**

At the beginning of September there are **less than 30 registrants**. This is awful! More Victorian Branch members went, last year, to Tasmania than will come to Olinda Gardens at its peak. The program is excellent and interesting. **No boring speeches**. Garden visits to stunning private gardens. A winery Sunday lunch. Enjoy interstate and overseas visitors. There is a dinner. The original invitation is set out below again.

**Ed**

**AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY**

**VICTORIAN BRANCH (INC.A5896Z)**

The Victorian Branch would like to extend a warm invitation to all garden lovers to join them in Melbourne on the weekend of October 16 and 17. The event is the gathering of all members of the A.R.S. for their yearly celebration and A.G.M.

The Branch will hold its monthly General Meeting at the Nunawading Horticultural Centre, Jolimont Road, Nunawading, on Friday evening, October 15. There will be a Guest Speaker, Door prizes and Supper will be served at the end of the meeting. The meeting starts at 8.00pm and should conclude around 10.00pm and all are invited to attend.

On Saturday, October 16, the morning will be spent at the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda, morning tea and lunch will be provided. The afternoon will be a visit to a large and beautiful private garden in the area. In the evening, the A.G.M. and Dinner will be held at the Knox Club in Wantirna, where a 3 course Dinner and soft drinks will be provided. Alcoholic beverages will be available from the Bar at own cost.

On Sunday, October 17, the morning will be taken up with visits to private gardens. Lunch will be at a Yarra Valley Winery.

The weekend should conclude around 4.00pm.

Any queries can be directed to the Secretary, Carole Quinn at [caroleq@Bigpond.com](mailto:caroleq@Bigpond.com) or P.O. Box 524, Emerald. Vic. 3782. Telephone number is 0500 848 000.

The cost per person for the weekend for Early Bird Registration (by August 15, 2004), is \$100.00 per person. After this date the cost will be \$110.00 per person, registrations close Sept. 15, 2004.

## REGISTRATION FORM

**Name/s:** ..... and .....

**Address:** .....

.....(Tel. No.) .....

**Special Requirements:** e.g. Dietary, etc. ....

.....

**Own Transport** Yes / No

**Transport Required** Yes / No

**Method of payment:** Cheque / Visa / Mastercard

Card No..... Expiry date .....

Name on card.....

**AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY - Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)**

**NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Annual General Meeting of the Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z), shall be held on Friday, November 19, 2004, at the Whitehorse Horticultural Centre, 84 Jolimont Road, Forest Hill (Melway Ref: 62 G4), commencing at 8.00pm.

The business of the meeting shall be:

- a . to confirm the Minutes of the last preceding Annual General Meeting;
- b . to receive from the Committee, reports upon the transactions of the Branch during the last Financial year;
- c . to elect Officers of the Branch, and the Ordinary Members of the Committee;
- d . to receive and consider the Statements of Income and Expenditure and Assets and Liabilities for the last Financial Year;
- e . to elect an Auditor;
- f . to elect a Delegate to represent the Branch on the National Council for the two year period of 2004/2005 and 2005/2006;
- g . to conduct such other business of which notice is given in accordance with the Branch Rules.

All positions of Officers of the Branch shall fall vacant under Rule 22.(3) and are to be filled by election.

The Officers are: President, Vice-President (1), Vice-President (2), Secretary, Treasurer.

Three positions of Ordinary Committee Member Positions 7,8 & 9 fall vacant by rotation for three year periods in accordance with Rule 23.(3). Position No. 6 remains Vacant and is for a two year period. Retiring Officers and Ordinary Members of Committee are eligible to stand for re-election.

Please note that **ONLY** financial members of the Branch are allowed to vote at elections - **ONE Vote per Membership**.

Nominations of candidates for election shall be in writing, signed by two members of the Branch and accompanied by the written consent of the candidate, and shall be delivered to the Secretary of the Branch not less than seven (7) days before the Annual General Meeting.

**Note** that the Nominee, Proposer and Seconder must be financial members of the Branch at the time of signing.

Nominations, which close at 5.00pm on Friday, November 12, 2004, should be sent to the Secretary, A.R.S. - Victorian Branch (Inc.), P.O. Box 524, Emerald. 3782. Vic.

A copy of the "Statement of Purposes", and the "Rules of the Australian Rhododendron Society - Victorian Branch Incorporated (A5896Z)" may be obtained on application to the Branch Secretary.

An example of a suitable Nomination Form is attached to this Notice.

Carole V. Quinn,  
Honorary Secretary,  
A.R.S. - Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)

September 1, 2004.

**AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY - Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)**

Nomination for election of Officers and Ordinary Committee Members at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Friday, November 19, 2004.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

being a financial member of the Australian Rhododendron Society - Victorian Branch Inc.

(A5896Z), hereby Nominate \_\_\_\_\_

who is also a financial member, for the position of: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Secunder, who is also a financial member of the Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

This Nomination is dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (Proposer). \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (Secunder). \_\_\_\_\_

I accept nomination for the position indicated.

Signed (Person being Nominated) \_\_\_\_\_

Nominations close with the Secretary, A.R.S. - Vic. Branch Inc. (A5896Z),

P.O. Box 524, Emerald, 3782, Victoria, at 5.00pm on Friday, November 12, 2004

## FOR YOUR DIARY

- Friday, 17th September: General Meeting** — Nunawading **8.00 p.m.**  
**Topic:** TBA  
**Guest Speaker:** Andrew Raper
- Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup>—Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October: Azalea Show**— **1.00 p.m. Saturday**  
NRG Olinda **8.00 a.m. Sunday**
- Saturday, 9th October: Vireya Group Meeting:** -Cancelled
- Friday, 15th October: General Meeting** — Nunawading **8.00 p.m.**  
**Topic:** Recent Cox/ Hootman Expeditions  
**Guest Speaker:** Fred Whitney, President of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, Seattle
- Saturday, 16th—Sunday, 17th October: ARS Congress.** Starting **9 a.m.**  
**Guest Dinner Speaker:-** Fred Whitney.
- Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> October—Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November: Rhododendron Show** **1.00 p.m. Saturday**  
NRG Olinda **8.00 a.m. Sunday**  
**8.00 p.m.**
- Friday, 19 November: General Meeting**—Nunawading  
**Topic:**  
**Guest Speaker:**
- Friday, 17 December: General Meeting**—Nunawading **8.00 p.m.**  
**Topic:**  
**Guest Speaker:**

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