

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

JULY 2011

Published by the

Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)

P.O. Box 500, Brentford Square, Victoria 3131

Email: secretary@vicrhodo.org.au

Telephone: 0418 340 240

Editor: Simon Begg Ph: (03) 9751 1610

email: simonwbegg@gmail.com

ARSV Website: www.vicrhodo.org.au

Picture site <http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVic>



PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held at the Municipal Horticultural Centre, Jolimont Rd, Vermont. Mel 62 G4 or the National Rhododendron Garden, The Georgian Rd, Olinda unless otherwise stated.

THE 2011 PROGRAMME : NEW FORMAT

GENERAL MEETINGS AT NUNAWADING: **3rd Friday**

- JUNE 17TH 8.00pm Andrew Rouse – Vireyas from seed & hybridizing.
- SEPTEMBER 16TH 8.00pm Speaker to be advised.
- NOVEMBER 18TH 8.00pm AGM. Speaker to be advised.

OPEN WORKSHOPS AT THE NATIONAL RHODODENDRON GARDENS; **3rd Sunday.**

- MAY 15th - 2.00pm Liliiums with Mike and Inge Hammer
- OCTOBER 9TH – 2.00pm Neil Puddey from Coffs Harbour– Vireya Rhododendrons.
- OCTOBER 30TH – 2.00pm during the Rhododendron Show. Growing rhododendrons in Melbourne.

SEPTEMBER

FRIDAY 16TH at Nunawading 8.00pm

OCTOBER

NEXT NEWSLETTER

SUNDAY 9TH at National Rhododendron Gardens 2.00pm Neil Puddey lives in Coff's Harbour on the coast north of Sydney where he grows, sells and hybridises vireya rhododendrons. He has kindly agreed to come to Olinda to share his experiences with us.

He supplies overseas markets in Singapore and China and sells locally on line. One of his best hybrids is R. Archangel and many of his self sown vireyas are worth buying. Neil will bring plants for sale.

SUNDAY 30TH at National Rhododendron Gardens 2.00pm Topic – Growing Rhododendrons in Melbourne.

NOVEMBER

FRIDAY 18TH at Nunawading 8.00pm - AGM

DECEMBER

SUNDAY 11th is the tentative date for the Xmas Lunch. Details in the September Issue

PRESIDENTS REPORT JUNE 2011

The rain has continued up here in the Dandenongs with over 800 mm in the first 5 months. The ground is extremely soggy and the rivulets flowing out of the rock cuttings on the sides of the roads have returned after an absence of some years. It has also been cold with 2 brief snow falls so far. As a consequence, the autumn colour was good although it is now largely over.

We held a meeting at the gardens, in the volunteers lunch room, in May with a presentation about growing lilioms, significant companion plants to rhododendrons and azaleas. The venue is far from ideal but none the less about 25 people attended and feedback received was very favourable. Maybe this is indeed a better venue and time than Friday evenings at Nunawading. If you have an opinion, please let us know.

Sales of our DVD of the gardens continue at the gardens gift shop albeit slowly although the feedback from Parks is that they expect this to increase substantially in the spring.

Last year we campaigned strongly to increase the profile of the National Rhododendron Gardens and to obtain increased funding. As reported earlier, one of the outcomes of this was an offer to present articles, one for each season, in the magazine Yarra Valley and Ranges Country Life. The last of these 4 articles has now appeared in the magazine and feedback from the readers of the magazine via the publisher is that the articles were extremely popular. The magazine is being displayed in the Parks shop at the gardens.

Another outcome of our campaigning was a promise from the State Liberal Party at the last election for \$200,000 increased funding for the NRG over 3 years. Well, while the Liberals did indeed win the last State election, the local Liberal candidate was narrowly defeated which left the promise somewhat uncertain. However I can now announce that the Liberal government has honoured the election promise and has awarded \$200,000 in increased funding to the NRG for the purpose of increasing maintenance in the gardens. This is a major achievement and one of which our Society should feel very proud.

Parks also reports that they are making good progress in re-establishing planting records and governance over material in the gardens. This is an extremely significant development for a garden seeking botanical garden status and a very positive sign for the future.

Overall, the future for the NRG is looking somewhat rosier than it did a few months ago. I hope that this will give at least some of our members more confidence that the ARS Victorian branch does still have a useful function and encourage them to take a more active role in the operation of the Society.

Michael Hammer

THE SPECIES COLUMN.

oreodoxa -Subsection Fortunea. [photo page 7]

This species is not very well-known here, but should be more popular. It looks like a typical *fortunei* or *decorum*, but with smaller leaves and flowers and is much more floriferous. Last spring our oldest plant in the Maddenia walk was literally covered in

hundreds of clear pink flowers in small trusses. It seems to prefer a semi-shaded position but is generally not difficult to grow.

Name:

The name means “Glory of the mountains”. Subspecies *fargesii* is named after Pere Farges, French missionary to China.(1844-1912).

Distribution:

China, in Sichuan, Gansu, and Hubei, in woodlands at relatively low elevations of 2100 to 3000 metres.

Characteristics:

This forms a bushy shrub up to 6 metres high in the wild but much smaller in cultivation. The leaves are elliptical around 6 to 8 cm. long, paler underneath. The flowers vary from pale to deep pink and are borne in trusses of 6 to 12. This species has been split into three subspecies as follows:

Variety *oreodoxa*—has clear pale pink flowers and narrower leaves.

Variety *fargesii*—has wider leaves and deeper pink flowers heavily spotted inside

Variety *shensiense*—has 5 lobed flowers and glandular hairs in the ovary. Clearly these varieties all belong to the same species, and it is not unusual to find natural variation over a wide geographical area.

Where to See These Plants:

In our G.P.S. survey we could only find 3 plants of the 24 listed in the database.. Admittedly the wilderness of plants towards the Mathias Road boundary has not been properly surveyed, so there are probably more of this species. The oldest plant can be seen in the centre of the Maddenia walk and is probably 40 years old. It flowers in early November.

Alan Kepert.

VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN

This issue I had intended to reproduce, with kind permission of RHS and the authors George Argent and Keith Rushforth, a note on the new vireya species *R trancongii*- a close relative of *R rushforthii*. But the best laid plans so easily go awry! I copied all the text but forgot to include all the photos when Marcia and I left in our caravan at the end of May.

So, instead, I thought I'd attempt an update on where Australia's vireya species collecting stands and what the future holds. I address vireyas primarily because non vireyas are more widely held and, anyway are my personal interest. But the same issues apply to non Vireyas.

We know that Australia's quarantine regime basically requires a permit to import any plant material, including seed. However AQIS maintains a site, ICON, which can be searched to see what can be imported and under what conditions. The “Permitted List” on ICON under *Rhododendron* has recently been updated to include all species my researches, of a couple of years ago, revealed to be in Australia as well as a limited number of species not known to me to be in Australia for which I was granted an import permit. I have a standing request to import the vast number of species, Vireya and non Vireya, not known to me to be already here. There are also a small number of species I have, in recent times, discovered to be in Australia for which, when I find the time and energy, I shall seek an import permit.

As the criteria for grant of a permit are either presence in Australia or evaluation by Biosecurity Australia as ‘not having weediness potential’ in Australia I can see no reason why, with persistence, a permit could not be obtained for all *Rhododendron* species not currently on the ICON “Permitted List”. Australia does not have the same problem with *R ponticum* and its hybrids being weeds, and vectors for *P kernoviae* and *P remora* to boot, that the UK and Ireland does. *R ponticum* is already here and the dreaded *phytophthora* are not.

One might, properly, worry that the Australian native *Rhododendrons* *R lochiaie* and *R viriosum* might be contaminated in their native habitat. The ready answer is that if anyone, deliberately or otherwise, were minded, or prone, to such contamination there are vast quantities of contaminant vireyas already here so new ones would make no difference. There is also the very practical answer that accessing Australia’s native species is extraordinarily difficult. As I write I am close to Thornton Peak and yesterday passed close to the other relevant Queensland Peaks. Climbing them is another matter altogether!

The first task is to conserve what we have. By this I mean clarify identification ambiguities, correct mistakes, correctly label, with provenance and distribute widely to avoid losses from death, neglect and disasters. Ideally the country’s premier collection would be held and conserved in a Botanical Garden with ideal growing conditions. National *Rhododendron* Garden for example. Lack of resources and lack of full confidence in Parks Victoria’s dedication to the task make reliance on NRG alone a dangerous strategy. Andrew Rouse, I believe, has Australia’s best vireya species collection but reliance on Andrew alone is also insufficient. Lyn Craven still has a great collection though Canberra confines them to a glasshouse. Inge Hammer, Murray McAllister and I all have collections. There need to be many other collectors to keep us company! Preferably younger ones. Emu Valley, Mount Tamborine and Mount Lofty all have *Vireya* species collections. They should be encouraged. It would be nice if there was a collection on the Atherton Tableland, but I have yet to see a single vireya plant even though I know, if I could climb the peaks, the native ones are there. Neil Puddey and Anton Vanderbyl both have wonderful hybrid collections but not many species.

Speaking of species Marcia and I did see crocodiles in the Daintree River.

More seriously Andrew Rouse is having considerable success in growing vireyas from seed. Below is a table of some of his outcomes dating back quite a few years. The size of the surviving seedlings illustrates how slow they are to grow. Some of these are unmatched in cultivation world-wide. Hopefully in the fullness of time surviving seedlings can be propagated and spread to other collectors. Hopefully, also, the permit position will progress to enable future seedlings.

Species	Germination Y/N	Status (April 2011)
<i>R cf crenulatum</i>	N	
<i>R herzogii</i>	Y	Vigorous plants, ~ 30cm in height
<i>R brassii</i>	Y	Excellent germination, good seedling vigour, however plants (~10cm in height) are v susceptible to foliar fungal disease and suffer from

		die back)
<i>R aff pachystigma</i>	Y	Very poor germination, one plant (in excellent health ~ 10cm), now taking cuttings
<i>R tintinnabellum</i>	N	
<i>R culminicola</i>	Y	Plants ~ 10cm , reasonably vigorous
<i>R rhodochroun</i>	N	
<i>R correoides</i>	N	
<i>R evelynae</i>	N	
<i>R cf herzogii</i>	N	
<i>R saxifragoides</i>	Y	Poor germination, 2-3 plants < 1cm in height
<i>R glabriflorum</i>	Y	Very poor germination – one seedling! (~ 2cm)
<i>R tuberculiferum</i>	N	
<i>R agathodaemonis</i>	Y	Good germination, vigorous plants (~ 10cm)
<i>R versteegii</i>	Y	Poor germination 2 plants (3cm)
<i>R phaeops</i>	Y	Poor germination, 2 plants 1-2cm
<i>R saxifragoides</i>	N	
<i>R cf herzogii</i>	N	
<i>R saxifragoides</i>	N	
<i>R javanicum</i>	N	
<i>R curviflorum</i>	Y	Good germination, plants 15-20cm
<i>R subcrenulatam</i>	Y	Poor germination, 2 plants (2cm)
New species close to <i>R scabridibracteum</i>	Y	OK germination, 8 seedlings (5mm)
New species close to <i>R scabridibracteum</i>	N	
New species close to <i>maius</i>	N	
New species close to <i>opulentum</i>	Y	20 seedlings (2-4mm)
Form/var/hybrid of <i>R pachystigma</i>	Y	16 seedlings (2-4mm)

NATIONAL RHODODENDRON GARDEN UPDATE

Wet, wet, wet – two years ago who would have thought that we would be so wet?

It has been great to see the subsoils finally building up some water retention again after slowly drying over the past ten years. Growth this season has been phenomenal with some of the big leaf Rhododendrons that are over forty years old expanding by more than a 30 cm with new growth which represent 10% or more of the size of the plants. We have been making progress on some pieces of the puzzle needed to align us with botanic gardens.

Database – The Parks Victoria IT department has put considerable effort into getting a mapping database up and running for the gardens. It is getting closer and some early test models look to have some great features such searches by species, genus and area. The mapping particularly will be great with locations marked on maps and the ability to search by area. Other handy features are the ability to attach a photo and possibly cross reference with other plants of the same name within the database. At this stage we are trying to install a hand held device so we can capture data in the field. Once this is up and running there will be a big effort to enter, verify and update data. I know that it will be years before the database will be fully functional for the whole garden but it is a start and I hope will be a really useful

tool moving into the future especially for future managers and gardeners. I believe this is the one tool we have to capture much of the knowledge that is with the few real experts we have left with Rhododendrons and will add immense value to the collection here internationally.

Labelling – Thanks to two community grants from Parks Victoria, successfully gained through the ARSV, we have been able to have public labels made for a lot more of the plants in these gardens. Last year we had 700 stainless steel stakes made and this year we have bought the vinyl face plates to engrave. As part of the database upgrade there is a need to update our individual tagging system that consists of cattle tags tied to each plant or an aluminium stamped label. I would like to upgrade the tags with plant name and accession number which would be attached to a stake at the bottom of each plant. Labels would be easier to find and plant names more accessible. With the Tuesday morning working group we have managed to find a laser engraver that has great flexibility to cut and engrave any size font and shape on a variety of materials. I am hoping that we are able to get a community grant and possibly other external grants to help with the purchase of this machine. This will add value to the collection and the usability of the gardens to enthusiast and public. This system would be one of the most advanced labelling systems of a public garden in Australia that I know of if we are able to purchase it.

Collections Policy – The final piece of the puzzle that links all these bits and pieces together is the living plant collection policy. I have just recently been to a Botanic Gardens workshop on collections policies. Instead of reinventing the wheel gardens are sharing information and resources on issues like this. The workshop presented a collection policy framework for gardens to use and based on this template we are developing up policy guideline which then leads into individual collection policies for each collection of plants. The framework proposes that we concentrate on the curated collection for the database and labelling. What is left will be garden plants that fill the gaps and make the garden as a whole. This approach allows us the freedom to garden within our resources but to still have some direction and meaning to our collections.

Database and labelling in major botanic gardens takes up the full time role of at least one or two staff so we should not kid ourselves that we will be able to achieve perfect records for the whole garden. But to manage the garden on a day to day basis in the long term we need to understand what are the significant plants and collection that we do have. If this is recorded properly then successive managers and gardeners should be able to better manage the gardens for the people of Victoria and also truly put this garden onto the national stage as a botanic garden and the international stage as a place of conservation and education.

The puzzle is mostly made up already, the gardens has been developed over the past 50 years by the hard work of The Australian Rhododendron Society, many volunteers and staff. Unlike a jigsaw the final few pieces are some of the more difficult technically to fit into a living organism such as the gardens. Most of all we want this truly beautiful place for people to visit year round to enjoy the beauty that plants have to offer and hope that it helps us all to appreciate the jigsaw that is life.

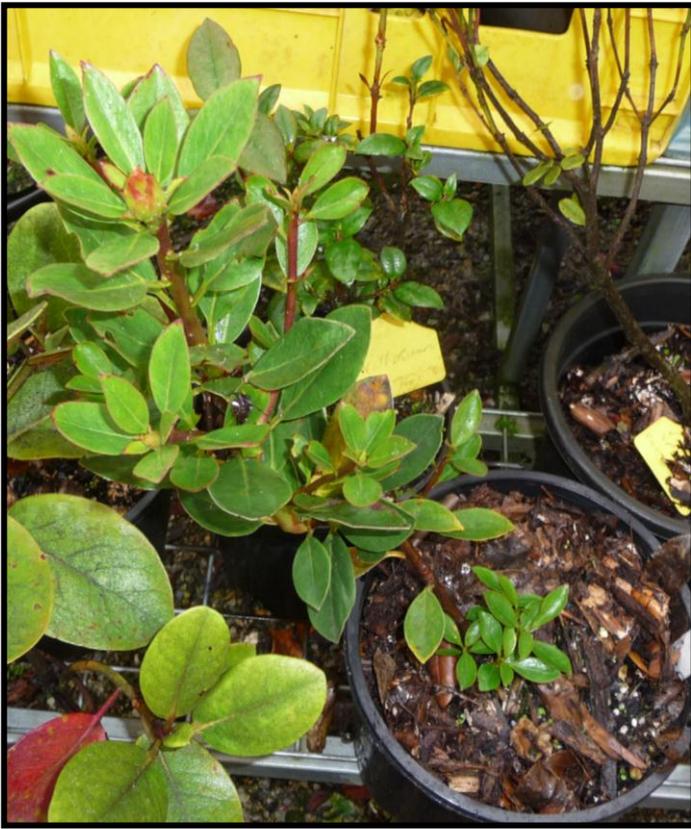
Glenn Maskell, Team Leader, Parks Victoria



Rhododendron oreodoxa



Rhododendron rushforthii,
'Beechmont' May 2011



Rhododendron brassii
with flower bud at
'Beechmont' May 2011



Rhododendron kochii,
'Beechmont' May 2011
(above)

R. Archangel,
At Neil Puddey's nursery at
Coff's Harbour.



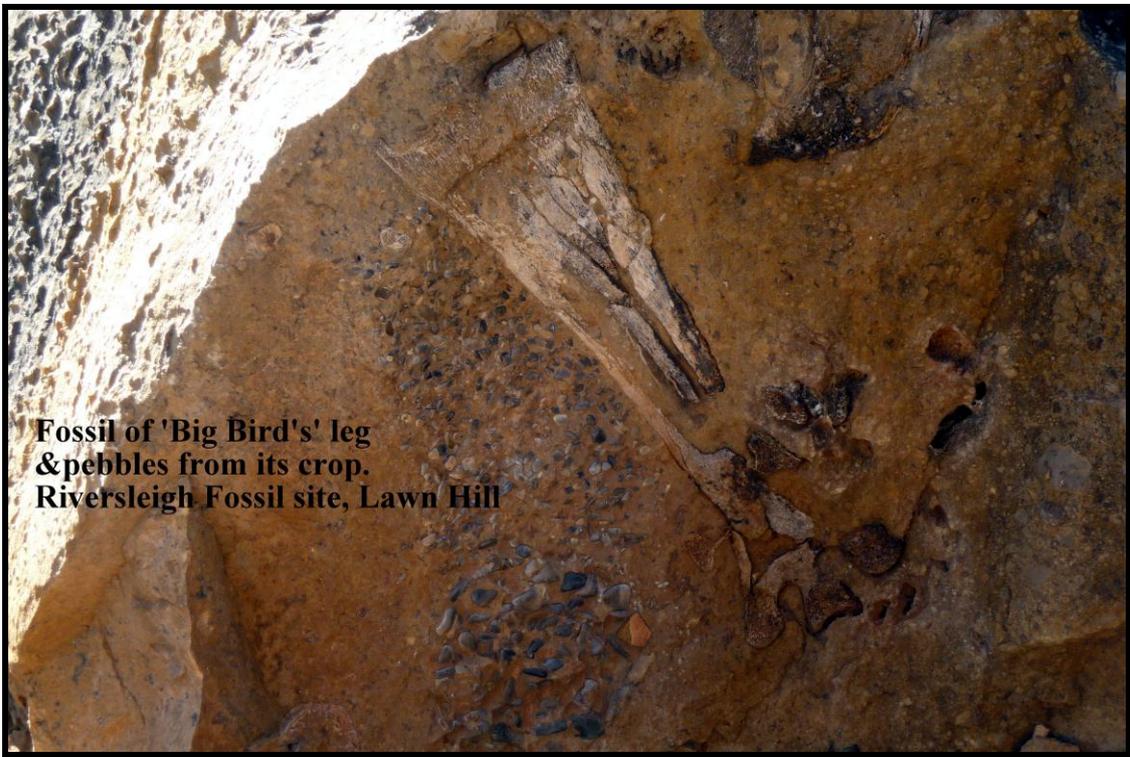


Neil Puddey's vireya nursery.



Gorge at Adel's Grove,
Lawn Hill NP





**Fossil of 'Big Bird's' leg
& pebbles from its crop.
Riversleigh Fossil site, Lawn Hill**



**INDARRA FALLS
LAWN HILL**



LETTER FROM BEYOND THE BLACK STUMP

As I commence this letter I am sitting in our “Gold Crown” caravan at 10am on Sunday 12 June in the caravan park at Adels Grove. It is 15C with a cool breeze. The weather would match Olinda on a sunny winter morning. This is definitely beyond the Black Stump. Where



exactly? On the Lawn Hill Creek in far North West Queensland 50k from the Northern Territory border and about 250k north west of Mt Isa and 200k from the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Now where is the black stump? The Black Stump, so the signage tells us, is at Blackall on the Landsborough Highway 600k due west of Gladstone. Landsborough is the guy who went looking in these parts for Burke and Wills in

1861. Beyond the Black Stump is the outback. The stump is a petrified conifer moved to the site of the original stump used in 1887 as a point in his survey to mark precisely to position of towns in Western Queensland. Petrified conifer found locally dates back to a rainforest past and the time when there was an inland sea in Australia and dinosaurs roamed.

Adels Grove is very close to the past action to be found at the Riversleigh Fossil Field 50k south. Adels Grove is named for Albert De Lestang who, in about 1930, purchased a “Miners Homestead Perpetual Lease”, established as such in 1920, and comprising 30ha. The site was within The Burketown Mineral Field now part of the Carpentaria Minerals Province which has produced lead silver and zinc since the 1880s. Today the CRA Century Zinc Mine, the world’s largest producer of zinc and the second largest open cut mine is 12k due east of Adels Grove.

Albert was a French botanist who, the present owners believe, was commissioned by the Queensland Government to experiment with the growing of tropical trees and fruits. By 1939 he had in excess of 1000 different species of trees and shrubs growing irrigated with an elaborate watering system from the creek. Many species were imported from Africa, Asia and tropical America.

Albert supplied seed from his collection to collectors worldwide including Kew Gardens where some still grow. Adels Grove, then, was a beautiful landscaped botanic garden with stone lined paths; white painted post and rail fencing. He also had a shop and supplied local miners with fruit and vegetables as well as clothing and other stores. He advertised

‘repairs, blacksmithing, carpentry, and saddler as well as the purchase, sale or exchange of horses and motor vehicles, catering for motorists, drovers, bagmen and other travellers’

Sadly Adels Grove is not the same today. In the early 1950s, while apparently Albert was absent, fire spread from a mine to the south and burnt all Albert’s records and buildings and much of his plantings. Albert, then over 70, was a broken man and died in Charters Towers in 1959 where he is buried.

Today only 2 mango trees remain and the campsite has no landscaping to speak of. Its beauty is the remnant rainforest along the creek and its attraction swimming in it and nearby Lawn Hill National Park. “Creek” is a misnomer since even in the dry winter it flows very strongly

from springs on the Barkly tablelands. In the wet [summer] there is ample testimony in debris to the raging torrent it becomes. Albert would have had his work cut out keeping his garden above the floodline.

Last Thursday we visited Lawn Hill and hired a canoe for a couple of hours traversing the middle Gorge and then the Upper Gorge, separated by Indarra Falls. The falls are growing from limestone being deposited from the heavily mineralised springs that feed Lawn Hill creek. A magic place. We returned later and did the Park walks

Lawn Hill was once part of Lawn Hill Station which still exists around Adels Grove and the National Park. Next door, 50k east, is Riversleigh Station also a cattle station. It is famous for the fossil discoveries and part of it, where the fossils are, is a World Heritage area. We went there yesterday morning to 'Site D' with Jim, our accredited "Savannah" guide. We were shown leg bones and gizzard stone fossils of the extinct "Big Bird" and fossils also of huge extinct crocodiles and dinosaurs. All were preserved in limestone forming in ponds in prehistoric rainforest. Basically the same process that is continuing along Lawn Hill creek.

Both Lawn Hill Station and Riversleigh Station are run together as cattle stations, with 75,000 head of cattle between them, by the traditional owners.

I return to this story on Wednesday 15th June at Karumba on the South East corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria- still well beyond the Black Stump. It is approaching dinner with fresh barramundi to cook. Karumba is where grey nomads from southern regions of Australia come in their caravans, motor homes and camper trailers to fish, some for three months at a time. The "Sunset Caravan Park", aptly named for us grey nomads in our twilight years, is full to brimming. For the season running one of these parks must be a licence to print money. We have site 158. There are 162.

Karumba is also port for live cattle exports but the loading yard is, currently, deserted. We all know why. However up here, along the Gulf, cattle are everywhere in huge numbers.



Brahman Cattle
Burketown

Brahman. At Adels Grove we climbed nearby Harry's Hill for mobile phone reception from the Century Zinc mine and saw stockmen drive many hundred cattle along the road below to Adels Grove gates, then back along the road and into the bush below. On the road ourselves, from Burketown to Normanton, we were stopped for half an hour by a mob of 1000 being driven to yards for pregnancy testing. We heard, on the radio, the lady Mayoress of Burke Shire, a cattle owner being interviewed over the export ban. I suspect the Government won't garner more than a handful of votes up here, come the next election.



Burketown, on the way here, has so it proclaims the oldest pub in North Queensland and serves 'Barra'. Marcia didn't like hers. We know it as 'the pub with no wine'. The only wine on sale was chardonnay in a can! We took a trip out to the wharf, on the Albert River, and on the way went to look at the "Landsborough Tree". We could not make sense of it. Our photo says it all.

We lunched at Normanton beside a cast of "the world's biggest recorded" crocodile, shot by a lady hunter in 1959. 8.63m. Then it was on to Karumba 73km further North at the mouth of the Norman River.

But enough from me this issue. I'll save the rest for the September Issue.

Simon Begg

JOTTINGS

(Following is an amusing email forwarded by John Wood)

Qantas Airlines: Repair Division

In case you need a laugh:

Remember, it takes a college degree to fly a plane but only a high school diploma to fix one.

After every flight, Qantas pilots fill out a form, called a 'Gripe Sheet' which tells mechanics about problems with the aircraft.

The mechanics correct the problems; document their repairs on the form, and then pilots review the Gripe Sheets before the next flight.

Never let it be said that ground crews lack a sense of humour.

Here are some actual maintenance complaints submitted by Qantas' pilots (marked with a P) and the solutions recorded (marked with an S) by maintenance engineers.



By the way, Qantas is the only major airline that has never, ever, had an accident??

P: Left inside main tyre almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tyre.

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough..

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

P: Something loose in cockpit.

S: Something tightened in cockpit.

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

P: Autopilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 feet per minute descent.

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed..

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

P: Friction locks causes throttle levers to stick.

S: That's what friction locks are for.

P: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

S: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.

P: Suspected crack in windshield.

S: Suspect you're right.

P: Number 3 engine missing.

S: Engine found on right wing after brief search.

P: Aircraft handles funny..... (I love this one!)

S: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right, and be serious.

P: Target radar hums.

S: Reprogrammed target radar with lyrics.

P: Mouse in cockpit.

S: Cat installed.

And the best one for last.....

P: Noise coming from under instrument panel. Sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer.

S: Took hammer away from midget.



THE 2011 PROGRAMME : NEW FORMAT

NB The Rhododendron Newsletter will be produced quarterly this year. Issues will be sent out by email or post in January, April, July & October. Contributions would be greatly appreciated. Committee meetings will be held at 5.00pm before General Meetings & as necessary.

JULY - Newsletter

SEPTEMBER

FRIDAY 16TH 8.00pm General Meeting at Nunawading. Speaker to be advised.

OCTOBER - Newsletter

SUNDAY 9TH – 2.00pm National Rhododendron Garden Neil Puddey from Coffs Harbour

SATURDAY 29TH-TUESDAY 1ST NOVEMBER - RHODODENDRON SHOW.

SUNDAY 30TH – 2.00pm National Rhododendron Garden during the Rhododendron Show. Growing rhododendrons in Melbourne.

NOVEMBER FRIDAY 18TH 8.00pm AGM and General Meeting at Nunawading. Speaker to be advised

DECEMBER

SUNDAY 11TH is a tentative date for the Society Christmas lunch.

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ARSV COMMITTEE 2011

There are many vacancies on the committee. The vacancies, it seems, increase with every issue! New committee members with enthusiasm and new ideas are desperately needed.

PRESIDENT: Michael Hammer Ph: 9755 2176

VICE PRESIDENT No 1: Vacant

VICE PRESIDENT No 2: Vacant

TREASURER: Vacant

SECRETARY: Michael Hare, 9844 2232

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

Inge Hammer, Ph: 9755 2176

Valerie Marshall, Ph: 9803 4434

Alan Walker, Ph: 9726 8836

Elizabeth Xipell, Ph: 9859 9934

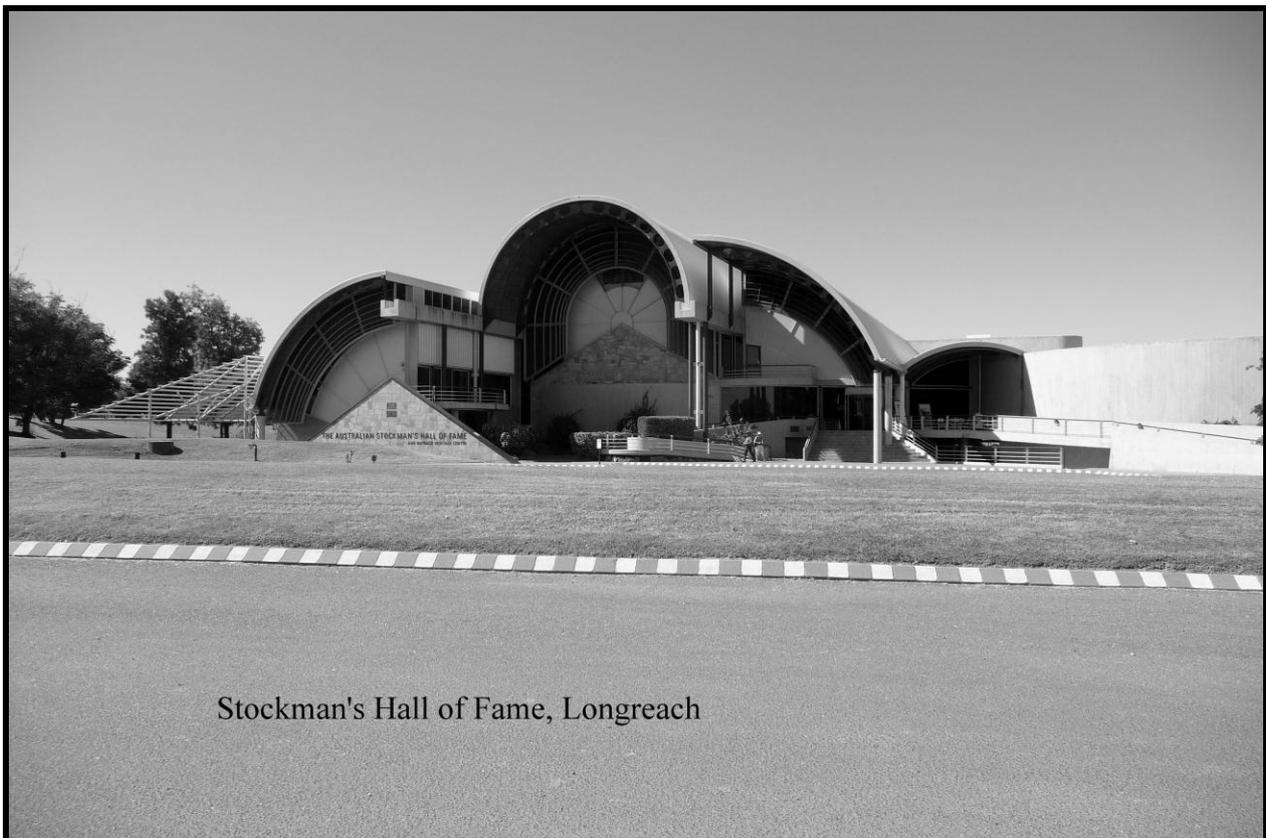
SOCIETY PICASAWEB SITE

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

Arising from the 2010 conference there are many new pictures:

- * of the conference
- * of NRG
- * of each of the gardens and venues
- * of delegates

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



Stockman's Hall of Fame, Longreach