

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 36:2

March 2025

Message from the President

Dear Friends,

We haven't been able to get together for quite some time and I am looking forward to seeing you in March.

Once again, we felt the cold shoulder of Nature last month, and, as in the last several years, it may take months before we see the damage those freezing temperatures left in our gardens. The snow cover protected some plants, but there are rhododendrons in my garden that will once again be set back, even though they appear undamaged at this point.

Indoors, in a large pot, my trifloral, *Rhododendron* 'Coral Glow' is in full bloom.

Why is it in a pot?

Well, I first planted my one-gallon plant in a nice pot and placed it beside the front door to enjoy its early flowers. It has grown very quickly.



Photo: Harry Wright

CVRS

March Meeting

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

7:00 pm

*Greig Rhododendron
Species Garden*

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Banner Photo:

Rhododendron blooming at the entrance of Rhododendron Memorial Park in Lake Cowichan

Photo: Verna Buhler



I love its cheery blooms so early in the year, so, I wanted to protect its buds from the freezing temperatures that I hoped wouldn't happen this winter, but suspected would. I know that I will have to set the trifloral free, find a sheltered spot in the garden near the door so its early blooms can be appreciated, and allow it to grow into the beautiful shrub it is meant to be. In Dart's Hill Garden Park in Surrey, the ocean influence and mature rhododendrons provide protection for this stunning early bloomer.



Photo credit: Dart's Hill Park

Most, if not all of us, are genuinely patriotic and determined to preserve, protect, and continue to develop the uniqueness of the identity of our great country, Canada.

Recent political events have raised Canadian concerns, hoisted Canadian flags, and intensified a Canadian sense of unity.

It seemed appropriate to focus this month on the special region in British Columbia where we live; it inspires us daily to be proud and protective.

Please enjoy the articles and photos of some of our valley's magnificence and our rich heritage of hardworking pioneers of Vancouver Island.

Verna

CVRS March Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, March 5, 2025

7pm at THE HUB

2375 Koksilah Road, Duncan, B.C.

Three-Man Panel
from
Greig Rhododendron Species Garden
and
Milner Gardens and Woodland

The CVRS has made several contributions to the development of the finest rhododendron garden on Vancouver Island. We have an opportunity to hear from three persons most closely involved with the species garden from its inception to its ongoing developments and plans in the future.



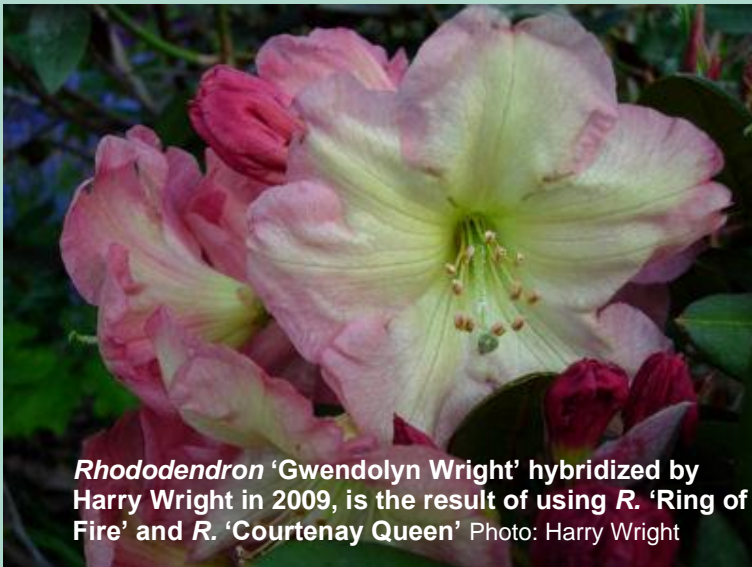
Geoff Ball, Executive Director of V.I.U.'s Milner Gardens and Woodlands, Jim Cadwaladr landscape architect advising in the establishment of the 'Greig Garden', and John Deniseger, chair of the Rhododendron Species Advisory Committee for the garden will be with us to describe and answer any questions about this formidable garden undertaking.

Six Degrees of Separation

By Alan Campbell

Having fore knowledge of this month's presentation caused me to muse over the various connections that are rooted in the formation of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden. I have come to think of these connections as six degrees of connections.

The initial whisperings of developing a rhododendron species garden within the Milner property began over 25 years ago. Initiated by, among others, **Harry Wright** a past Director of District One and a Past President of the North Island Chapter. With the passing of Veronica Milner in 1998 and the subsequent bequeathing of her estate to Malaspina College the time seemed right. Unfortunately, the years of flux of the college becoming a university delayed any thought of developing a garden.



Rhododendron 'Gwendolyn Wright' hybridized by Harry Wright in 2009, is the result of using R. 'Ring of Fire' and R. 'Courtenay Queen' Photo: Harry Wright

The Spring of 1954 saw the arrival of newly married **Ray and Veronica Milner**, second marriage for both, to Ray Milner's property at Qualicum Beach. The 40-acre wooded property must have seemed desolate to Veronica who was ranked in British peerage and more acquainted with English high society. With only memories of her grandmother's 11,000-acre

estate at Canford in Dorset, Veronica must have felt quite isolated. The lovely gardens of the Dorset estate would eventually move Veronica to slowly embellish the Milner property with new plantings. Aiding in her endeavors would be the local Royston Nursery.

The Royston Nursery of **Ted and Mary Greig** opened in 1936, and, therefore, was well established when Veronica Milner began to transform the Qualicum Beach property. Over the decades that the Royston Nursery operated, the esteem that Mary and Ted garnered in the plant world saw no bounds. Ted's fascination with alpine plants and Mary's love of rhododendrons quickly had the Royston Nursery notable around the world.

Importing species rhododendron from Britain, as well as subscribing to the expeditions of plant hunters such as Frank Kingdon Ward, expanded the Greig nursery stock to the point where, in the 1950's, Royston Nursery was supplying 10% of the rhododendrons available in North America. Ted and Mary Greig were charter members of the American Rhododendron Society in 1944.

Ted and Mary's dedication to the genus rhododendron was recognized by the A.R.S. with the presentation of the Gold Medal in 1966, a glowing tribute to years of purpose, which initially began with a small purchase of nursery stock from Marble Bay at Cowichan Lake.

The Marble Bay Alpine Plant Nursery was owned by **George Buchanan Simpson** and his wife **Jeanne Suzanne Simpson**. The Simpsons had visited the Cowichan Valley, from Briton, and eventually settled at Cowichan Lake in 1916. After purchasing a slice of property from the Stoker family, George and Jeanne began their garden and nursery. Subsequent years saw the expansion of the nursery and the acquisition of the rest of what became the 25-acre Stoker property. For 20 years the Marble Bay Nursery thrived until the Simpsons, wishing to retire, sold their nursery stock to Ted and Mary Greig. With the death of George Simpson in 1958 and the slow deterioration of her health, Jeanne Simpson, in 1968, offered the property and gardens to the **University of Victoria** with the stipulation that it be used as a unit for scientific study. It remains so to this day.



Rhododendron 'Buchanan Simpson' was hybridized by the Greig's in 1961.

It is a cross of the species *R. oreodoxa* var *fargesii* and an unknown pollen parent.

Dr. Richard Stoker and his wife **Susan**, when traveling in 1893, fell in love with the wilderness of Vancouver Island and bought property in the Cowichan Valley. After retiring from the British Gurkha Battalions in India as Surgeon Lieutenant Colonel, Richard and Susan returned and settled in the Cowichan Valley in 1900.



Marble Bay, Lake Cowichan
Photo: Bayview Village Strata

The Stokers would weather the colder winter months in their home at Quamichan Lake and venture to their 25-acre wilderness property and log cabin at Marble Bay, Lake Cowichan during warmer days. The Stoker's interest in the natural wilderness spurred the construction of a garden of native plants as well as the importation of plant material from British gardens and plant hunters.

This was the beginning of the naturally landscaped rhododendron garden at Marble Bay. Many of these rhododendrons would eventually find their way, 60 years later, into Finnerty Gardens at the University of Victoria. <https://www.uvic.ca/finnerty/index.php> It should also be noted that, in 2010, a park, Stoker Park, was designated along the shores of Bald Mountain.



Stoker Park is located on the south side of the Bald Mountain Peninsula on Cowichan Lake near the village of Youbou.

This waterfront park is located near the base of Bald Mountain Park which has many hiking trails with magnificent views of Cowichan Lake.

My 'sixth degree of separation' is somewhat tenuous. Perhaps drawn from rumors, whispers and conjecture. Dr. Stoker was born in Dublin, Ireland along with four brothers and two sisters. The question that has been debated perhaps for 100 years over coffee shop and bar tables was: "Did Richard Stoker's brother, Abraham Stoker, better known as the author **Bram Stoker**, ever visit his brother and walk the roadways and byways of the Cowichan Valley?"

Sources and suggested reading:

Cadwaladr, Margaret, *In Veronica's Garden*

Walker, Judith, *A Garden for Life: Mary Greig and the Royston Rhododendrons*

Kaatza Station Museum and Archives, Lake Cowichan

Editor's Note:

Clearly Bram Stoker's imagination was inspired by the Cowichan Valley experience, as he wrote:

"As we wound on our endless way, and the sun sank lower and lower behind us, the endless shadows of the evening began to creep round us. . .the dark firs stood out here and there against the background of late-lying snow."

His visit took place, no doubt, on and around the fourth of May:

"Just before I was leaving, an old lady came up to my room and in a hysterical way. . . she asked again: "Do you know what day it is?" I answered that it was the fourth of May. She shook her head as she said again:

"Oh yes! I know that! But do you know what day it is?" On my saying that I did not understand, she went on:

"It is the eve of St George's Day. Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway? Do you know where you are going and what you are going to?"

(This evidence, for humour's sake, was drawn from the text in Bram Stoker's book, *Dracula*.)



Rhododendron 'Drake's Orchid'

Hybridizer: Drake, E.F. Olympic Peninsula

Seed parent: *R. wardii* var *wardii*

Pollen parent: *R. fortune* ssp *discolor*

Rhododendron macrophyllum

PACIFIC RHODODENDRON

The native range of the species *Rhododendron macrophyllum*, the Pacific Rhododendron, is from British Columbia to northern California, from sea level to 6,000 ft, along the coastal foothills and Cascade Mountain in Oregon.

It can become leggy and 25 feet tall in shade and densely planted areas. It can form thickets of compact shrubs in sunnier sites such as forest opening and edges.



Rhododendron Lake on Vancouver Island
Photo: Harry Wright



Photo: nativeplantspnw.com



Photo: Susan Lightburn



Rhododendron macrophyllum in the Cascade Mountains in Oregon
Photo: Oregon State University



Photo: Susan Lightburn

Pacific Rhododendron is more tolerant of drought than some other rhododendron species, and can survive temperatures of -20 C.

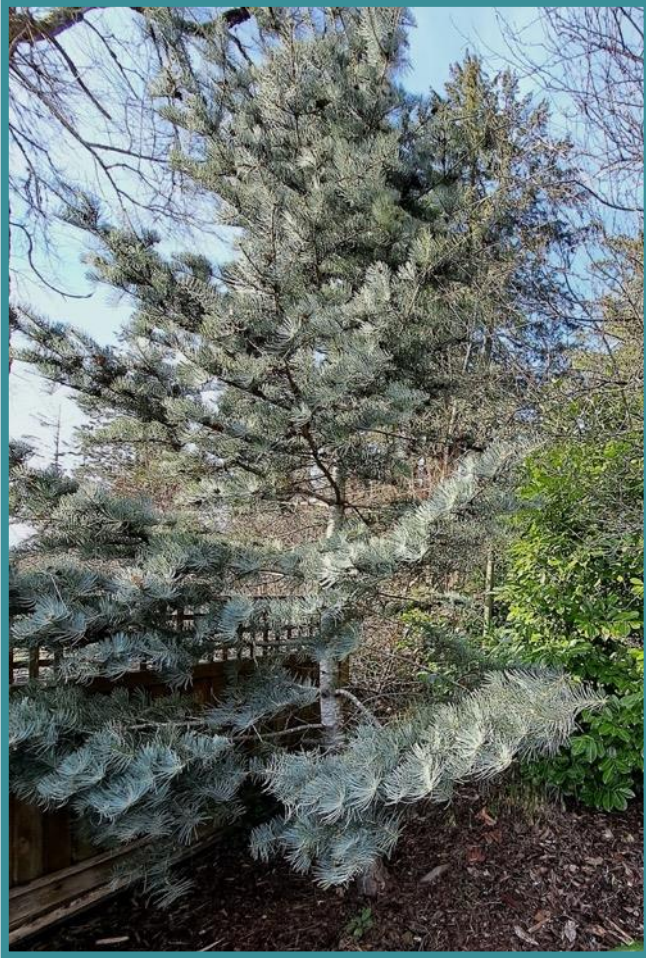
It occurs in a wide range of soil types, but is most commonly in relatively shallow, well-drained soils of various textures, from rocky coarse-grained soils to sandy soils.

Pacific Rhododendron cohabits with a wide variety of trees and shrubs.

Nearer to the coast, *Rhododendron macrophyllum* grows in wetter forests of Douglas fir, western hemlock and Sitka spruce where it co-dominates the understory with salal, huckleberries and fern. It even grows beneath shore pine, and Monterey cypress in the northern California coast.



Photo: Susan Lightburn



Abies concolor

Abies concolor is also known as the White Fir, or Colorado Fir. It is native to the mountains of western North America, the Sierra Nevada and southern Rocky Mountains.

It occurs naturally at elevations of 3000 to 11,200 feet. Some trees have grown to heights of more than 200 feet.

In cultivation, the white fir is selected and grown as an ornamental tree in parks and large gardens largely because of its very bright glaucous blue foliage. It is popular as a landscape tree and is often selected as a Christmas tree. Several cultivars, such as 'Violacea', have been chosen for outstanding foliage.

Abies concolor subsp. *concolor*, the Rocky Mountain white fir, generally does not exceed 125 feet.

The bark of *Abies concolor* is gray and at least 4 inches thick. The needle-like leaves are flattened and 1 – 3 inches in length, 2 mm wide and 1 mm thick. They are green to glaucous blue green above with two glaucous blue-white bands below. They are slightly notched to bluntly pointed at the tip. Although the leaf arrangement is spiral on the shoot the leaves are twisted to lie in two flat ranks on either side of the shoots, curving above, *but not below*, the shoots, as shown in the photo below.



A dwarf cultivar, *Abies concolor* 'Compacta' grows to a maximum height and width of 8.2 feet. It received the RHS Award of Garden Merit for these outstanding qualities.

COWICHAN VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

PLANT SALE

Saturday, MAY 3, 2023, 10am – 2pm

Plants and Volunteers Deeply Appreciated



CVRS PLANT SALE – WANTED! PLANTS!

It's that time again, when we encourage all our members to pot up divisions of their favourite plants to donate to the **CVRS Plant Sale**.

The earlier the plants are potted, the more well-rooted they become; they will then look wonderful by mid-May!

If everyone contributes 5 plants, we will once again be able to fill our sales tables with the special plants that our community appreciates.

At this time of the year, you may think you don't have those interesting plants, but in a short while, those plants will excite you as they do every year. No doubt, they would excite others as well.

Gentian, Ferns, Hellebores, Epimediums, Dwarf Irises, Heuchera, Lilies, Hostas, Peonies, Primulas, Euphorbia, Anemones, are just a few among so many more!

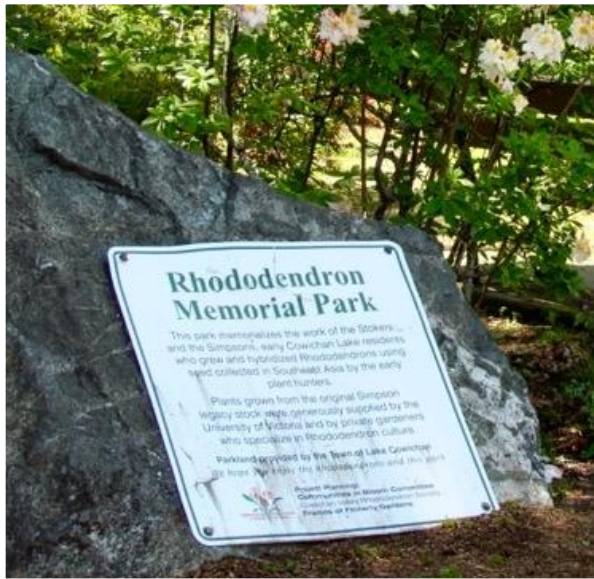
Please check to make sure your varieties are well behaved rather than invasive.



THANK-YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT!

RHODODENDRON MEMORIAL PARK

Is it Not Time to Remember?

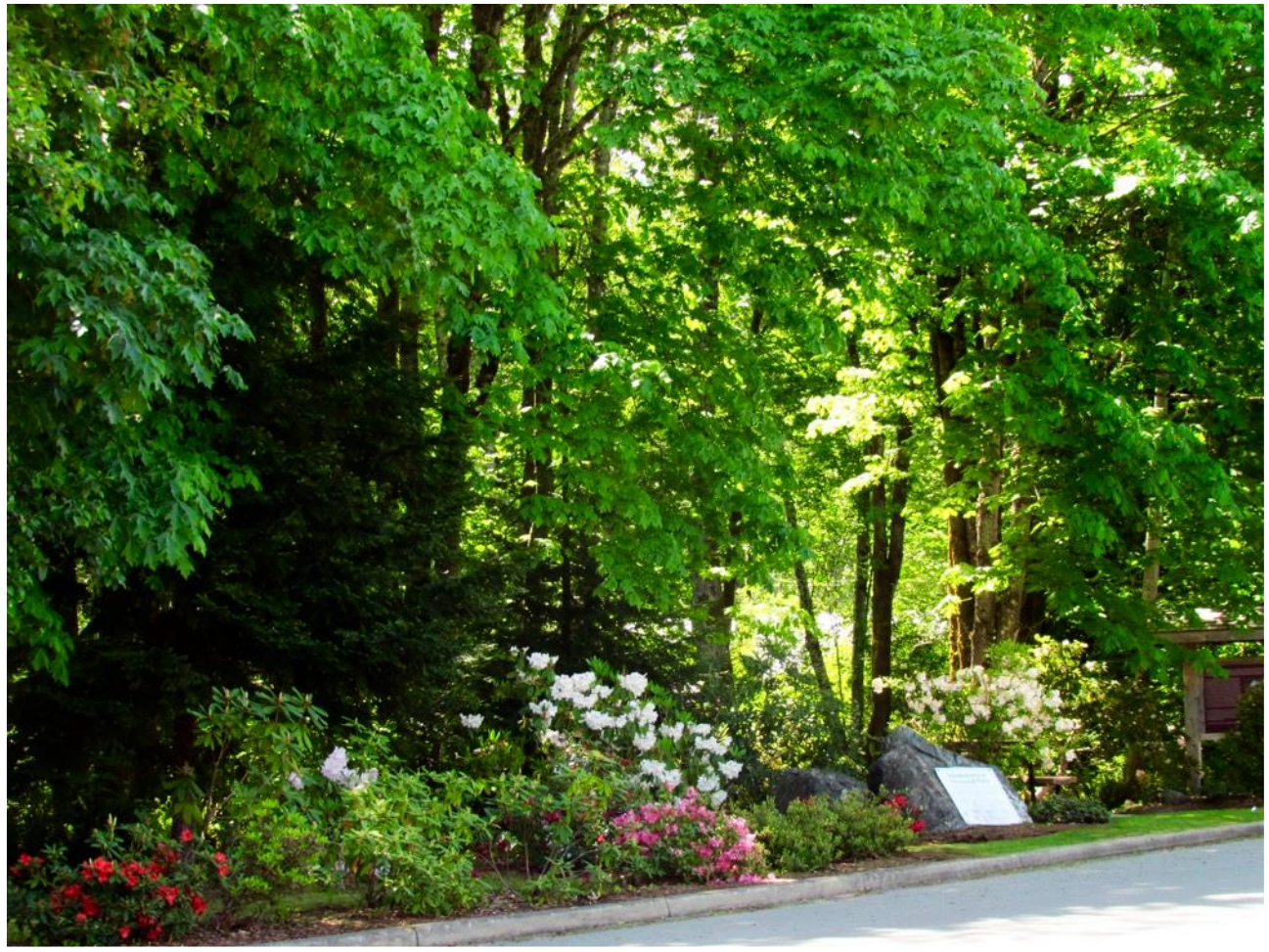


In May 2020, shortly before Ian Efford left us suddenly in June 2020, he asked me to go to the Rhododendron Memorial Park in Lake Cowichan to take photos of the rhododendrons in bloom. He asked me to record the numbers on the tags that identified the rhododendrons, and together we would use a list of the rhododendron numbers and names to identify the plants. I took the photos, and at the Plant Sale held at my place that year, we spoke briefly about getting together to organize this list for an article. Sadly, we were not able to complete the task as he had planned.

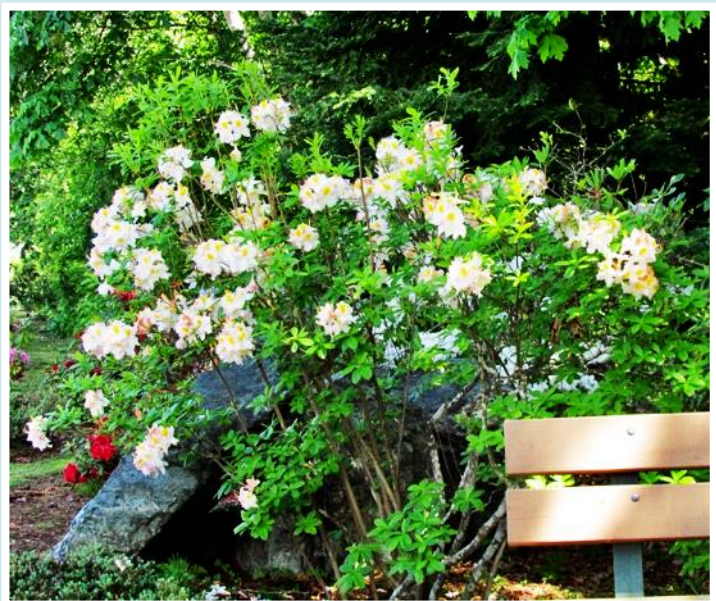
I hear myself telling people that the Cowichan Valley needs a community garden to showcase stunning rhododendron plants and special companion plants. It could be a place for aging gardeners to retire their favorite plants before they sell their properties. After selling their homes, despite wishful dreams that the new owners will value their heart and soul investments, too many drive by their previous loved homes to see their dearly loved gardens have been demolished.



For some reason, I do not remember that the Cowichan Valley *does* have a small Rhododendron Garden. That is a sad reflection on me, but it may also be that it is a garden that many of you have forgotten about as well. The sad irony is that it is a *Memorial Garden*, and as far as I know, it does not have a rhododendron dedicated to the person very much responsible for its inception, Ingeborg Woodsworth; nor does it have one in memory of the fine gentleman, Ian Efford, who had taken steps to *remember*, just weeks before his own passing.



The entrance to the Rhododendron Memorial Park is bright and inviting with white blooms set out against the lush forest. The rhododendrons do not have labels, but instead are identified with numbered tags which are associated with a list of the rhododendrons in the garden.





The rhododendrons appear to have been selected carefully, as they display stunning flowers and impressive foliage.







If any of you are confident about identifying some of these rhododendrons, please do let us know.





Artistically placed rhododendrons complement one another in the garden; the purple blotch of one drawn out by the deep purple blooms of another nearby.







There is something calming and elegant about white in a garden, and so I saved this arrangement of photos for the last. They speak to me of the gentle spirit of a memorial garden, this place of rest following years of effort and determination, of living to leave a positive, long-lasting impact, a legacy for others in the future, a testament of caring and passion.



As I worked through research for this newsletter, I became more and more convinced, along with millions of other people in the world these days, about the importance of place and home, the importance of never taking for granted the wonder and fortune of our situations; for us, there is so much here on Vancouver Island.

What I was struck by, powerfully, was that this Rhododendron Memorial Park Garden has been neglected. It was a joint project between the Communities in Bloom and the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society.

I discovered that Phases 1 and 2 of a Five Phase Plan had been completed, but then little else has been reported since.

I feel compelled to discover why the project fell to the wayside, and how to continue the vision which began in May 2008.

I would like to work with a small group of people to determine how best to revisit, and progress, this vision of the Five-Phase Plan for the Rhododendron Memorial Park Garden in Lake Cowichan.

Photos and Text by Verna Buhler

The following article is reprinted from the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society to provide background for the photo story in this issue (pages 15-19) of the Rhododendron Memorial Garden Park in Lake Cowichan

COWICHAN VALLEY CHAPTER HELPS DEVELOP PUBLIC GARDEN

*Ingeborg Woodsworth
Lake Cowichan, British Columbia
Canada*

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society, ARS District 1, has received an ARS Endowment Grant for the continued development of the Lake Cowichan Rhododendron Memorial Park.

Within the Cowichan Valley is the Town of Lake Cowichan, population approximately 2,800[at the time this article was written] Several members of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society are also members of Communities in Bloom, Lake Cowichan, and it is the combined efforts of these members who organized and planted Phase 1 and will continue to help with the upkeep of this garden.

We have begun Phase 1 (approx. 2 acres) of the Lake Cowichan Rhododendron Memorial Park Garden project with original plants and some propagated species and hybrids. These come from the main core of rhododendrons and azaleas at the University of Victoria/Finnerty Gardens. They were originally transplanted to University of Victoria from the University's Endowment Lands at Marble Bay near Lake Cowichan, Vancouver Island, BC. The Simpson family, who had cultivated rhododendrons with the Stoker family, endowed the property at Marble Bay, to the University of Victoria. This property is considered to be one of the cradles of the Pacific Coast for rhododendron hybrids. The history of these rhododendron plants, their origins, and their propagation, was published in spiral bound booklets and were available at the grand opening of the park during Lake Cowichan Heritage Days in May.

There is the potential of having five phases to this project. We have available to us land on both sides of Point Ideal Road, as well as the boulevards, in which to plant specimens. This provides a very unique setting for rhododendron culture with its humidity, uneven ground and established trees. Phases 2-4 will encompass four manageable plots of the land, which with Phases 1 and 5 will make up the entirety of the park.

The timeline involved is ongoing as it is dependent on funding and availability of more plants offered by the Finnerty Gardens of the University of Victoria, and others.

The fifth phase will include

Rhododendron macrophyllum at the Trans-Canada trail end in Lake Cowichan, which is located across the main road from the park. The challenge has been given to the Trans-Canada Trail Committee in Duncan, B.C., to meet us halfway on the trail between/[connecting] the two communities, with rhododendrons indigenous to the Pacific Coast area.



Watch for an article on Phase 2 of the development of the Rhododendron Memorial Park Garden in Lake Cowichan in the April issue.

Speak to me, Verna, if you are interested in pursuing this project



NEED ROOM FOR NEW PLANTS?

Most Gardeners Do!

Why not make some room for more dream plants by digging out some of your other dream plants that have happily propagated/expanded in an area, and pot them up for the CVRS Plant Sale?

Your CVRS Executive Plant Sale Team is looking to gather all donated plants destined for the Plant Sale, **one week in advance**, to tidy-up, label and price plants before the day of the sale!

Call us if you need help, or if you wish to help!

If each member was to donate FIVE PLANTS, we would present a fabulous sale!

PLEASE CALL US!



Diphylleia grayi

Skeleton Flower or Glass Flower

White open-faced flowers appear to turn to glass when they become wet



Diphylleia grayi is a mountainous, woodland plant that has a slow growth rate, eventually forming a lovely ground cover. It has a mounding habit of large, deeply lobed foliage that umbrellas over the stems. The skeleton flower grows best in Zones 4a – 9b in environments that suit Solomon's Seal, Hellebores, and Ferns. The fading of the colour in the petals when wet happens because of a loose cell structure present in the white flowers. When it rains, water fills in the cells of the petals, thus turning it clear, the same as water.





Event Details:

Sunday March 9th, 2025 9am to 3pm Michael J Fox Theatre, Burnaby

To Register: [Click Here](#)

Recordings Only: \$35 for one month of viewing – so if you are away, you can still see our speakers!

Early Bird Tickets: \$55 until January 15th, 2025

2024 – 2025 Calendar of Events

Contact CVRS: cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

Wednesday, March 5, 2025, 7pm

CVRS March Meeting at The Hu

Greig Rhododendron Species Garden Presentation

Sunday, March 9, 2025, 9am – 3pm

Vancouver Master Gardeners Spring Seminar 2025

Grow Different: Ideas to Transform Your Garden

Monday, March 31, 2025, 1pm

Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island

Richard Hebda: *Winter Jewels: Snowdrops and Crocuses*

Saturday, April 19, 2025

MARS Rhododendron Show and Sale

Qualicum Beach Curling Centre

April 25 and April 26

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden Spring Symposium

RSBG Federal Way, Washington

Saturday, May 3, 2025, 10am-2pm

CVRS PLANT SALE

Venue: The Hub

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY EVENTS

June 5 – 8, 2025

ARS 2025 Spring Convention Wolfville, Nova Scotia

USEFUL LINKS

Cowichan Rhododendron Society:

cowichanrhodos.ca/

Victoria Rhododendron Society:

victoriarhodo.ca/index.html

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society:

marsrhodos.ca/

North Island Rhododendron Society:

nirsrhodos.ca/ws/

The American Rhododendron Society:

rhododendron.org/

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society:

nanaimorhodos.ca

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden:

rhodygarden.org

Nanoose Garden Club:

nanoosegardenclub.ca/

Linda Gilkeson:

lindagilkeson.ca/

Vancouver Island Rock and Garden Society:

virags.com

Linda Chalker-Scott:

<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Steve Henning:

rhodyman.net

Rhododendron, Camellia, Magnolia

<https://www.rhodoqgroup-rhs.org/>



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society P.O. Box 904
Duncan, British Columbia V9L 3Y2

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>

2024-2025 Executive

President: Verna Buhler
Vice-President: Alan Campbell
Treasurer: Diane Allen
Secretary: Diane Allen
Director-at-Large: Janice Moseley
Director-at-Large: Laurie Moseley
Director-at-Large: Elisabeth Zoffman
Director-at-Large: Vacant
Membership Chairperson: David Annis

Convenors

Sunshine: Carrie Nelson
Tea: Sandy Campbell
Raffle: Hilda Gerrits
Program Planning: The Executive Team
Fundraising: The Executive Team
CVRS Garden Tours: Vacant
CVRS Bus Tours: Vacant
Library: Verna Buhler
Newsletter: Verna Buhler
Membership Chairperson: David Annis