

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 29:8 November 2018

President's Message

The colours of autumn are resplendent now, with reds, oranges, and yellows, a warm and brilliant palette. Autumn is perhaps my favourite time of year. It is a more sad and thoughtful time, however. There is none of the exuberant and lush fullness of spring with its vibrant greens and startling flowers.

Autumn is a time for reflection with hints of nostalgia of glories past, and of putting to bed last year's hopes, successes, and failures. It is a time for planting next year's bulbs---the epitome of future dreams, encased in a small round condensed plant form, buried beneath the earth for six months before emerging triumphantly the following year in a swathe of colour. The humble *Anemone nemerosa*, an unprepossessing rhizome in its dormant state, bursts forth in March and eventually covers the ground with its starry white, mauve, or bluish flowers. It then has the good grace



**Guest Speaker: Philip
MacDougall, botanist**

Wed, Nov 7 @ 7:30pm

(More details on page 3)

Tea Service - Nov 7

David Annis's Team

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to fade away completely, so you are not left with rather boring foliage for the rest of the season. It associates well with rhododendrons.

There are many bulbs, tubers and rhizomes you could consider planting now for that grand display in the spring. The *Scillas*, *Chionodoxas* (Glory of Snow - an evocative name), *Crocus*, and numerous lilies, would all be a good fit in our rhododendron and woodland gardens.



I also like the architectural leaves of some of the species such as the *Rhododendron sinogrande*. They stand there, leaves drooping, somewhat in a state of despair at the oncoming winter. This is just a fact of life and we humans know things will get better, even if they are not sure about it.

The deciduous azaleas come into their own now---the dull green of summer giving way to the reds and oranges of their leaves. I find that now I appreciate these deciduous plants more and look forward to their changes during the coming seasons---from the staid skeletal outline of bare stems, to the first burst of green, and finally the scented flowers. But their autumn dress is what I like best.

Barrie Agar, President



Deciduous azaleas in autumn dress

Wednesday, November 7th

GUEST SPEAKER:

Philip MacDougall, botanist

Philip is a botanist who has explored the Americas and the Far East. He is an executive member of both the Alpine Garden Club of BC and the Vancouver Rhododendron Society.

"Let me present the cheap and lazy plant explorers guide to Yunnan, an alternative with no huts, no ruts, no porters, no treks and especially no rats."

"SEA OF RHODODENDRONS: JOSEPH ROCK WAS ALREADY HERE"

"Over the Skype connection to my partner Quan, I pointed at the Chinese tourist map of the Changshan that I'd found. "What does that say?" I asked, expecting the large scroll of letters to be the mountain's name. "Sea of Rhododendrons" was his reply.

That would do nicely then. And so I saw one of the world's flower spectacles: mountainsides covered in pure stands of Rhododendron lacteum. At the peak of the Rhododendron season, my self-guided tour of Yunnan continued in that fortuitous vein."

Philip has an interesting collection of plants. He specializes in *Epimediums*, but he has other plants such as *Scheffleras*.

Another of his presentations is entitled "Green Patience – woodlanders: the common and rare, easy and recalcitrant". He says of *green patience*: "These charmers offer interest throughout the year. New breeding and collections from Asia have added heaps of surprisingly good plants".



Letter *from the Editor*



Weren't those three extra weeks of warm sunny weather in October a treat!

Generally, I am caught digging, cleaning, drying, and packing dahlias in numbing conditions late into dark rainy nights. This time the tubers were out of the ground, and I left The Island just before the cold and rain began. I have not yet played in the snow while here in Manitoba, but the air was definitely brisk as my sister and I raked leaves this week . . .

Okay, that was last night; my sister had asked how my "Letter from the Editor" was coming and I told her that it wasn't---everything seemed out of context here. Then this morning, a sprinkle of white magic changed everything. Before she left to teach her Grade One class, my sister placed the pan of now dry, collected plant parts in front of my mother; my mother's face lit up as she began to crush the "hulls" (she corrected me when I had called them "husks") of the seeds she had gathered in summer. The winter activity of discovering the tiny bits of living potential inside



simply delighted her. Always a natural teacher, she invited me to examine the bits of plant material and questioned me as to what I observed. "What do you think you will find in this piece?" she asked. When I rubbed it between my fingers and suggested that it didn't look like much, she said, "Exactly. That's what I expected." This continued throughout the next four steps of the four-hour process of extracting the seeds. "I taught you something over the years then," she added, as she separated the small from the larger healthy specimens on the sheet of white paper, one seed at a time. She explained why she discarded some and saved the others.



So finally, the illusive connection: The title that our special guest speaker Philip MacDougall had chosen for this week's presentation included the name of Joseph Rock. That initiated my delightful exploration of these persistent and "obsessed" plant explorers. Linnaeus, Hooker, Fortune, Delavay, David, Henry, Wilson, Forrest, and Ward: these highly renowned plant explorers' names are included in the botanical names of hundreds of plants, but I hadn't seen "*rockii*". These men, and a few women, who travelled,

collected, sorted and saved tiny precious specimens well before my mother's time, were driven by that same botanical fascination. Watching my mother's determination during the process of seed saving---she had me collect every single one that fell to the floor because any one of those might produce one of the best plants---made me feel a powerful sadness when I thought of how devastating it must have been for Joseph Rock when years of intensive work, his seed collections and notes, were destroyed by a Japanese bomber while en route to America during the war.

During my stay, my mother repeatedly sang a short tune: *Today is mine, tomorrow may not come/ I may not see the rising of the sun/ When evening falls, my work may all be done/ Today is mine, tomorrow may not come.*

With that truth in mind, we do our part as gardeners; we spend parts of our "todays" enjoying, and parts contributing to the preservation and perpetuation of the magic plant kingdom.

Verna

These steps can be followed with Rhododendron and Azalea seeds. The surprise would be in discovering what hybridizing work the bees have been doing in our gardens:



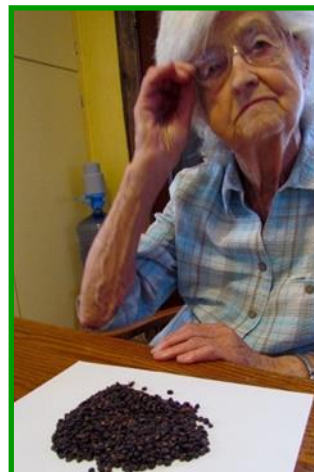
Break open the dry seed capsules and separate seeds from other plant material



Select the right size sieve to sift the seeds from out of dry plant parts



Select and separate the most viable seeds and discard the rest



Admire the pile of seeds before packaging, labeling, and storing them in a dry dark place

Joseph Rock: Botanist

According to Peter Demarco, "AS TALES OF ADVENTURE GO, his had it all: treacherous passages through snow-covered mountains; escapes from gun-wielding marauders; grand dinners alongside tribal princes; and religious rituals virtually unknown to the outside world."

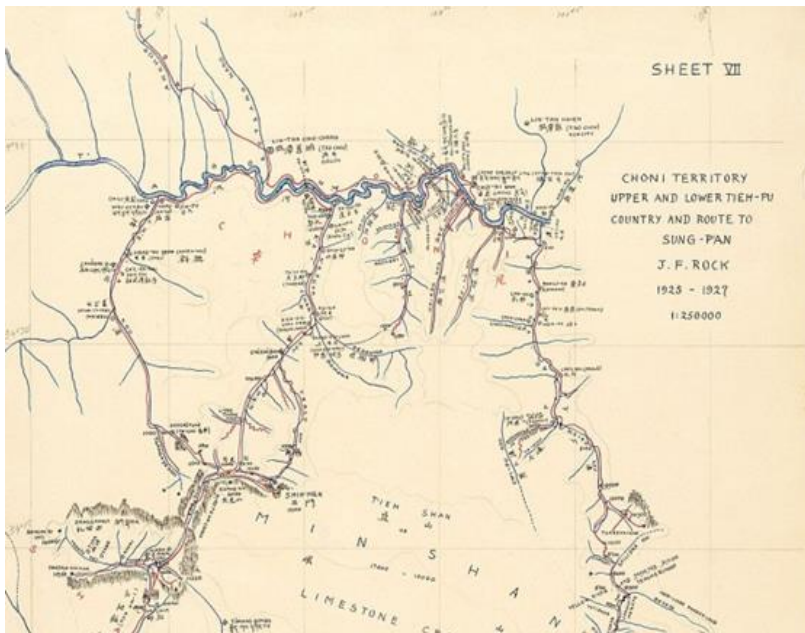


In 1924, Harvard contracted Joseph Francis Rock to explore China's southwestern provinces. He collected 20,000 specimens for the Arnold Arboretum during his three-year [Wild West] expedition.

"Botany, though, was just one of Rock's fortes. As an ethnologist, he took hundreds of photographs of the Naxi, an indigenous tribe in Yunnan province, recording their now-lost way of life for both

Harvard and *National Geographic* .

His hand-drawn map of his travels through China's "Cho-Ni" territory, in the Harvard Map Collection, includes more than a thousand rivers, towns, and mountains denoted in both English and (now antiquated) Chinese, and was so well made, the U.S. government used it to plan aerial missions in World War II.



Sheet VII of Rock's map of the "Cho-Ni" territory

Map courtesy of the Harvard Map

He was "[s]cientist, linguist, cartographer, photographer, writer (his expedition missives, at the Arboretum Library, are captivating)" (Peter Demarco *Harvard Magazine* September-October 2015)



***Sorbus aucuparia* 'Joseph Rock'** is a stunning variety of Mountain Ash that is derived from the Chinese species. It has a pretty and delicate look to it and has won both the First Class Certificate and the Award of Merit in 1950.

***Syringa pekinensis* (Beijing lilac)**, one of Rock's discoveries, is a dependable urban tree and a great choice even for parking lot, boulevard, and parkway plantings. Native to Asia, it is both hardy and beautiful, with attractive, amber-colored, peeling bark. In early summer, when many shrubs and trees are done blooming, it has large, creamy-white, honey-scented flower clusters.



***Additional information about Joseph Rock is drawn from an article published in the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society, Volume 37 Number 4.
[Presentation by Gwen Bell, of Seattle WA, at the National Rhododendron Convention in Portland, OR.]***

[Joseph Rock] was born in Vienna, Austria, on January 13, 1884. His early years were not filled with the happy, carefree experiences of most young children for his comfortable, loving mother died when he was just six years old.

Joseph was a curious boy . . . [who] read about far-away lands. China became the focus of his dreams and at age thirteen, he struggled to teach himself one of the languages of China. He collected little cards with intricate Chinese characters inscribed upon them.

In December of 1921, Joseph Rock stood poised on the threshold of his dream. He made his first incursion into western China. China had been virtually closed to the West following the Opium Wars of 1842 and 1860, although Robert Fortune led a large-scale expedition along the coast in 1843. Few foreigners had penetrated into the interior until Ernest Wilson made four expeditions and set off a wave of competition for Chinese ornamentals. Next came George Forrest, Reginald Farrer, Frank Kingdon Ward and in 1921 and 22, Joseph Rock.

[One summer] Forrest, Ward and Rock met in the field, but no rapport was established. Each seemed wary of the other and jealous of the territory. In the fall, Rock swept through the Sweli Valley searching for blight resistant chestnuts.

Joseph Rock emerged from that vast backcountry of China . . . and by 1924, he was in Washington identifying some 60,000 to 80,000 specimens that he had forwarded to the museum.

[Having returned to China], 1926 proved both exhilarating and depressing for Rock. [Initially finding little], he worked his way into lower Tebbuland and there was rewarded for all his efforts. "I have never in all my life seen such magnificent scenery. If the writer of Genesis had seen Tebbu country, he would have made it the birthplace of Adam and Eve." He amassed 20,000 herbarium specimens and uncounted bags of plant material and seeds, plus the skins of 1000 birds.

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Again, after some time spent in civilization, Rock sought a new sponsor] Charles S. Sargent, director of [Harvard's Arnold Arboretum] recognized an opportunity to replace [Ernest Wilson, who had collected successfully for British firms and for, but had suffered a severe leg injury] with a collector already experienced. He wished to import material from farther north than Yunnan, ornamentals hardy enough for Massachusetts. Sargent and Rock negotiated a three-year contract to explore unknown areas along the Amne Machin, a mountain range rising to 20,000' with the Yellow River curling at its base, and the Richthofen Range near the Tibetan-Mongolian border. Here, Rock must make his own maps and calculate all distances and altitudes.

He . . . collected 163 species of rhododendrons out of 317 varieties of plants, 30,000 herbarium specimens, bird skins and magnificent photos in black and white and color. [Once back] in Washington in 1932, now forty-eight years old and graying, he was tired and unprepared for the shock of finding that Ernest Wilson had been unfairly critical of his collecting.

Disaster hit China in 1937 when the Japanese invaded . . . [Rock] decided to leave China. Later he wrote, " . . . if all is OK, will go back to Likiang to finish my work. I want to die among those beautiful mountains rather than in a bleak hospital bed all alone."

It was unfortunate that he suffered a grave loss at this time. His belongings were on board a ship that was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in the Arabian Sea. Manuscripts, translations, years of work sank to the sea bottom. Now only three volumes remained for they had been photo-stated, then placed in the Library of Congress.

It was the fall of 1946 before he was free again to return to China and this time, the Harvard Yenching Institute agreed to underwrite his Nakhi research.

By 1948, the Communists and the Nationalists were competing for power in northeast China. Though it had not affected Yunnan as yet, Rock recognized that his China Adventure was almost at an end. He proposed one last expedition to members of the American Rhododendron Society, offering to spend two months in the field. He asked only \$2500 to buy supplies and to hire porters. From this exclusively American collection came quantities of rhododendron seed from 165 varieties. He collected seed from prostrate *R. repens* to plants the size of *R. sino-grande*. E.H.M. Cox noted that seed sent home by Rock was cleaner, had fewer rogues and a better percentage of germination than from any other collector.

To implement his income, [Rock] sold his library to the Far East and Russian Institute at the University of Washington in Seattle for \$25,000. Dr. Rock was appointed an Honorary Research Associate and spent some time there.

Dr. Joseph Francis Rock was presented with the ARS Gold Medal on April 23, 1954, in Seattle, Washington, in grateful acknowledgement of his horticultural work as a plant explorer and achievement in the discovery of new and valuable species of the genus Rhododendron.

Later, he went out to the Islands to botanize and to edit his Nakhi studies. He made short trips to Europe, to South America and to the Orient - but never to China! While living with friends, he suffered heart failure on December 5, 1962, in Hawaii---as S.B. Sutton put it, "half way between West and East".

The Understory Garden

Submitted by Elizabeth Zoffman

Many of us already have understory gardens when we grow rhododendrons among taller trees. Sadly, the rhododendron season lasts but three to four months.



Eranthis hyemalis, and *E. h.* 'Schwefelglanz'

Thoughtful addition of smaller plants with different foliage shapes, colours, variegation and heights will keep visual interest for months before and after our rhododendrons bloom.

Small ephemerals such as *Erythronium*, *Trillium*, *Anemone nemorosa*, *Anemone blanda*, *Dodecathron*, *Fritillaria*, *Eranthis hyemalis*, *Sanguinaria*, and *Triteleia* all bloom in early spring and disappear by June. They happily occupy the first few inches of soil, are not aggressive, and do not compete with co-planted shrubs.

Convallaria majalis, (Lily of the Valley), *Cyclamen*, *Disporum*, *Smilacena racemosa*,

Polygonatum (Solomon's Seal), *Aruncus aethusifolius* (Dwarf Goat's Beard), *Epimedium*, *Heuchera*, *Hepatica*, *Podophyllum versipele* (Spotty Dotty or May Apple), *Paris polyphyllum*, and woodland primulas all provide flowers, and endlessly varied forms of leaves and many degrees of variegation.



Cyclamen in snow



Triteleia laxa

Non-flowering choices include a host of ferns, *Gaultheria*, *Farfugium*, *Lonicera nitida* 'Twiggy', *Hosta* and others, where the choices can allow for the use of leaf colour, leaf size and

variegation (stripes, dots, edges) to lighten up dark corners of the garden.

Small trees including dwarf acer, dwarf conifer, *Cercis canadensis* (Forest Pansy), *Azara microphylla variegata*, *Carpinus japonica* add height and interest without creating too much shade or competition.

Shrubs such as *Corylopsis pauciflora*, *Daphne* of many varieties, and very dwarf conifers all fit under other shrubs and trees and provide scent.

Last but not least are my favourites – *Hellebores*. They come in so many colours from modest nodding white bells to outrageous, frilly black, femme fatales. Since their roots go deep as opposed to out, they do not compete with neighbours (They are in the ranunculus family after all.)

Sourcing these plants may be hard, as local nurseries generally carry what the mass producers will provide. Frasers Thimble Nursery on Saltspring Island has an astonishing variety of the ephemerals, shade plants and native plants. Quality *Hellebores* can be had at Phoenix Perennials in Richmond as well as at Fraser Thimble Nursery. Keeping one's eyes open at Home Depot and Canadian Tire can sometimes bring surprises (I once found a whole flat of *Meconopsis betonicifolia* (Himalayan Blue Poppy) at \$3 per 4" pot at Canadian Tire in Burnaby!!!) Sharing extras between garden friends is often the best way to obtain plants like *Anemone nemorosa* 'Vestal' (double white) – it spreads readily but may initially cost \$10 for a little plant in a 4" pot.



Disporum longistylum 'Night Heron'



Paris polyphyllum



CVRS CHRISTMAS PARTY



This year's Christmas Party is being held, once again, in the afternoon at The McLay Heritage Guest House on Koksilah Road. The ambience of this early Twentieth Century Home sets the stage for a rural traditional Christmas. Also, holding this event in the afternoon makes it easier for some of our members to attend.

Sunday, December 2, from 1-5pm

McLay Heritage Guest House

5241 Koksilah Rd, Duncan, BC V9L 6V3

Phone (250) 746-5233

Buffet style **Food and Goodies** table, the same as other years. We ask that you bring your favourite sweet or savory dish to share and delight! A non-alcoholic punch, wine, and soda/ fruit juice will be provided.

Rhododendron Photo Contest: Don't forget to bring a copy of your best Rhododendron photo for entry in the photo contest. Everyone also needs to bring 4 quarters for voting. There'll be prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd most popular photos.

Story Telling: Back by popular demand. It is a well-known fact that Rhododendron lovers are the best storytellers in the Cowichan Valley. There are very few rules to this contest:

- Your story may be fact or fiction, indeed truth or veracity is discouraged
- You will have 3 - 4 minutes (approx.) to spin your yarn
- Following are 8 words that must be used at least once in your tale:

Tibet Chrysomanicum Red Walloper macabeanum

Enchanted Evening Quadrille Rubicon Cabaret

These are all Rhododendron related, except for maybe Tibet, but there are rhododendrons found there. While

some of the more Latin sounding names may be difficult to insert, remember inventiveness is the overriding consideration. Gramer, no...gramor, grammar? It is absolutely secondary. As this is an oral rendition of tales, spelling drops "out the window".

The master storyteller will be chosen by an appropriate method (clapping of hands)

Gift Table Auction: Everyone/couple) is asked to bring an unwrapped gift for the Auction Table. An arm's length of tickets is sold as your bidding token. Put your ticket into the cup of the gift you would like to receive; if your number is called the gift is yours.

Food Donations: As usual we will be seeking food donations for the **Local Food Bank**.

The Salvation Army will receive the proceeds from the Gift Table Auction.

If you call **Barrie Agar** at **(250) 748 2308** or email barrie.agar@shaw.ca she will help you arrange a ride.

We sincerely hope you are able to join us in the fun and festivities. If you would kindly RSVP

Elaine at y1880@yahoo.ca, we will set a place at the table especially for you. Due to the size of the room, our limit is 40 people.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Wednesday November 7, 2018; 7:30 pm
CVRS Monthly Meeting;
Guest speaker: Philip MacDougall, botanist

Sunday December 2, 2018; 1 - 5pm
CVRS Christmas Party
Details in the Notice in this Newsletter

March 13 - 18, 2019;
Jonny Larsen Special Presentations
and Events
More information in the Notice below

February 2, 2019
Mixing It Up
"Beauty & the
Beast"

**Saturday April 27,
2019**
Cowichan Valley
Garden Fair



Special Upcoming Event

JONNY LARSEN

Jonny Larsen is a Rhododendron enthusiast and expert, living in Norway. His presentations at the Bremen Conference this summer past were very well received. He is coming to Vancouver Island this summer and will be speaking at the Island clubs. We have not settled on a day and time for the CVRS to hear his presentation while he is in the Cowichan area, but at this time, the plan involves organizing some car-pooling to the other club meetings, to join them. Stay tuned for more information!

- March 13 Qualicum Beach MARS
- March 14 Nanaimo Rhododendron Society
- March 15 Garden Tours in the Cowichan Valley
- March 16-18 Victoria area

He has a variety of presentations:

- 1) Plant hunting - the experience of an amateur
- 2) Rhododendron species culture in Scandinavia
- 3) Jean Rasmussen in Norway - a short presentation on Frank Kingdon-Ward's second wife and her years in Norway.

2018-19 Executive

President: Barrie Agar
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Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

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Library: Verna Buhler

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History: Ian Efford

Garden Tours/Trips: Al Murray

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

Christmas Party: The Team



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society
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Duncan, British Columbia
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<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



April 27, 2019; 10 am - 2 pm
<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>



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