

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

September 2009

Published by the

Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)

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PROGRAM

General Meetings are held at the Municipal Horticultural Centre, Jolimont Rd, Vermont. Mel 62 G4 unless otherwise stated.

OCTOBER

SATURDAY 3RD AND SUNDAY 4TH - AZALEA SHOW in the Hall at the National Rhododendron Gardens. Show schedules are included in this newsletter. All members and friends are encouraged to enter the competition by bringing along any number of entries on Saturday morning. There will be experienced members available to help place them.

SATURDAY 3RD FROM 2.00PM – MEMBERS DAY. Bring along a friend for afternoon tea, see the garden in full spring splendour and peruse the show results. Please let us know if you are coming for catering purposes. Marcia Begg 9751 1610 Inge Hammer 9755 2176.

FRIDAY 16TH 8.00PM GENERAL MEETING: SPEAKER : DON TEESE from Yamina Rare Plants in Monbulk. Don will explain the intricacies of managing a family run nursery and display some of his treasures. Don's father Arnold Teese was very involved with the NRG in the 1960's.

FRIDAY 16TH – SUNDAY 18TH ARS CONFERENCE and National Council AGM in STH. AUSTRALIA. All welcome.

NOVEMBER

SAT. 31ST OCTOBER TO TUES. 3RD NOVEMBER, RHODODENDRON SHOW in Hall at National Rhododendron Gardens Show schedules are included in this newsletter. All members and friends are encouraged to enter the competition by bringing along any number of entries on Saturday morning. There will be experienced members available to help place them.

SATURDAY 14TH – VIREYA GROUP 10.00am at Andrew Raper's nursery. Meet at Rhodoglen Nursery, Georges Rd, The Patch, Mel 124 F5.

FRIDAY 20TH 8.00pm AGM. SPEAKER to be advised.

DECEMBER

SUNDAY 6TH CHRISTMAS FUNCTION : 12.00pm Lunch at Burrinja Café Art Gallery 351 Glenfern Rd Upwey. \$15 pp. Drinks extra. This is a subsidized social occasion for members and their partners and must be booked and paid by Friday 20th November. Marcia Begg 9751 1610, Inge Hammer 9755 2176

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has been a relatively quiet time for the last 2 months with not much happening. We had an outing to Leongatha flower show. The vireya group meeting was to see Olive Howard's garden, a beautiful garden with spectacular views and a wide range of exciting plants. Unfortunately both outings were poorly attended. It would be really nice to see a few more turn up. For the Friday evening meetings, I gave the July talk on liliiums and Barry Stagoll gave the August talk on his trip to Yunnan China. Both meetings were reasonably attended.

Alan Walker has been very ill with a serious arm infection caused by a slight altercation with a rose bush he was trying to prune. He is now slowly on the mend after a very long time in hospital. We hope he continues to improve and eventually makes a full recovery. Clearly rose bushes are dangerous things, safer to stick to rhododendrons – no thorns.

Parks is preparing new signage for the gardens and these have been reviewed by the ARS. We have also contributed photographs for the panels so look out for these some time in the future.

We are gearing up for the 6 week show at the NRG. This year we are involving some nurseries so that we can put on a more exciting show and they will also be selling plants. The show is also forming part of the Dandenongs' garden festival – “Inspiring in Spring” - a tourist initiative that has been organised this year from 12th September to 18th October. Please participate by coming to the Dandenongs to see all the attractions, including NRG, and by staging some entries at our Azalea Show. Don't forget the Rhododendron Show over Cup weekend.

My perception is that this has been a relatively cold winter in the Dandenongs with many daffodils still in full bloom now and the tulips not out as yet. Non the less, as I walk around the garden the signs of spring and awakening of new life have become more obvious in the last week or two with fat green buds on deciduous trees and shrubs and emerging stems of perennials. A few early peonies are in flower although most are still in early bud and colour beginning to show on a few early rhododendrons.

The big leaf rhododendrons should be coming into flower about this time but, at least in my backyard there are few flowers this year. Either because of the extreme heat last summer or because of lack of water. This prompted me to review the rainfall statistics I keep for our area – Sassafras in the Dandenong ranges. The long term average comes from Dunns Hill which is our closest official weather station and about 1 km from us.

Month	Long term av Dunns Hill	2008	2009
January	65.4	52	8.5
February	68.6	63.5	0
March	73.9	47	115
April	95.1	away, included in May number	104
May	85	137	40.5
June	88.5	90	71.5
July	85.3	92.5	136.5
August	85.7	160	87
September	84.9	56.5	90*
October	89.5	45.3	
November	102.5	172	
December	84.3	141	
Annual total	1010.7	1056.8	653**

* rainfall up to the 17th of September

** total up to the 17th September long term average for same period = 697.5

The statistics are quite interesting. These are not as bad as the alarmist media have been suggesting. In fact we do not seem to have been particularly deficient in rain overall. The period since March this year has been about 14% above average but the lack of rain in January and February this year stands out very boldly. Clearly this did not help our gardens or, for that matter, the fire risk. Non the less, if the more recent trend continues we might be seeing a return to more long term rainfall patterns. We can only hope.

The other weather event of note in the last few weeks has been the unusually strong winds. I know strong winds are relatively common in early spring but this year we seem to have had more than most years. Many areas have lost trees and power outages have been common and prolonged. I can personally testify from two very recent experiences that when a full grown mountain ash comes down onto rhododendron forest the result is a very good approximation to a clear felled paddock. Ah well, new found space to plant a lot of more recent cultivars.

Keep well and I hope to see more of you at our meetings

Michael Hammer

THE SPECIES COLUMN.

scabrifolium -Subsection Scabrifolia. And variety *spiciferum*. (see photo page 10).

Rhododendron *scabrifolium* is rarely seen in European gardens due to its early flowering and intolerance of frost. Fortunately, it is much better suited to the Australian climate and is reasonably tolerant of warm dry conditions, preferably with some shade. If you are looking for a low-growing, early rhododendron which is also resistant to lace-bug and petal-blight, this should be your choice. *Scabrifolium* tends to be straggly in the garden, so I would recommend the more compact variety *spiciferum*.

Name:

The name *scabrifolium* means rough leaves, and *spiciferum* refers to spiny stems.

Distribution:

Both varieties come from Yunnan (1500 – 3400 metres), on dry rocky slopes, with var. *spiciferum* having a more southerly distribution.

Characteristics:

The Scabrifolia Subsection is related to the Triflora and Virgata Subsections, but are distinguished by flowers coming from Axillary buds (except *spinuliferum*). Most other rhododendrons flower from terminal buds, which makes this group easy to identify. Var. *spiciferum* has much smaller and narrower leaves than *scabrifolium*. *R. racemosum* also belongs in this series, but is easily distinguished by its smooth non-bristly leaves. The flowers in this group are generally small, around 1-2 cm. long, but the plant is compact and free-flowering making it ideal for the rockery.

Hybrids:

There appears to be only one hybrid available here:

Donvale Pink Drift. (*spiciferum* x Crossbill) A fine early-flowering plant with deep pink flowers, raised by Jack O'Shannassy. Crossbill is a hybrid between *lutescens* and *spinuliferum*, both of which are hardy here.

Where to See These Plants:

Most of these species can be found in the Scabrifolia bed, which is towards the North end of the Garden past the Azalea species bed. The best plants of *spiciferum* can be seen in the main rockery and flower in August-September. These plants are over 40 years old

Alan Kepert.

VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN

R brassii [photo page 10]. According to the classification proposed by Dr George Argent *Rhododendrons of subgenus vireya* RHS 2006 the species is a member of Section VII Euvireya- Subsection iv Malesia. This Subsection is a large one with 53 members spread from New Guinea to Vietnam. This species comes from West New Guinea, Lake Habbema 3225m camp. It was discovered in 1938 by Leonard Brass and named in his honour by Dr Sleumer in 1960. However it has only been cultivated since 1990 when it was introduced to Edinburgh. Its introduction to Australia is even more recent. It has been propagated from seed by Andrew Rouse and distributed by him to ARS members. So far as I know it has yet to flower in Australia. The reason I have selected it for description is that Andrew has produced many seedlings which, so far, are progressing well. I have a number of these growing on ready to distribute to members game to try small plants. Alternatively members can wait until they grow a bit. Mine will be at the stage of taking cuttings in the next six months. I think we can hope for flowers in the next year or two. Importantly the species shows promise of thriving in Melbourne, and Olinda.

Distribution

According to Dr Argent: Indonesia, West New Guinea, near lake Habbema and the Wamena River on the North slope of Mt Wilhelmina in shrubby forest or grassy margins of *Podocarpus* forest, or open shrubberies on ridges, locally plentiful, 3200-3225m. A very narrow altitude range!

Description

[taken from Dr Argent, *Rhododendrons of subgenus vireya*, p223]. Erect shrub to 2.5m.

Leaves spiral, equally placed along the branches. **Blade** 30-50 x 15-25 mm, elliptic, broadly elliptic or sub-ovate; apex broadly obtuse or rounded, apiculate with a thick prominent gland; margin flat or weakly revolute, entire or minutely irregular to denticulate-crenulate and narrowly cartilaginous; base broadly tapering and somewhat decurrent, laxly scaly above but quickly glabrescent, the scales leaving minute pits, more persistently brown-scaly beneath, mid-vein impressed above and obtusely prominent beneath; lateral veins 6-8 per side, ascending at a 45 degree angle, slightly impressed above, raised or inconspicuous beneath, reticulation only visible beneath. **Petiole** 3-6 x 1.5-2 mm grooved above, flattened, scaly.

Inflorescence 3-6 flowered, in an open or one-sided umbel, the flowers hanging vertically or, sometimes, half hanging. **Corolla** 45-50 x 25-30 mm, dull yellow or greenish yellow with a strong red flush on the proximal half of the tube, without scent, narrowly funnel shaped, fleshy, glabrous inside and out; **tube** 30-38 x 6-7 x 10-15mm almost straight; **lobes** 12-15 x 14-18mm.

In cultivation in Edinburgh it makes a leggy shrub flowering irregularly throughout the year.

Hybrids

Danet, 2005, has described a natural hybrid with *R versteegii* – *R x nebulicolum*.

Verdict

The flowers, as described by Argent, seem attractive; and, if the plants thrive, judicious pruning should make the species worthwhile. We shall see.

Simon Begg

OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT THAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a hotly debated topic and is debated at the highest echelons of the country. The evidence seems hard to ignore, with the Dandenongs included in an area declared to be in drought for the past ten years and the rain still does not seem to be appearing over the horizon. Over the past year we have been grappling with what should we be doing to make the gardens sustainable in the long term whether or not there is climate change.

The reality for the National Rhododendron Gardens is that Parks Victoria has finite resources.

Water – In my search for alternatives to expand our present water reserves in the lake of 11 megaliters we dug an unsuccessful 100m bore which now holds the record for the deepest long drop in Parks Victoria. Technical reports located no other locations in the garden, or surrounding Parks Victoria land, which would have yielded the water the garden needed.

The reality is that we cannot water every plant that needs to be watered in the gardens over the long term. Strategies to make the gardens sustainable will be to

- use water saving measures such as mulch
- identify significant genetic material, such as species and important hybrids, and move them to places they will survive in the gardens
- upgrade our present irrigation systems to enable us to use current technology and eliminate leaks.
- group plants with similar water needs.

People – The reality in the mid term is that I cannot see us getting more staff under present political and economic conditions. So we must use the people we have and volunteers as efficiently as possible.

Opportunities

- Cool climate plants will continue to do better up on Mount Dandenong with higher rainfall, cooler temperatures and clay soils which hold the moisture. This should give the gardens a chance to present itself as the premiere cool climate garden for Victoria and to form stronger ties with the Botanic Gardens Network.

- Threatened species, which are already an important part of the gardens, will become more important for preservation as urbanisation and development along with climate change threaten more eco systems.
- Broaden the appeal of the gardens by diversifying the collection

What are we doing?

Over the past 18 months we have been developing our Strategic Development Plan which prioritises some of these issues and will be available for public comment when the Parks Victoria releases it.

We have funding to replace the water main and upgrade the pump from the lake after this summer season.

We are forging partnerships with other Botanic gardens, particularly the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, and we will continue to do this.

ARS Involvement how can you be involved?

Comment on the Strategic Directions Plan when released to the public.

Identify plants that are under stress and are genetically significant and propagate them to be moved to a more sustainable position.

Continue to maintain the data base to help us make informed decisions about the collections.

Glenn Maskell, Team Leader, Parks Victoria

JOTTINGS

RHODODENDRON SUCCESS at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Millais Nurseries in Surrey, UK, won their first Gold medal for their exhibit of Rhododendrons and Azaleas at this year's Chelsea Flower Show. It is only the third time they have entered the show and they were the only specialist rhododendron grower. 'The exhibit featured an island bed showing larger growing hybrids cascading down in size through interesting wild collected foliage species, deciduous azaleas and yak hybrids, with evergreen azaleas and dwarf varieties forming the front of the exhibit'. Many of the rare plants attracted a lot of attention from the public and the perfume from the deciduous azaleas was commented on.

Due to the warmer weather the plants had to be held back at 3degrees C in cold storage 'waiting for their time to shine'!

'TO BE SIX AGAIN': A man was sitting on the edge of the bed observing his wife looking at herself in the mirror. Since her birthday was not far off he asked her what she would like for her birthday.

'I'd like to be six again', she replied, still looking in the mirror.

On the morning of her birthday he arose early, made her a nice bowl of Fruit Loops cereal and chocolate milk, and then took her to Luna Park. What a day! They went on every ride, ate hot dogs and fairy floss and after five hours her head was spinning and her stomach felt upside down!

He then took her to McDonalds for fries and a chocolate sundae before going to the cinema to see a Walt Disney film.

Finally she wobbled home with her husband and collapsed into bed exhausted. He lent over her with a big smile and lovingly asked, 'Well Dear, what was it like to be six again?'

Her eyes slowly opened and her expression suddenly changed. 'I meant my dress size, not my age, you insensitive idiot!!'

The moral: Even when a man listens, he is going to get it very, very wrong!

MNB

JUNE GENERAL MEETING

Our President, Mike Hammer, gave an in depth talk about liliams and their role in the garden. They make excellent companion plants to rhododendrons and azaleas and by growing many different varieties there can be a long flowering period. Mike will write an article for a future newsletter. Members might be interested in attending the Liliam and Vireya Show to be held at the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Hall on 16th and 17th Jan 2010. The first show was held in January this year and was a great success. The perfume from hundreds of liliams and their regal stature in vases was a sight to behold and the vireyas added more colour to the scene.

BENCH RESULTS. A good showing of vireyas. Best bloom of the night was won by Andrew Rouse who had *R. Jasminiflorum ssp. jasminiflorum* and *R. orbiculatum* voted equal best for the evening.

Andrew scooped the vireya species; flowers less than 4cm diameter won with *R. Jasminiflorum ssp. jasminiflorum*, *R. leptanthum* var. *warianum* and *R. malayanum*.

Other classes were spread between Mike Hare, Simon Begg and Andrew Rouse. Simon won placings in two classes with 'Craig Faragher' and 'Christo Ray'. Andrew was first with *R. orbiculatum*. Mike won second place in two classes.

The azalea section had a very light showing with one display in class 6 of *R. linearifolium* by Simon and in class 7 three blooms displayed by Alan Walker who benched 'Charlie' and 'Dogwood White'. Only one exhibit in cool temperate rhododendrons was entered by Inge Hammer.

Len Sloggett displayed a lovely pot of cyclamens in the general plant section.

JULY GENERAL MEETING

Leslie Eaton, a former President of the Society, very kindly travelled down from her home in Swanpool near Benalla to tell us about her experiences of growing rhododendrons in a difficult climate. Previously Leslie and Graeme (who sadly died earlier this year) had lived on a lovely property in Kalorama with excellent conditions for growing rhododendrons and exotics.

Leslie's large 40 acre block is on the top of a hill with views to the surrounding area and a deep dam which is used for irrigation. Her first love is the dwarf varieties but these have not been as successful in their new location though many are surviving in pots. The soil is easy to dig at any time of the year as it is gravelly. Many exotic trees are growing well and Leslie declares the autumn colour is better than the Dandenongs. Maples, Malus and Paulonias are among many that thrive. Some trees received no water last year and Leslie considers the pine shavings used for mulch greatly assist water retention.

Rhododendrons are grown from cuttings and kept in the large glass house which was Graeme's delight after the small one at Kalorama. Many of Don Dosser's deciduous azaleas and German hybrid rhododendrons are doing well.

As the plants grow the garden beds are gradually being extended giving Leslie plenty of work to occupy her spare time.

BENCH RESULTS. Best blooms of the night again went to Andrew Rouse with a beautiful truss of a *R. himantodes* flower with brown scales on a white corolla tube and leaves densely scaled.

Class 1, flowers less than 4cm in diameter was again won by Andrew with *R. himantodes*, *R. radicans* and *R. leptanthum*, first, second and third placing respectively.

Andrew also took class 5, one vireya plant in a container, with [*R. rubineiflorum* x *R. pauciflorum*] x [*R. rubineiflorum* x *R. anagaliflorum*] scoring a first place, [*R. rubineiflorum* x *R. pauciflorum*] x *R. gracilentum* scoring second place and *R. 'Highland Bonsai'* third place.

Three places in class 4, a vireya hybrid with minimum flower size 40mm, went to Simon Begg with 'Christo Ray', 'Coral Flare' and 'Lorchris' which was very nice.

Azaleas and asiatic rhododendrons were again poorly represented with only a few blooms in various classes.

Len Sloggett won the mixed plant section with a fine floral arrangement of Camellias.

MNB & WL



R brassii

Photo from Chris Callard's archives



R scabrifolium var. *spificerum*

Alan Kepert photo



**Leongatha Daffodil Show
September 2009**



R tuba

"Beechmont" 4 September 2009



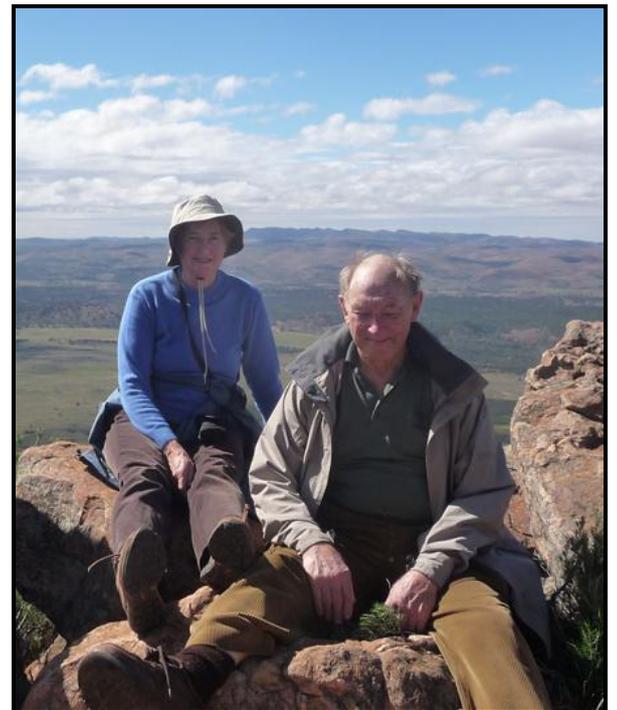
**Yellowtailed Rock Wallaby
Flinders Ranges
Near Wilpena Pound
August 2009**



**Olive Howard's Daughter, Pam's house
"Birdwood" Chalet Road Olinda
Visited by Vireya Group
September 2009**



**Begg's Campervan, Melrose, SA
August 2009**



**Simon and Marcia Begg
On Mt Ohlssen Bagge
Wilpena Pound August 2009**

GREY NOMADS

I wonder how many of you have tried the 'Grey Nomad' lifestyle? After the very sad demise of our two best friends, Raani (Staffy cross) and Callie (Australian Silky cross), earlier this year we decided to bite the bullet and join the grey nomad fraternity. What to buy? We had tried motor homes with three children on overseas trips but decided we wanted something that could be parked and left while we drove off to see the sights. That left caravans, camper trailers, pop up tops, tents, etc. ranging from a four by two trailer to 'Big Rigs' with every mod-con.

Our car determined what we could pull so with the help of experienced friends we opted for a modest camper trailer with shower and toilet. The van is the same height as the car and with forty-five turns of the handle it reaches walk-in height, so within 10 minutes we are set up and making a cuppa!

We were given lengthy instructions and training before we left the manufacturer for the first time but most of the learning took place at the first few caravan parks. Many of our friends expected us back within a week! After setting it up we set off to Mt Beauty via the Black Spur to visit our son and his family. Being the snow season it was cold and we were glad of the fan heater we had put in at the last minute also the mohair rug and bed socks (an electric blanket would have been very welcome)! The water froze in the pipes and the heater and electric jug together were too much for the power supply! Smoke alarms, we found, are a nuisance in a confined area as they go off with the slightest trace of smoke. Ours spent most of its life under the pillow to re-emerge at bed-time.

While staying at Mt Beauty we visited Beechworth to witness the re-enactment of Ned Kelly's committal hearing before he was taken to Melbourne for his trial. A large crowd saw Ned accused and transported out of the town with a large posse of mounted police.

After three nights at Mt Beauty we headed for a warmer climate at Echuca. By then we had discovered that the fridge was not functioning on 240volts as all the frozen food had thawed. Fortunately there was still gas or battery power available.

Echuca has everything a camper could possibly want, from camping supply shops in the main street to repair and sales businesses just out of town. The mechanic did not take long to find the problem. When he at last found the well concealed powerpoint he just had to plug it in and turn it on!

There is a lot to see along the historic port and we spent some time in the old Movie House and Penny Arcade. We stayed two nights there enjoying the perfect weather.

Our next stop was Robinvale where we had a perfect camping spot on the Murray. Simon makes an excellent cappuccino and we had made room for the cappuccino machine in the van. It had become a breakfast ritual to sit outside weather permitting and relax with coffee and toast before exploring each new town.

Wentworth, at the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers, thirty kilometres from Mildura, was another beautiful camping ground. Our grassy site by the Darling was beside 'Sturt's Tree', an ancient red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) marking Sturt's discovery of the junction in 1842 while on a search for the fabled inland sea. Later in the 1870's Wentworth was the busiest inland port in Australia. One of the consequences of this was the need for a large jail built in 1879 which housed both men and women and was the first Australian designed jail. Many of the women were members of the Salvation Army who

were jailed for a few days for disturbing the peace while preaching their beliefs and holding street marches.

We were entertained one evening by the Variety Club car rally when about forty decorated cars roared in for the night on their way to Alice Springs and on other nights by two young brush-tailed possums that appeared from the mighty branches of Sturt's tree to enjoy our carrots and fruit.

A day trip to Mungo National Park (formerly Gol Gol station), Australia's first World Heritage Area, was our first trek into the outback. Lake Mungo is one of a chain of dried out lakes in the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area about 110k north of Mildura. We were not lucky enough to find any bones of Mungo woman or fossils of the huge wombat-like marsupials, *Diprotodon*, during our exploration of the 'Walls of China' but the visitor's centre was very enlightening. There seem to be many 'Walls of China' in Australia! These consisted of 25k of crescent shaped lunette or dunes of sand and dried mud along the bank of Lake Mungo which dried up 14,000 years ago.

The Perry Sandhills, the result of a geological event, are red sand dunes that rise up 20m from the surrounding Mallee saltbush country and are constantly moving. Beside these there was a 'For Sale' sign advertising excellent blocks for holiday houses. We wondered how many blocks had been inundated by sand.

Mildura was celebrating its inaugural Winterfest and the town was rocking and rolling with classic cars and jivers from miles away wearing short full skirts and cowboy hats.

We spent time watching a paddle steamer move through Loch 11 where the Mildura Homestead still stands near the timber shearing shed, though both have been largely rebuilt. The first settler to cross the river at this spot with cattle thought he had landed in South Australia and he raced down to Adelaide to put in a claim for the prime site. Unfortunately for him by the time he returned another settler had done the same thing at the correct place in Melbourne and was already well installed.

The Australian Inland Botanic Garden 2k out from Mildura is the first semi-arid botanical garden in the Southern Hemisphere. First plantings were in 1991 and have been laid out in geographical regions of the world. Mallee trees (*Eucalyptus oleosa*, the Oil Mallee) used to grow in the area but these have long since gone to build fences, shearing sheds and houses. Eucalyptus oil can be extracted from the foliage of this species. One that is dated at 2,500 years old stands in a protective fence. Three Wollemi Pines are doing well with wind protection. A grazier's homestead and shearing shed are still in use by the public.

Along the Silver City Highway to Broken Hill the scenery is flat saltbush for 260k. The only break is a roadhouse halfway which actively discourages the use of the toilet facilities by placing signs to the effect that customers must buy something in the shop before they will be given a key for the overly large padlock on the gate to the loos! In the loos are more signs requesting ladies to sit or squat, not stand! I do not know what the signs in the men's read!

There is a lot to see in Broken Hill. Wall murals and art galleries abound including Pro Hart, Jack Absalom and the Broken Hill Art Gallery but the newest and most spectacular is the Living Desert and Sculpture Park near Silverton completed in 1993. Sculptors from all over the world were invited to make a sandstone sculpture to stand on Sundown Hill. The best times to view them are at sunrise and sunset when the colours on the sculptures and in the sky are spectacular.

On our first morning we went with three other tourists on a City Sights Tour driven by a local who had an extensive knowledge of the history. The city is called Broken Hill because of the breaks in the 'line of lode' which is a long hill containing valuable minerals including

silver. The streets are named after components of minerals and names of engineers eg. oxide, bromide, etc. We were able to don miner's helmets and radios at Daydream Silver Mine, 1882-1983, and descend into the once highly productive depths where small amounts of silver still extrude from the rock. Boys as young as 8 years old used to work deep in the mine.

The Geological Museum houses the famous 'Silver Tree' a beautiful model of a tree 60cms high with small figures of aborigines and a stockman at the base, all made from silver for the Melbourne Exhibition in 1880. Another gallery has a painting by Pro Hart's brother in law which is 103m long and features scenes of Broken Hill. The Mining Museum is the place to buy silver jewellery and I stocked up for Christmas.

The new Royal Flying Doctor Visitors Centre has an historical display with videos and a flashback diorama to the 1950's. Visitors can watch activities in the hangar from a specially built balcony and hope they never have any personal experience of the RFDS.

One hundred desolate kilometres east is Menindee where there are many shallow lakes that hold water from the Darling basin. When full, together they hold 1.7megalitres but at present the Darling is very low and only one lake has water held by a weir. The River Lady Boat Cruises take visitors around this lake amongst dead river red gums that house birds of prey ready to pounce on anything edible. Bird watching is one of the attractions of the lakes. A bus group shared the cruise with us and I was surprised to find they belonged to the Maroondah Walking Group in Melbourne. A friend of mine is one of the group leaders and was known by several of these walkers! Small world!

Nearby at Pamamaroo Creek there is a sign on a tree stating that Burke and Wills camped here on their ill-fated journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1860. This delightful spot became the base camp for the remainder of the party.

From Broken Hill we drove along the Barrier Highway to Peterborough which was a very important railway junction of the east-west and north-south lines. Nowadays the Indian Pacific is the only train service. 'Steamtown' is a tourist attraction run by an enthusiastic team of volunteers and even the Visitor Information Centre is housed in a train carriage. We noticed that the South Australian towns have excellent information boards relating historical events and the towns we visited have beautiful old sandstone buildings in good repair.

Our next main stop was Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges where we planned to stay for about four nights. It rained for most of the 250k and we were disturbed by the number of caravans heading in the opposite direction. By the time we reached Hawker, 50k before Wilpena, the weather was extremely miserable and we were back into coats. We stocked up with a few essentials like diesel, bread and chocolate and continued on our way. Fortunately the rain stopped while we set up the van but we did make a mess backing into the site in the red mud.

After a late lunch we managed a very pleasant 7k walk to the very solid Hills Homestead inside the Pound. The Pound is a natural amphitheatre 17k long by 6k wide with a single narrow entrance through the Wilpena Gap gorge. This entrance was found by a bushman William Chace and his employer took out a lease for the whole area in 1850. The highest point of the two mountain ranges forming the Pound is St Mary's Peak at 1170m. No-one knows why it is so named. Sheep and wheat were grown in and outside the Pound until drought drove farmers out.

There is some excellent motel and cabin accommodation at Wilpena but we were not tempted as our little van had become a home away from home with all amenities. We had experienced some terrific winds during our trip and had heard about the extreme winds back

home but our van held the ground firmly. Being parked under Red Gums made for some anxiety and another time under a Lemon Scented Gum or 'Widow-maker'!

On our second day at Wilpena we undertook a walk of only 6.5k to Mt. Ohlssen Bagge but it turned out to be extremely rocky and mountainous at 960m. However the view from the top looking into the Pound in one direction and out to the plains and National Park in the opposite direction was well worth the effort.

Many wildflowers were out especially the many species of wattles but also red and pink grevilleas, *Dodonea*, *Xanthoreas*, Dusty Millers, a small blue orchid, brooms, *Hibbertia*, *Olearia*, *Pimelia*, *Clematis vitalba* (Old Man's Beard), a dwarf Mulla Mulla, various Solanums, *Nicotiana*, *Senecio*, *Eremophila*. The most common trees were the huge Red Gums, Wattles and *Callitris*. Hillsides and meadows were scattered with stands of *Callitris* pines and looked most un-Australian because of their conical shape. Some areas looked like golf courses with the naturally low growing grasses. The most common weeds were Patterson's curse, oxalis and a different onion weed, all very pretty, thankfully no blackberries, hollies, agapanthus, cotoneaster, onion weed or flick weed that we have at home! Fauna seen were wallabies, kangaroos, euros, emus and a male emu with a dozen newly hatched chicks, shingleback lizards (usually sunbaking on the road so we had to stop and hurry them off), rare and endangered yellow foot rock wallabies, wedgetail eagles, kites, apostle birds, parrots of various kinds and many small birds.

The weather was still cold but not wet when we set out on a four wheel drive tour in a luxurious Range Rover with a local guide to explore the ranges on Arkaba Station. We probably could have used our 4x4, though there were some very rough dry creek crossings and steep hills, but taking a tour with an experienced local is an invaluable source of information on history and ideas for further exploration.

Dirt roads in the outback can become treacherous and impassable after rain and we were lucky on our next day trip through the National Park that a grader had been through the gorge and valley roads and the main road to Blinman at the north end of the Flinders Ranges had been recently sealed. On the way we passed another 'Great Wall of China'! Totally different to the sand and mud dunes of Mungo National Park these were lines of rock topped with ironstone that had been weathered along the ridges of the hills for thousands of years. Much more like a wall!

Blinman was named after Robert Blinman who discovered copper there in 1859. From 1863-1908 it was the largest smelting works in the Flinders Ranges. The remnants of a copper mine remain and tours can be arranged but most of the old buildings have long since gone.

Nearby (in outback terms!) is Parachilna and the Prairie Hotel famous for its 'feral' menu of crocodile, camel, kangaroo, emu, yabbies, quandongs and more. It is the most awarded outback hotel for its cuisine and it is said that people come from far and wide to sample the well presented and delicious food. We were not very ambitious but certainly enjoyed the meal and the atmosphere. The coal train from Leigh Creek to Port Augusta goes through Parachilna daily and can be up to 3k long.

Large groups of aborigines used to walk to Parachilna from miles away to collect and trade the rich red ochre deposits in the ranges south of Parachilna. Sacred ceremonies including initiations were held at the sites. There was trouble with the early farmers who thought the aborigines congregated in the area to kill stock for food but after unsuccessful attempts to ship the ochre to another area in 1905 legislation was passed protecting the ochre mines for the use of the aborigines.

The return drive went through Brachina Gorge which had dried out since the rain two days before. There is a self guided geological tour one can do with graphics explaining the evolution of the area over the last 130 million years. We were very lucky to see an endangered Yellow Foot Rock Wallaby beside the road. It had an extremely long yellow and brown striped tail and yellow feet and was very agile on the rough rocky hillside.

Next morning we packed up after another windy night, relieved that the red gum beside us was still intact, and headed south to a pleasant town called Melrose in Mt Remarkable National Park.

Melrose is reputed to be the oldest town in the South Flinders Ranges and like many others it has some lovely old buildings and is well maintained with excellent sporting facilities. Originally producing copper it is now a rich grain and grazing area. Mt Remarkable is 960m high.

Two trails have been opened up which pass through Mt Remarkable National Park and Melrose making it an important overnight stop. The Heysen Trail named after Hans Heysen, who favoured the Flinders Ranges in his art, was completed in 1992 for bush walkers and is 1200k long from Cape Jervis on the south coast to Parachilna at the northern end of the Flinders Ranges. The Mawson Trail is for mountain bike riders and is 900k long from just north of Adelaide through the Ranges to Blinman.

We needed some good exercise so decided on the Alligator Gorge Ring Route, a 9k walk along the bed of the rocky gorge surrounded by red canyons and the sounds of frogs and trickling water. It was a difficult walk and took about two hours to go 2k along the gorge then came a steep climb out of it before an easy track back to the car. There were lots of wildflowers and the scenery was spectacular. At the end of four and a half hours we deserved a rest and lunch!

Next day we opted for an easy 5k walk through the forest and farm lands where ancient red gums with immense burls and deep habitat holes lined the banks of the creek. In the afternoon we went for a drive to Port Augusta in the rain. We spent a lot of time exploring 'The Outback Experience' at the Information Centre which is a multi-award winning, enthralling theatrical experience, a journey through time in the Flinders Ranges and the Outback of South Australia.

We had booked a ride on the Afghan Express which is part of the Pichi Richi Tourist Railway and covers 40k from Port Augusta to Quorn just south of the Flinders Ranges. The Pichi Richi Railway is an operating museum with regular heritage train journeys on the oldest remaining section of the famous narrow-gauge old Ghan railway. The steam engines and wooden carriages are from the original Ghan trains. It was a wonderful day trip. The railway rises from sea level to 300m at Quorn and crosses long trestle bridges, gorges and canyons. The old town of Quorn has wide streets and a lovely old station which was very important during the war when the railway was used to transport the military and coal. Built in 1897 the line was intended to go from Port Augusta to Darwin but only got as far as Alice Springs by 1929. It was closed in 1957 and replaced by the new standard gauge line to Darwin that by-passes Quorn. Unfortunately the battery on the camera was not working and we were very disappointed not to be able to record this part of the trip. With a flash of inspiration Simon thought of the mobile phone. We normally do not carry or use it but because it was a new toy he had brought it with him. Of course we had no idea how to take photos with a mobile phone so I went for a walk along the carriage looking for someone from a younger generation! Not much later and we were taking photos. When we returned to the van Simon had to learn how to download them! Too many learning curves these days!

On our return to Port Augusta we visited the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden which specialises in displaying hundreds of varieties of *Eremophila* or Emu Bush and has extensive walking tracks and displays.

By now we were into the last week of our holiday and not looking forward to returning to the real world. Melrose had been a lovely place to stop and we were sad to leave for the next stretch to Murray Bridge. The drive through the Clare Valley, where all is lush and green at this time of year, was very peaceful.

Overnight at Murray Bridge then a long drive to see friends at Halls Gap, who it turned out were overseas, where we stayed for two nights. It's a beautiful setting surrounded by hills where there are many walks to views and falls, excellent restaurants and shops and a new information centre. The forests affected by the 2006 fires are regenerating and brilliant with low growing wattles and wild flowers.

Our last night was at Drummond near Daylesford where Simon's brother lives. It was a very pleasant end to our wanderings which had been a new adventure, one to be repeated we hope, many times in the future.

MNB

PROGRAM 2009

OCTOBER

FRIDAY 2ND, SAT 3RD & SUN 4TH ABC GARDEN SHOW @ CAULFIELD RACECOURSE. The ARSV will not have a stand this year.

SATURDAY 3RD & SUNDAY 4TH AZALEA SHOW in Hall at National Rhododendron Gardens

SAT 3RD 2.00pm MEMBERS DAY, bring a friend for afternoon tea & show results

FRIDAY 16TH 8.00pm General Meeting at Nunawading. SPEAKER: DON TEESE from Yamina Rare Plants. Don will have rare plants to display and sell.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

FRIDAY 16TH TO SUNDAY 18TH ARS CONFERENCE in SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NOVEMBER

FROM SAT. 31ST OCTOBER TO TUES. 3RD NOVEMBER, RHODODENDRON SHOW in Hall at National Rhododendron Gardens

SATURDAY 14TH – Vireya Group 10.00am at Andrew Raper's nursery.

FRIDAY 20TH 8.00pm AGM at Nunawading. SPEAKER to be advised.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

DECEMBER

SUNDAY 6TH CHRISTMAS FUNCTION

FRIDAY 11TH – Committee Meeting at Olinda 8.00pm

FERNY CREEK HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY EVENTS: 2009

Flower Festival: 24th and 25th October

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 20th, 2009, 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 2009/2011;
- 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 fall vacant by rotation for three year periods in accordance with Rule 23.(3). Positions 1, 2 and 3 become vacant. In addition, position 4 is vacant for a term of 2 years. 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 Secunder must be financial members of the Branch at the time of signing.

Nominations, which close at 5.00pm on Friday, November 13th, 2009, should be sent to the Secretary, A.R.S. - Victorian Branch (Inc.), P.O. Box 500, Brentford Square, 3131.

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.

Michael Hare: Honorary Secretary

AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY - Victorian Branch Inc.
(A5896Z)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

Nomination for election of Officers and Ordinary Committee Members at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Friday, November 20th, 2009 at the Municipal Horticultural Centre, Jolimont Rd, Vermont. Mel 62 G4.

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). _____

ACCEPTANCE

I accept nomination for the position indicated.

Signed (Person being Nominated) _____

Date _____

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

P.O. Box 500, Brentford Square, Victoria, 3131, at 5.00pm on Friday, November 13th, 2009.

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ARSV COMMITTEE 2009

The new committee was elected in November 2008 for the following year. There are vacancies on the committee and members who would be interested to be more involved would be made very welcome. The committee meets at Nunawading at 5.00pm before the Monthly General Meeting on the 3rd Friday.

PRESIDENT: Michael Hammer Ph: 9755 2176

VICE PRESIDENT No 1: Vacant

VICE PRESIDENT No 2: Vacant

TREASURER: Neil Webster, Ph: 9859 3622

SECRETARY: Michael Hare, 9844 2232

Simon Begg (Editor) & Marcia Begg, Ph: 9751 1610

Inge Hammer, Ph: 9755 2176

Valerie Marshall, Ph: 9803 4434

Cynthia Sladen, Ph: 9561 8874

Alan Walker, Ph: 9726 8836

Elizabeth Xipell, Ph: 9859 9934

SOCIETY PICASAWEB SITE

Visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVic> for the latest pictures.

Additions since the May 2009 Newsletter are :-

For the "Beechmont" Picasaweb site visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/simonwbegg>