



NEWSLETTER

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EDITOR: LESLIE DREW

March 2006

Two Fields of Exploration

Peter Wharton, curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at the University of British Columbia, will be making his 11th botanical trip to Southeast Asia this autumn, followed by another in the spring of 2007.

In September and October, he will be plant hunting in the western part of China's Sichuan province with a professor and two undergraduate students from the University of Sichuan. In April of 2007, he will spend 3 weeks exploring a region of North Vietnam adjacent to the Yunnan border.

Both trips are privately funded. District ARS chapters have been asked to contribute in exchange for rhododendron seed. Directors of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society voted \$500 at their January meeting.

The mountainous part of western Sichuan he will visit (highest mountain is 3100 metres) is extraordinarily rich in plant life and has been little explored, he said. He expects to find several new species.

In North Vietnam, he will be exploring south of Omei. His goal is a mountain range 150 kilometres long and 30 kms wide, where the highest peak is 4000 metres and most of the terrain between 3000 and 2500 metres. The region is known for its plant diversity and hardiness.

He expects to bring back seeds of maples, linden, rhododendrons, members of the camellia family, styrax, and climbing roses.

Meanwhile, for the further benefit of the Asian Garden, UBC has engaged a Chinese collector at the main botanical garden at Beijing to look for specific genera and species. 

What's Coming Up

March Meeting: March 1 at St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

Main Speaker: Leslie Drew will speak on Richard Layritz, the most successful nurseryman in British Columbia history, and his influence on rhododendron-growing in the Pacific Northwest. When rhododendrons were an emerging genus, he introduced the first hybrids and propagated them in quantity. He brought them to public attention as no one else had done in the Northwest in the days before the specialist.

Short Talk: Peter Kearns will talk on propagating from seed.

Display: Please bring a flower or spray of any rhododendron in blossom in your garden. At the last meeting, two very early bloomers showed up: David Annis brought *R. 'Olive' (moupinense × dauricum)* and Peter Kearns *R. 'Heatherside Beauty' (caucasicum × unknown)*.

Plant Table: Please bring spare plants of whatever you're raising for the garden. This is an important moneymaker and a chance to share material.

Tea and Goodies: Joan Clarke, co-ordinator (748-1272); Doris and Ian Anderson (746-8678); Mary Gale (743-9329).

*PLEASE REMEMBER TO RETURN YOUR
LIBRARY BOOKS AT THE NEXT MEETING!*

Directors' Meeting: March 15 at the home of Leslie Drew, 4491 Creighton Road, Sahtlam.

Spring Show and Sale: May 6 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 10 AM to 2 PM.

ARS Western Regional Conference: Harrison Hot Springs September 22-24, 2006.

*Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month
in St. John's Anglican Church Hall,
486 Jubilee Street, Duncan.
Set-up at 7:00 PM, start at 7:30 PM*

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society
PO Box 904, Duncan, BC V9L 3Y2 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>



Vancouver Island Hybridizers: The Beginning

by Alan Campbell

My interest in local rhododendron hybridizers germinated 7 or 8 years ago as I attended the annual show and sale of the Victoria Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The Victoria Chapter, the oldest chapter on the Island having been chartered in 1980, always has an excellent truss show. Wandering among the show tables while trying to hold a studious expression, hoping that I appeared to know what I was looking at, I came upon a table holding the Vancouver Island hybrid section. I was aware of a couple of local people who had produced their own hybrids, but I was astounded to learn of the number of individuals and the volume of their work. Instantly intrigued, I began an in-depth study of what I consider a far too overlooked segment of the Island's horticultural heritage as well as that of the Rhododendron Society—the Vancouver Island hybridizers, the floral equivalent to Emily Carr and Roy Henry Vickers.

In the 1880s another industrious Scotsman was lifting his eyes from the heather hankering to follow the setting sun westward. His name—George Fraser. Bill Dale of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society has devoted many years to studying George Fraser's work. Bill's findings have been published in the newsletters of many ARS chapters, as well as the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society. I have no intention of tramping all over Bill Dale's research, but would like to reiterate some of his points as I go along.

George Fraser, as a 17-year-old in 1871, entered the workforce by attaining a position with Christies Nursery in the small town of Fochabers. East of Inverness along the Moray Firth, Fochabers sits on the east bank of the River Spey. Ahh Speyside, the very name calls forth the nosings of the Highland single malt distilleries—Macallan, Aberlour, The Glenlivet . . . ahem, yes, well, excuse me. Apparently, George was not as gripped by any amount of indecision of where to seek employment as I would have been in his time and place. Of course, Speyside also holds the mystical whisperings and spiritually guided gardens of Findhorn. Perhaps Mr. Fraser, with heritage reaching far into the Highland mists, was imbued with skills seldom granted by

Mother Nature to mere mortals. Such could perhaps explain the accomplishments that George Fraser's future would hold. A less fanciful and more believable scenario I expect is that one of the premier plant hunters of that time, Robert Fortune (1812–1880) was also a Scot, working at the Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. Plant material derived from Fortune's expeditions and publications of the same, I imagine, would have been the stuff of dreams to a young George Fraser.

Emigrating to Canada in the 1880s, George worked his way across the country to eventually land in Victoria in 1889. Here he shouldered the responsibility of project foreman under John Blair, the landscape architect commissioned by the city to build Beacon Hill Park. Completing his contract with Blair, George now looked for property to buy and begin the construction of his own nursery. Upon hearing of near-perfect growing conditions on the west coast of Vancouver Island, he purchased over 230 acres of Crown land in 1894 in what is now the town site of Ucluelet. George had followed the westward sun as far as he would go.

The primary focus of the Fraser Nursery in Ucluelet were plants in the Ericaceae family, heathers and rhododendrons (azaleas included), which are my main interest here. George Fraser corresponded and exchanged plant material around the world, most notably with Joseph Gable of the eastern United States and, I expect, through him to the likes of James Barto of the western States and Edward Magor of the United Kingdom. His close association with Gable is apparent in the parentage of a number of hybrid rhododendrons registered under Fraser's name. *Rhododendron maximum* of eastern North America and *R. macrophyllum* of the West Coast were used to produce hybrids, such as 'George Fraser', 'Maxie', and 'Albert Close'. The deciduous azalea 'John Blair' comes from the crossing of *R. occidentali* and *R. arborescence*.

My personal favourite hybrid of George Fraser's is his 'Mrs. Jamie Fraser' [*R. arborescence* ssp. *arborescence* × *R. macrophyllum*] × *R. arborescence* ssp. *arborescence*. As one would expect from its parentage, 'Mrs. Jamie Fraser' will develop into a large shrub. The rather long 5-inch leaves tend to be on the light side of green, not the deep dark green that most gardeners desire. It is the flower that catches my fancy—an openly funnel-shaped flower

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Rhodo propagating, anyone?

For some time now, three members of the CVRS have been involved with a group from the Victoria Rhododendron Society who have taken their interest in rhododendrons one step further. They call themselves simply “The Propagating Group.”

Once a month, the group meets very informally in someone’s home. The focus of discussion is rhododendron propagation, but the topics can, and do, wander to current events, computer problems, the best camera to have, but always returning to rhododendrons. Sometimes two or three topics will be discussed at the same time. It’s always interesting.

Knowledge levels range from beginners wishing to learn, to seed propagators, to vegetative propagators, to those already hybridizing. Everyone is welcome.

The three of us in the CVRS would like to form a comparable group within our own Chapter. To give us

an idea of the level of interest in forming such a group, would those of you who feel it is time to take that next step please contact Ingeborg Woodsworth, Leslie Drew, or myself.  by Alan Campbell

Therapy Course

As a licensed trade school, Providence Farm is offering the four courses required to complete a horticultural therapy certificate accredited with both the American and the Canadian Horticultural Therapy Associations. The certificate course is valued at 1.5 points toward professional registration.

Offered for 4 weeks during the summer, the course consists of an introduction, techniques, programming and community development, and horticultural therapy.

More information may be obtained from Providence Farm’s Web site at www.providence.bc.ca or by phoning (250) 746-4202.

Hybridizers: *The Beginning . . . continued from Page 2*

with wavy edges and a colour best described as a blackish-crimson holding a flare of black spots. Not being a botanist or a geneticist, I am at a loss to understand how such a dark-red flower could be produced by that set of parents. I realize this colour will not appeal to everyone, but I do hope consideration is given to at least one selection from the Fraser hybrids. Perhaps the smaller, more delicate ‘Fraseri’, a pink deciduous azalea, would hold more interest. I have also heard whispers of a ‘Fraser’s Pink’, but I do not know whether this is a synonym of ‘Fraseri’, or one plant from what has been called “the Fraser Group.” If a reader could clarify this, please do.

On page 226 of the Vol. 58, No. 4, 2004 issue of the ARS journal, an article by Bill Dale describes the discovery and progression of a second-generation Fraser hybrid. Four years after the death of George Fraser in 1944, a seedling was found growing in his abandoned garden. “Rescued” and transported to Victoria, it still grows happily after 60 years. When rediscovered by Bill Dale in the 1990s, cuttings were obtained and rooted. Registered by Bill and listed in

the registry of plant names (Autumn 2001 supplement of the ARS Journal) is the hybrid ‘Fiona Christie’, named for a descendant of the Fochabers Christies who visited Victoria in 2000. Rooted cuttings of this plant returned with their namesake to Scotland and to Fochabers. The touch of George Fraser had come full circle.

For 50 years, George Fraser worked his nursery in Ucluelet, yet we have only half a dozen or so rhododendron hybrids to list next to his name. Does this denote a lack of focus on George’s part? I don’t think so! I expect his work was of a greater volume than we know. A combination of time and lack of knowledge is the culprit here. The loss of plant material through attrition, the loss or lack of documentation of the what, when, and where of plant production leaves us with a sparse representation of a life’s work. That, in a nutshell, is the reason that I push for the propagation of our “heritage plants.” We just can’t afford to lose them. Somewhere a forgotten Fraser hybrid is growing. Perhaps it will be recognized, perhaps not, but with a little diligence we will not lose the ones we have. 



Rhododendrons in March

As if we need reminding, let's talk about wind chill factors.

Right now, my neighbours are scrambling about their hillside garden with burlap and sticks to enclose any rhododendrons planted last fall or later, or any that truly look stressed. As a temporary enclosure for each medium-height rhodo, I suggested "row cover," or burlap, stapled to each end of a stake. By driving the stakes deep enough (5 stakes in total) to hold firm and leaving the top open, you'll have a reusable device for many years.

If the weather is mild, March is a good time for layering. It's one way of increasing our favourite rhodos, but it does call for patience.

As you walk around your garden looking for winter damage, you may find a rhodo branch bent down to the ground. This is a chance for layering provided by Mother Nature (but suitable only for weevil-resistant varieties!). I like to have all materials on hand—rooting hormone No. 3, a sharp knife, a 6-inch metal pin (12 inches of heavy wire bent in half), a large rock, and yes, a blank label so that the date of separation from the parent plant can be recorded when the time comes.

Take your time with this little job. Inspect the branch for a potentially even-branched plant, and then scrape a finger's length of the bark and powder it with the rooting hormone. Now press the scraped portion into loosened soil under the branch and anchor it with the metal pin before releasing your grip on the plant. Cover slightly with just a little soil (one-half inch) and, gently holding your future plant upright, place a grapefruit-sized rock against the stem and attach the label.

This is where the patience comes in! I wait nearly 2 years before lifting my new creation. Regardless of how long it takes, novices never forget their first layer.

A number of apple-blossom pink rhododendrons make a fine succession this month, including *R. fargesii* and *R. oreodoxa*, and the hybrids 'Tina' and 'P.J.M.', with pale yellow 'Bo Peep' for contrast. The species *R. lutescens*, one of the parents of 'Bo Peep', flowers for 2–3 weeks at this season. Indeed, the pace of springtime quickens all through this month (weather permitting), until we have the full splendor of our gardens in April. 

by Ingeborg Woodsworth

— 2006 Directors —

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— 2006 Conveners —

BARGAIN TABLE/RAFFLE	Joyce Gammie Daphne Jackson Dawn Fedorchuk	246-2484 748-9475 715-1233
GARDEN CLUB LIAISON	Joyce Gammie	246-2484
GARDEN TOURS	Anne and Roger Slaby	748-4623
HISTORIAN	Bev Mountain	746-6339
INTER-CHAPTER RELATIONS	Ingeborg Woodsworth	749-6291
LIBRARIAN	Janet Gardner	748-1867
MEMBERSHIPS	Jackie Walker	743-3650
NEWSLETTER	Leslie Drew	748-6152
PICNIC/CHRISTMAS PARTY	Joan Clarke Mhairi Bruce	748-1272 743-8327
SPEAKERS (to mid-June)	Sandy Campbell	743-3597
SPRING SALE	Ian Efford Michael Krieger	246-1453 391-6215
SPRING SHOW	Sharon Tillie Janet Gardner	748-8254 748-1867
PROPAGATION	Alan Campbell	743-3597
REFRESHMENTS	Maria Kemmler Sheryl Krieger	746-8751 391-6215
SUNSHINE	Ann Springford	746-7303
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