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# The Scottish Rhododendron Society Yearbook 2015

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Cover Pictures: Front: *Rhododendron trichostomum*  
Back: Deep pink *Rhododendron souliei*  
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## **Editorial**

Welcome to the SRS Yearbook No 16. Another bumper volume written by our members. As a society, we are so fortunate to have a depth of knowledge that enables me to produce an annual publication of the quality that makes us the envy of the rhododendron world.

With this in mind, it has become necessary to review our copyright policy. Therefore I respectfully draw your attention to page 70. In order to protect their work, our scribes need to know that there can be no reproduction without their permission.

This Yearbook contains not one, not two, but three tales of wild plant exploration. This is a subject very close to my heart, and it is wonderful that some people are venturing into the wild to botanise. All this information helps with our knowledge of plants, what might be endangered from logging or climate change, environmental demands, and of course pests and diseases.

The Nagoya Protocol was ratified in October 2014. This will make it even more difficult to obtain wild collected plant material. This may have the opposite effect on conservation to what is intended, as ex-situ conservation becomes difficult. I have tried to make sense of it, but it does not make for easy understanding. As more information becomes available, I hope to bring you more in the future.

I have included the full article about Ashridge, touched on in the Autumn Review. Those who are full ARS members will have seen this in the Summer Journal, but more of our members are only SRS members, so it is definitely worth reprinting here.

Arduaine has always been the “spiritual home” of the SRS, so it is fitting that two articles about the garden are included in this Yearbook. Arduaine was threatened with closure by the National Trust for Scotland in 2009. It is important therefore to appreciate what we have, and understand that, without the support of societies like ours, it could have become an overgrown wilderness.

Enjoy your Yearbook.

*John Roy*

# My Adventure in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

**Jonathan Davies-Coleman**

In October I was privileged to take part in the International Dendrology Society's tour of Bhutan. It was my first time in Asia let alone India or Bhutan. My role was to accompany the botanists and learn from them and other knowledgeable individuals about the flora as well as field botany techniques. It is safe to say that I have come away from the tour a different and more experienced individual who is excited about a possible future working with plants.

The tour's main interests were trees and some shrubs but not specifically rhododendrons. I however, felt differently. Over the course of the 19 day tour I managed to find 24 different species of rhododendron and many more we sadly could not identify. We managed to see the four large leaf species that occur in Bhutan, namely *Rhododendron grande*, *R. falconeri*, *R. hodgsonii* and *R. kesangiae*. These I could identify from past experience, but the others I was helped greatly by the botanists in identification, and I did on at least one occasion break out the botanical key.

Our tour started in the Imperial Hotel Delhi. Here we got to know each other and more about the trip over dinner in a Thai restaurant. We already knew that the tour was to start in the East and we would slowly make our way to the West after a week long trek. During dinner we got more in-depth details such as leaving times, places we were staying and other useful information. The following morning we took an internal flight from Delhi to Guwahati in Assam where we were met by the Bhutanese tour company and their Bolero vehicles. The conditions were much more humid than in Delhi but we were still in the tropical zone with the likes of *Delonix regia* flowering in the car park. From here we made our way to the border post first stopping off on the Indian side. We had a bit of a wait as the Indian border officials manually wrote all our details into a ledger. Whilst this was going on we had the opportunity to walk down the road and do a bit of botanising. The main sights were tea gardens and teak trees. After a little while we were able to progress onto the Bhutanese side where we received the traditional "Kadar" scarves from our Bhutanese colleagues. These are given to guests and we received a number over the course of the tour. We lunched just across the Bhutanese border and started our roadside botanising shortly after. The roadside botanising was to become a regular occurrence during the tour. The flora had not changed much compared to the Indian side. The only real addition

was a mimosoid legume ground creeper that acted just like sensitive plant. Once the light had begun to fade we boarded buses again provided by the tour company and made our way to Samdrup Jonkhar where we spent the night in a lovely hotel and had our first Bhutanese food. Anyone who has been to Bhutan will probably have had the same experience of Bhutanese food where the meat or carcass is attacked savagely by a cleaver resulting in small bony pieces of meat. It does mean that your meal turns into a game of Russian Roulette with you having to guess what is bone and what is flesh.

The following morning dawned with the weather beautiful and not a cloud in the sky. We again boarded our buses and started to make our way towards the town of Trashigang, one of the larger towns in the East of Bhutan. Along the way we botanised along the roadside and found some beautiful specimens such as *Cerapegia sp.* which is a rare find in Bhutan and had not been recorded in the East before. I managed to find my first rhododendron in the wild, *R. arboreum*, unfortunately the exact subspecies I do not know. Another one of the highlights was seeing hillsides covered in *Pleione praecox*. They stood out amongst the rocks and low growing vegetation on the road side. We ended the day with a visit to a traditional weaving school for girls. We watched as they made the most elaborate and beautiful designs in the fabric. We arrived in Trashigang after dark and could only observe what was in the headlights of the bus. That night we were given instructions about the next day which was our first day of trekking, so the night was spent repacking a waterproof bag with only the essentials and also packing my backpack with items needed during the day as our main bags were to be carried by mules. We were going to spend the next three days trekking to the remote village of Sakten which lay at about 2800m above sea level.

The next six days were spent trekking from Jongkhar to Sakten and back again. During the trek my perception of how and where rhododendrons grow was completely changed. Until the trek I had thought that they formed the basis of the vegetation in the Himalayas and the other plants grew alongside them. Whilst this is true for the very high altitude alpine areas and some rhododendron forests, most of the time they grow alongside a vast array of different woody species such as *Quercus spp.* and *Hydrangea spp.* and so many more it could take up the entire report simply with plant names. Some of the highlights for the first couple of days were walking through rhododendron forests such as the one pictured here. The species is *R. arboreum* either ssp. *cinnamomeum* or ssp. *arboreum* as these were the two we regularly saw and later keyed out. As the altitude increased so the flora changed and we slowly saw more and more familiar genera such as *Pinus bhutanica*, *Mahonia spp.*, *Berberis spp.* and again

so many more. But for me the best bit was when we started to see more diversity in the rhododendrons. At first it was the likes of *R. maddenii* and the first of the large leaf species, *R. grande* and *R. falconeri*. It then progressed on to *R. kendrickii*, *R. cinnabarinum* and *R. triflorum*. These finally gave way to species such as *R. thomsonii* and *R. barbatum* at the higher altitudes. At the highest altitude we trekked, c.4000m we observed *R. kesangiae* and *R. wallichii*. These again were accompanied by *Quercus semicarpifolia* and junipers such as *Juniperus recurva* and *Cupressus himalaica*.

At the highest point we stopped and had lunch at a monastery owned by the tour company owner. It was great to look down into the valley below and just take a moment to breathe it all in. It was here I reflected on my favourite day of the tour. The previous day just after leaving camp we walked through a *Pinus bhutanica* forest as the sun rose slowly into the sky. Its rays passed through the long needles of the pines and the wind sung softly in the branches. It was the closest to Heaven I have been yet. To this day that is still my favourite memory of the tour. That night we again had a cultural evening, which was a good end to an otherwise amazing trek. The following day we descended down the mountain again to our first camp, a trek of 15km, at the end of the walk I could not resist a swim in the river, which went down a treat and was exactly what I needed. The day had been fruitful, one of the other members of the tour had discovered *Sorbus mcallisterii* which has not been seen since the late 1930s and was only known from one specimen in China.

Sadly the trekking came to an end. On day 10, which was a rest day, we went to see the Chorten at Tashiyangtse after which we botanised near the Chasan Bridge where there is a good stand of *Euphorbia royleana*. It was amazing to see cacti after seeing lush temperate forests. That was our one and only rest day as thereafter we began the programme of travelling by bus everywhere whilst making regular stops to do some road side botanising. We travelled from Trashigang to Mongar, then to Bumthang (Jakar). Whilst travelling to Bumthang we went over some very high passes including the Pele La. At the Pele La we stopped and botanised, here I managed to find 8 species of rhododendron some of which I had never heard of before such as *R. wightii* and *R. succothii*. We also found the last of the four large leaved rhododendrons, *R. hodgsonii*. A short list of the others include:

- *R. campanulatum* ssp. *aeruginosum*
- *R. campylocarpum*
- *R. cinnabarinum*
- *R. lanatum*
- *R. thomsonii*

Day 16 was spent in the Dangchu Valley which we were the first large western group to visit. The flora had not changed much, however I had my nose close to the ground. I had to find at least 24 of the 47 species of rhododendron in Bhutan and had so far seen 21. I am happy to report that I found three more species that day and so managed to see 24 species before the end of the tour. The last three were all epiphytic and found growing on *R. arboreum* ssp. *arboreum*, they included *R. dalhousiae*, *R. lindleyi* and *R. vaccinioides*. The greatest thing we saw in the valley was some 1000+ year old *Cupressus himalaica*. These were marked for felling but after talks with the experts on the tour the local village leaders agreed not to fell them and rather turn them into a tourist attraction.

After the Dangchu valley we made our way to Punakha and finally Thimpu. The last two towns were more developed and so the flora sadly depleted. We did however make a quick stop at the Royal Botanic Garden Serbithang. The orchidarium was the main attraction with a really amazing collection. For our last night in Thimpu we had an evening of speeches by government officials and thanks to all who took part and contributed to the tour, Bhutanese and other. It was sad to say goodbye but hopefully not forever!





**Left: *Rhododendron succothii* in Bhutan by J. Davies-Coleman**

**Below: *Hydrangea sargentiana* by Richard Firmin**



## **Invasive Species**

**Richard Firmin**



**Left: *Rhododendron*  
'Grazelia'**

**Below: *Rhododendron*  
*sutchuenense***

**Both by Richard  
Firmin**

In the beginning there was *Rhododendron ponticum*. It occupied large areas of the understorey of the ancient coppiced oakwoods in which I spent much of my childhood. These regions were dark and mysterious, and in general I avoided them, though it was there I first encountered redstart and great spotted woodpecker - bright pictures still in the slightly faded memory bank.

When I began my first gardening round at age eleven most of my customers had one or two ponticum-like rhododendrons in their plots. I thought them rather brash and common - the plants, that is. I was never required to do anything with them because for a pound an hour



I was quite happy to dig the heavy London clay, an unpopular task for the owners.

A few years later, and five hundred miles north, gardening was still the main source of income, and the maintenance of large industrial premises in oil-rich Aberdeen proved a lucrative if tedious counterfoil to the more creative business of designing and building private gardens. It was one of these industrial landscapes that provided the first rhododendrons to be planted in our current garden - not so much because we liked them but that we had been paid handsomely to remove them; they still bore their Hilliers labels though regrettably these were lost long before we adopted an organised method of keeping track of our plants.

In 1990 we were able to add an extra acre or so to the garden, in which extra space we promptly planted a native woodland. Our stated aim was to encourage wildlife and, through a programme of coppicing, to supplement the wood supply that provides all of our heating requirements while at the same time enhancing the biodiversity of the plantation.

It was when, some fifteen years later, that large-leaved rhododendron species began to invade this otherwise native planting, we realised that the genus had taken hold; and with no *R. ponticum* in sight. I am inclined to blame a rather good garden centre on the Perth to Aberdeen road for much of this conquest. Successive vehicles that we have owned all seem quite unable to drive past this place without sabotaging our credit cards.

Now that our listed and labelled specimens number in three figures we can very easily pick the favourites: *Rhododendron rex* ssp. *rex* is the star of the show, currently 12feet x 12feet, though so far it has only flowered once, and then only on a small part of the plant. *R. fortunei*, on the other hand, is a guaranteed profusion of blooms produced late enough to escape frost damage. The same cannot be said of *R. sutchuenense*, my third choice - it insists on flowering in March, causing us to scamper around with swathes of fleece to preserve its springtime statement of intent. Number four is a completely different kettle of fish: planted in full sun, the narrow-leaved *R. 'Graziela'* provides a small dome of pink petals that never fail to please; and finally, a hybrid, *R. 'Teddy Bear'* - if I only had room for one it would probably be this, combining great form, good flowers and a fabulous rust-red indumentum.

Rhododendrons are not the only plants taking over our garden. We have several hundred Hosta cultivars which, in the main, enjoy the same growing conditions as their

ericaceous cousins, thus making them suitable candidates for companion planting. Sure, molluscs can be a problem; but one of the great things about hostas is that they completely disappear for several months of the year. So when winter's icy grip is threatening the survival of those large-leaved rhododendrons, the knowledge that at least the hostas are safe and sound can be very comforting.

We have used other shrubby plants to increase wind protection in the under storey, notably *Viburnum* spp. The native *V. lantana* is good in this respect, holding its leaves till well into December. Without our intervention it has hybridised with *V. rhytidophyllum* - the resulting seedling (presumably *V. x rhytidophylloides*) is now a stately specimen with furrowed foliage. Recently we have been impressed by *V. erubescens*, an evergreen with glossy leaves that takes very easily from semi-ripe cuttings, as do many of its close relatives. This is also true of several *Hydrangea* species which, in early November, are still covered in flowers - somewhat faded on *H. sargentiana* and *H. villosa* but still fresh on the indefatigable *H. arborescens* 'Annabelle'. Finally, looking something like a cross between these two genera, *Viburnum buddlejifolium* has proved to be remarkably hardy, holding on to its crumpled evergreen foliage all winter.

We no longer build gardens for other people, though Ellen still designs them. One of the drawbacks has always been the knowledge that all one's efforts can be nullified by a change of ownership. By far the grandest project with which I was ever involved was levelled into a practice putting green for a rather well-known golfer.

So when a neighbour dropped by at the beginning of last month and offered to sell us another couple of acres, one of the many reasons for accepting the idea was the notion that our garden could become too big, and too established, to get rid of. Not that I am suggesting ringing the whole place with *Rhododendron ponticum* - but I am hoping that the nursery on the Perth road will continue to infect our enthusiasm for its better-ordered relatives - as of course will our continued involvement with SRS workshops and field trips; assuming we can escape.

## Arduaine and its Garden Record

Mike Thornley

When all is said and done most gardens will only live on in the record. Geoff Dutton understood this when, anticipating that his Marginal Garden would probably return to nature, he left a legacy of writing, including a quarterly diary, poetry, photographs taken through the seasons, and a manual (*'Some branch against the sky'* Newton Abbot 1997). In the latter he included a map because, as he wrote in the preface: "Despite all Miss Jekyll's beckoning scenarios I have never successfully orienteered through a mapless Munstead Wood"

If Geoff Dutton had difficulty navigating in his imagination around Munstead Wood he would have found *'Gertrude Jekyll: essays on the life of a working amateur'* edited by Michael Tooley and Primrose Arnander (Witton-le-Wear 1995) a useful guide. This record not only contains the history of her family and Miss Jekyll's relationship to the Arts and Craft movement but also the 1991 survey of Munstead Wood by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for England, which mapped the extant remains of the garden as well as its relationship to the underlying historical landscape. Thus a framework is established for the central essay by Mark Wood in which he leads the reader through the garden at Munstead Wood using maps, contemporary photographs and Miss Jekyll's own planting plans.

Both of these equally excellent records evoke not only the sense of place but also describe the wealth and character of the plants in these two very different gardens. Likewise in both cases they convey that point in time, which the gardener is aiming for, when all the parts are seemingly complete. However this is largely illusory: growth continues, plants are lost; circumstances change, gardens are altered and often disappear.

If there are few comprehensive records of gardens there are even less that chart the inevitable changes that occur through time. However an example of the latter does exist for Arduaine, on Loch Melfort. In 1966 Sir Ilay Campbell wrote "The Garden of Arduaine" in the 'Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book', in which he guides the reader along a set route through the garden. Fourteen years later Ed Wright contributed an article "Arduaine Revived" which appeared in 'Rhododendrons 1979-80 with Magnolias and Camellias'. Fortunately he takes the reader on the same route

described by Sir Ilay Campbell. Last autumn we returned to Arduaine to follow in the footsteps of the two previous writers.

To reach the garden in 1966 a grass path descended a gentle slope bordered by flowering cherries to a simple wooden gate. This was how I remembered it in 1985. Now the path is made of tarmac with intermittent and elderly cherries on one side only. There are plans to plant new cherries but the gate has gone and has been replaced by a visitor entrance building.

Leading into the garden is a straight gravel path with a border which in 1966 was said to have lost all sense of its original formality although there were some interesting rhododendrons including a pure white *R. decorum* and what Sir Ilay called *R. campanulatum* Elatum, as well as a yellow bottle brush (*Callistemon*); in 1980 the two rhododendrons were still there but only the venerable bottle brush exists today. Likewise a *R. 'Lady Chamberlain'* that Ed Wright described as being weighed down with flowers in May is no longer, having been a victim of powdery mildew.

The visitor now arrives at the one architectural reference point in the garden: the small greenhouse which once served the Inside Garden behind, where vegetables and cut flowers were grown. The greenhouse has been enlarged and now contains pots of tender rhododendrons and ferns. It is here that Ed Wright describes the major changes he had made: the removal of the Inside Garden to create a lawn, and the grubbing out of a yew hedge on the seaward side to open up the view. Instead of comprising three distinct areas, the ornamental garden, the Wood, and the screened Inside Garden, Arduaine became a single entity and what might be now seen as a botanical pleasure garden.

At certain points on the route there are individual or groups of plants that signal a change in direction, or character, where the loss of a landmark is significant. A specimen of *Davidia involucrata*, “30 feet high with a spread nearly as great” as described by Sir Ilay, and which Ed Wright identifies as *Davidia vilmoriniana* and “said to be the best example in Scotland”, no longer exists at the end of the gravel path. Likewise there is a void at the entrance to the Wood where a vast *Rhododendron auriculatum*, which Sir Ilay considered to be one of the most remarkable plants in the garden, once stood between two plants of *Magnolia campbellii* (which remain).

The second edition of the 6inch Ordnance Survey map published in 1900 shows the main house, now Loch Melfort Hotel, under construction and an enclosure with

a small building that signals the beginnings of the garden on what was then a bare promontory. The 1inch Popular Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1929, indicates two adjacent plantations guarding the garden from the southwest and northwest winds. The northern most plantation is the Wood where the shelter and the sheltered originally grew together, causing both to be drawn up. Sir Ilay Campbell records that a large-scale rescue operation took place in the late 1950s but Ed Wright doubted if much thinning had been achieved and subsequently Ed and Harry Wright undertook the daunting task of opening up the Wood.

As Sir Ilay Campbell notes “Although the walk through the ‘Wood’ at Arduaine is an exciting experience...reading an account second hand, where each plant is mentioned but not adequately described, can be a tedious procedure”; doubly so when comparing one account with another. It is all rather confusing so that rhododendrons such as the well known *R. sinogrande* (“probably as good a plant as you will see anywhere” according to Ed Wright but not mentioned by Sir Ilay) can be found, while *R. ‘Shilsonii’* (described by Sir Ilay as “that wonderful hybrid between *R. thomsonii* and *R. barbatum* which exceeds both parents” but not mentioned by Ed Wright) is now missing, although a replacement is growing nearby. What is clear is that there are at least four phases of planting of mainly species rhododendrons in the Wood, each reflecting their period, the interests of the owners and the availability of plants at the time. These rhododendrons, fully labelled, could become a living reference collection to the genus.

The focus now shifts from the plants to the physical changes in the garden, the extent of which becomes clear in Ed Wright’s second article “Arduaine today” in ‘Rhododendrons 1987-8 with Magnolias and Camellias’. Sir Ilay and Ed Wright each devote only a single paragraph in the earlier accounts of the Cliff Path overlooking the garden, that gives fine views down the Sound of Jura. Ed Wright notes that below the edge there are a series of paths, which can be explored by those with enough energy but clearly this was a problem area that led to Ed and Harry Wright carrying out major engineering works to create a safe and easier route. Nevertheless the steep ground beneath remains difficult to access and cultivate and because of this it has stayed relatively unchanged.

As Sir Ilay Campbell remarked the only part of the garden now to be explored is the low lying, flat area towards the sea, embraced by the shelterbelts and the rising ground. His short account highlights the burn ending in a rocky pond, the small and more formal circular pool, and the Rockery (again limited in size but set within a

wonderful outcropping volcanic dyke). Ed Wright in his earlier account indicated the changes that were already being made to what he called the Water Garden, but the scale of the development, with its enlarged Heron Pond only becomes clear in his later account. Remembering the work being carried out and coming to the pond today it seems to be smaller, diminished by the trees and shrubs that have grown up around its edge.

Sir Ilay politely draws a veil over what the previous owners had called the Jungle: a pernicious swamp, close to sea level, which when first seen by the Wright brothers was “waist high in reeds, ankle deep in water, and islands of brambles, bracken and self sown pernettya, not to mention giant ferns”. They cleared and drained the ground. More ponds were formed but this wet, meadow like area has defied intensive gardening and as a result is one of the more relaxed parts of the garden.

At the beginning of this article it is implied that the most useful garden record combines a variety of sources, media, types of documentation and viewpoints. Further it is suggested the record should show the garden at different times and the changes that have taken place both in the collection of plants and the layout, often (although not in the two cases cited at the beginning) undertaken by various owners, each with more or less time and resources, which in turn determined how the garden looked at different stages in its life but also influenced the changes themselves. Ultimately a garden may not survive but the record will remain to inform and perhaps inspire future gardeners.

Arduaine is in the care of the National Trust for Scotland and, therefore, should be protected into the future, although nothing can be entirely certain. At the same time Arduaine has a raft of articles to support its record, including those referred to above as well as John Hammond’s historical perspective (in ‘Rhododendrons, and Camellias, and Magnolias 2008’) and George F. Smith’s detailed description of the rhododendrons (in ‘Journal, American Rhododendron Society Winter 1992’). In addition the garden itself holds an historic plants list as well as plant accessions from 1996 onwards and the Trust’s Demeter plant database. In effect this records all the work undertaken by Maurice Wilkins in this most beautiful of gardens to further enhance its horticultural and botanical interest while maintaining its unique character.

Last year David Hammett, on behalf of the Trust, drew up ‘Arduaine Gardens Time Line 2013’. This lists, in date order, documents fully referenced in the text, that describe, refer or relate to the garden in any way, from the years immediately prior to



its creation to the present. Some maps are included and if these were supplemented by archive images and plans of the garden through time, the basis of a truly comprehensive record would be formed, encompassing both the history and the plant collections. A further step would be to create links to the source documents and for the whole to be made available on the web.

The current statutory record is Historic Scotland's 'Inventory of gardens and designed landscapes' which can be viewed on its website. The entry for Arduaine is dated 1987, contains only three documentary references, places little value on the historic development of the garden, and focuses mainly on what was seen as its rescue by the Wright brothers, and on the rhododendron collection at that time: (to gauge the paucity of information compare Arduaine's 1987 entry with, for instance, Glenarn's 2014 revised entry). Obviously, the National Trust for Scotland is not mentioned. Given there is an urgent need to update this official record the Trust is well placed to initiate a review by Historic Scotland.

Finally what is the purpose of this gathering in, digging through, and turning over of a mountain of material, in order to create a garden record, other than to build an archive against the day when the garden, or gardener, disappears? First it provides the raw data for the garden's immediate interpretation and better appreciation by the visitor of its value. Moreover it has the potential for allowing the visitor to explore, in a virtual sense, the garden in much greater depth than has been possible until recently. Second it reveals to present and future gardeners, curators, and even managers, the archaeology of a garden (its foundations, historic layering, and the currents of change that have swirled through the planted beds and woodland walks) so as to better inform their decisions on how a garden might be best conserved and renewed: in Geoff Dutton's words "no small responsibility".

## **People, Places & Plants: J. Arthur Campbell's Adventurous Life and an Historical Perspective of Arduaine Garden**

### **The Development, Decline and Restoration of a Magical Rhododendron Garden on Scotland's West Coast**

**John M. Hammond**

#### **Introduction:**

Set amid the rugged mountains, moors and lochs on Scotland's West Coast is the fishing port of Oban, gateway to the Western Isles. No one can fail to be impressed by the scenic grandeur of Argyll's wild, rocky coastline with its myriad of isles, lochs and peninsulas that make it a photogenic destination when the snow still lingers on the mountains in early-May. South out of Oban the A816 twists and turns for 40 miles as it weaves a path through the rocky strata towards Lochgilphead. Around the halfway mark the Arduaine peninsula juts out on the west side of the A816, pointing towards the islands of the Inner Hebrides that are scattered on the horizon, of which the largest are, Shuna, Luing, Seil, Lunga and the Garvellachs; beyond them there is nothing but the Atlantic until the Labrador Coast is reached. At 56° 3'N and 5° 34'W the peninsula is similar in latitude to Labrador City and Hudson Bay, in Northern Canada, which speaks volumes as to the influence of the North Atlantic Drift on Scotland's West Coast.

Immediately to the east of Arduaine is the 841ft summit of Beinn Chaorach, an ideal location from which to get a better perspective of the vast expanse of coastline. The peninsula itself rises to the 239ft summit of An Cnap, the site of an Iron Age Dun [fortification], but in reality the promontory and its woodlands are lost in the immensity of the landscape, the sea and the sky; a reminder that with this scenic grandeur as a backdrop many West Coast gardens had no need for the services of a formal landscape designer such as Capability Brown. Beyond the white walls of Arduaine House, built by Arthur Campbell, and in later years better known as the Loch Melfort Hotel, the pathway flanked with daffodils leads down the bank beneath the overhanging boughs of a row of flowering cherry trees, which together form a spectacular entrance to the garden each spring. The garden itself sits in the protective curve of the southern slope of the peninsula, which affords some shelter from the north-east and north-west winds; the rainfall being relatively heavy at an average of 60 inches per year until the mid-1980's, and closer to 75 inches since that date.<sup>9 & 17</sup>

Arduaine Garden has been the spiritual home of the S.R.S. since the organisation was founded in 1983 and it is most appropriate that a historical perspective should be recorded in the publications of the Society. An abridged version of this article, which omitted much of the historical background, appeared in the 2008 R.C. & M. Group Yearbook. Recent research has uncovered further details and these have since been woven into the narrative. It is well worth taking the time to read the historical details, as they provide a somewhat rare glimpse of the way of life and wider activities of the Inverawe and Auchendarroch Campbell Families; they also answer many long-standing queries relating to the life of J. Arthur Campbell.

### **Historical Background of the Campbells of Inverawe:**

James 'Arthur' Campbell (1850-1929) was a member of the House of Inverawe, one of the oldest branches of Clan Campbell. In 1485, Colin, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Argyll, granted a charter of the fees of the Wardenship of Over Lochow (Loch Awe) to his beloved cousin Dugald of Inverawe. Down the years the Campbells of Inverawe were a particularly ferocious branch of the Clan, as the legends and records show, and this impression was largely created by two of its leaders; Ian 'Dubh' MacConnochie (d. circa.1604), Tutor (guardian) of Inverawe, was a leader of the Islemen against Elizabethan forces for the Earl of Tyrone in Ireland; and his great nephew Lt. Col. Dougall Campbell of Inverawe (d.1665) who was ruthless as a Covenanter and called by the Marquess of Montrose, 'Argyll's Champion'.

Major Duncan Campbell, 9<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe, rose to be Second-in-Command of his Regiment, the Black Watch, 42<sup>nd</sup> Highlanders, and on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1758 fought in the French & Indian Wars in up-state New York at the Battle of Ticonderoga at the narrow southern extremity of Lake Champlain, whose eastern shore forms the border with Vermont.<sup>1 & 2</sup> The Highlanders were cut down by the score and their casualties were heavier than any the Regiment was to suffer until the carnage of the First World War. A bullet shattered Duncan's arm, he was carried to Fort Edward, where after amputation he died and was buried near the fort only ten days after the battle. His second son, Captain Alexander Campbell, then became 10<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe, who was also severely wounded in the arm in the same battle, made it back to Scotland, but died of his wounds in Glasgow in 1760, aged 25. His elder brother Dougall had died in Gibraltar with the North British Fusiliers in 1756, the year Duncan had left for North America. There are records that indicate the wider Campbell Family in Argyll were aware on the day of the Battle of Ticonderoga that a calamity that had befallen their kinsmen. It is said that a 'sky-picture' of the battle was seen at Inveraray.<sup>3</sup>

When Duncan's eldest son, Alexander, died in 1760, his younger brother – also called Duncan – was still alive, although evidently a sickly child and he passed away sometime between April, 1760 and June, 1761. The Lands of Inverawe then passed c.1760 to Duncan's daughter, Janet Campbell, who married Captain William Pittman, an Englishman. They sold the lands to Janet's maternal uncle, Campbell of Monzie, through which family the lands eventually passed through to a daughter to the Campbells of Dunstaffnage. However, the title of Head of the House of Inverawe was passed down the male line only, for heraldic reasons, unless otherwise arranged. Major Duncan of Inverawe's brother Alexander, Provost of Renfrew and later Provost of Greenock and Comptroller of Customs at Greenock, was the 'heir male' and therefore inherited the territorial title 11<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe as part of his legal name in Scots Law. Provost Alexander had two sons: Archibald 12<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe, a West Indies merchant ship owner, and Duncan, a West Indies planter. This Archibald was known as Blackhouse and Finlayston since he had bought Blackhouse in Ayr on his return to Scotland about the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and had then won a life-rent of the Finlayston Estate from Graham of Gartmore in a card game at the 'Board of the Green Cloth', a Glasgow dining club. When his sister Anne died, who had been his housekeeper at Finlayston, he employed Catherine Fish, niece of one of his ship's captains, to be his housekeeper and had a son by her. Archibald was already in his sixties and the boy was named Alexander after his paternal grandfather, as was common in the Highlands. This liaison was later legitimated in Scots Law by a marriage, to the later satisfaction of the Lord Lyon (heraldic judge in the judiciary of Scotland), and Archibald died in 1825 when the son was aged 9, the mother Catherine having died earlier of tuberculosis. Archibald had left instructions in his will that the Lands of Inverawe be bought back for his son and heir Alexander, 13<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe.



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However, the then owner of Inverawe, Campbell of Finab & Monzie, said he would not sell unless he got more than it was worth. But he did sell one farm, Tirvine, where Provost Alexander had been born, to the Trustees. With the death of Archibald and, with Alexander Campbell (1816-1902) being a minor, trustees had to be appointed, among them one of the Noble family, later of Ardkinglas. Archibald had pursued a prosperous career and he left a very large fortune, which had been lent out or invested in loans or bonds held against property. This took time to gather in, and meanwhile one of the trustees unilaterally invested much of the gathered funds in either railways or the Rothschild Bank, and lost the lot. He was John McNeil of Oakfield and the Gigha family whose father had been Provost of Inveraray and had a maternal Inverawe connection. John MacNeil had his estate of Oakfield, near Ardrishaig, valued by the Duke of Hamilton's Factor for £70,000, the exact amount he owed the Trust. A 'mock' sale was held at a coffee house in Edinburgh and the Oakfield Estate passed to the Trustees in repayment for the loss. One of the sale conditions was that the name be changed from Oakfield, in this case back to the pre-MacNeil name of Auchendarroch. John MacNeil resigned as a Trustee and retired to the Isle of Gigha.

This meant that when young Alexander came of age in 1837, he was landed with the Auchendarroch estate, which had bankrupted two previous owners; so he inherited much land but little cash, since most of the remaining monies were required for the bequests of his father's will, some being annuities. He later qualified as an Advocate which in time got him the position of one of the first Officers of Health for Scotland, following the requirements set out by the Poor Law. At this time the Auchendarroch Estate was extensive, covering the majority of the Lochgilphead area and westwards to the watershed ridge of Knapdale. The handsome 18<sup>th</sup> Century house of Auchendarroch (Achindarroch on Roy's map of 1755 and Gaelic for 'field of the oak'), built by the elder MacNeil, stood immediately to the west of the Crinan Canal that opened in 1809. Alexander built up a large mortgage on his place which his great grandson, the late Alan Campbell of Auchendarroch and Inverawe paid off in full, taking up much of his life while working for J. & P. Coats of Paisley, latterly in Sweden.

#### **The Early Years of J. Arthur Campbell:**

James Arthur Campbell (1850-1929), who preferred to be known as 'Arthur', was the fourth of six sons [second son with his father's second wife Harriet Keir], and there were also two daughters. Arthur spent his youth on the Auchendarroch Estate where his father, Alexander Campbell, 1<sup>st</sup> of Auchendarroch & 14<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe, had planted numerous exotic trees and shrubs in the temperate climate adjacent to Loch Fyne. William J. Hooker, Professor of Botany at the University of Glasgow and

later Director of Kew Gardens, is credited with laying out the grounds of Kilmory Castle in 1830, another Campbell estate a short distance to the east of Lochgilphead.<sup>5</sup> Hooker was familiar with this area of Argyll, as he had a small estate in the district, and he supplied many of the exotic shrubs and plants that flourished in the grounds of the Kilmory laird, Campbell-Orde, who is said to have had a reputation for not being very sociable.

Around 1830 there were very few sources in Scotland for exotic plant material and, as the development of the woodland gardens on the Oakfield Estate (Auchendarroch), fits into this timeframe, it is more than likely that Hooker was involved to some extent with the contents of this garden, but to date no documentary evidence has been found to support this theory. These plantings probably aroused J. Arthur Campbell's early interest in horticulture, to which he was eventually to devote a great deal of his life.

Arthur was educated at Trinity College, Glenalmond where he is thought to have left in 1868 to go to Cambridge. Whilst studying at Trinity Hall he visited South Africa to see his elder brother Archibald James Campbell who was raising horses there. They both rode to Kimberley to spend some time as prospectors and found one large diamond on their claim, which Arthur brought home and sold on the London market. But Archibald then sold out to de Beers who subsequently had their large hole dug on the site. Arthur later found running ox wagons with supplies from Capetown to Kimberley more interesting. He also went on a trek with Cecil Rhodes' brother and knew Rhodes; his diary of these events still survives. His eldest brother Archibald was expected to become the 15<sup>th</sup> of Inverawe and 2<sup>nd</sup> of Auchendarroch; but he died before his father and the Auchendarroch estate was left to his second son Alastair Magnus Campbell.

In common with many other Campbell sons over the centuries who were not heir to estates, J. Arthur Campbell had to pursue a career and living elsewhere. Many Campbell sons, from the numerous branches of the Clan, served in the Highland regiments, whilst others sought employment in the commercial activities of the greater Campbell families who had financial interests at both home and overseas. Arthur came down from Cambridge in 1872, but surprisingly little is known by his descendants of what he did, and when, between that date and 1885/6. He is thought to have returned to South Africa for a time, then at a later date he went to Ceylon to work on the coffee plantations, as Diarmid Campbell, Inverawe family historian and a grandson of Arthur, explains :

“I was told by my uncle Richard, a younger son of J. Arthur Campbell, that when Arthur arrived in Ceylon a blight had hit the coffee plantations and it was Arthur’s idea to grow tea instead. I recently found a letter (dated April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914 from the Hotel del Monte in California) to my father from his father Arthur in which he mentions this point:”

“In 1885/6 I very nearly came over here (to California) direct from Ceylon after the coffee failed & the (‘Clunchhoua’?) and we got tea started on our places, I said to Uncle Walter (Arthur’s younger brother) there is no use our both staying in Ceylon. We have to wait and worry along as best we can till the tea comes into bearing (can be harvested) - so one or others of us had better clear out to a new country – he elected to stay so I determined to come over here (to California) & try and make a fresh start – had I done so I should probably have done well as land was then a very different price to what it is now.

However, things were otherwise ordained – My father (Alexander) begged me to come home first & while at home met your mother & had to alter my plans.”

It would appear that Arthur spent several years in Ceylon and India, and his descendants suspect that he had worked on the tea plantations in Assam and/or Darjeeling for a time. It seems obvious that with his interest in shrubs and trees he must have visited the Himalayas at some point and Assam was near to the mountains. He then probably moved to Ceylon where the failure of the coffee plantations occurred shortly after his arrival, and his subsequent decision to plant tea as a replacement crop would in practice have taken some time to implement. The tea plants would have had to be raised from cuttings and the fields planted; Arthur’s letter (above) confirms this had been done before he returned to Scotland in 1885/6 to see his ageing 70 year-old father. Whilst Alexander’s fifth son, Walter Keir Campbell, remained in Ceylon as a tea planter when Arthur returned to Scotland; his father’s sixth son, Neill Graeme Campbell, was also a tea planter and was still working at Baker’s Farm, Nuwira Eliya, Ceylon in 1913.

Back in Scotland, in 1886 Arthur met Ethel Margaret Bruce, probably whilst visiting Edinburgh. Her father, John Bruce, had come from an impoverished but educated background, was orphaned and brought up on a farm outside Edinburgh from which he attended the Edinburgh Academy. He then went into a firm of Corn Merchants and when aged 21 he asked to be made a partner. When told, “Don’t be ridiculous!” he said, “Well, I’ll start my own”. This he did with great success, and when Arthur was courting John Bruce’s daughter [one of three heiress daughters who all married into landed families and had gardens] he offered Arthur a job with the firm. Arthur and Ethel were married in 1887 and they lived at 28 Anne Street in Edinburgh, a New Town property that had been originally developed by the portrait painter Sir Henry Raeburn and his son, who was also involved in the development with Archibald Campbell of Blackhouse and Finlayston. Raeburn also painted Archibald’s portrait.

Arthur stayed with the firm until John Bruce died in 1895 when Ethel inherited her share of his fortune.

**The Origins of Arduaine Garden:**

It was only natural that J. Arthur Campbell should wish to return to his native Argyll where he had developed an interest in shrubs and trees. So, on retiring at the age of 45 from the corn merchants, and upon returning to Argyll, he decided to search for a property that had potential for development as a woodland garden. But the rugged, rocky coastline with its small isles and inlets was particularly difficult to access from the mainland; so, as Sir Ilay Campbell explains, the family tradition has it that in 1898 Arthur hit on a novel method of finding a home:<sup>6</sup>

“He therefore decided to search for a property which had potential scope for the development of a woodland garden, and to this end he and his wife acquired a small yacht, the *Calisaya*, and they spent the summer cruising and exploring the many lochs, sounds and islands which form the coastline of Argyll. Whenever they spied a likely spot, they would make enquiries as to land available to purchase.

Eventually they arrived in Loch Melfort, certainly one of the most beautiful of all, and here their search was destined to end. They saw a green peninsula jutting out into the loch backed by an almost complete semi-circle of comparatively low hills giving shelter from the north and east. The estate, then known as Asknish, chanced to be for sale . . . .”

Diarmid Campbell provides another perspective:

“Ilay’s story about the view from the yacht was also told to me by my cousin, Sir Bruce’s second son, Alexander ‘Sandy’ Campbell of Achnacreebeag. That was certainly the adult experience (of Arthur). But my father (Arthur’s 2<sup>nd</sup> son) also told me that, as a boy, Arthur had seen the green point of Asknish from a farm on the north end of the Isle of Jura and had decided that some day he would like to visit and explore the place. The Auchendarroch family used to rent out their estate for the shooting season and either go south to London or rent somewhere locally that was cheap. The boys enjoyed shooting and fishing and the north end of Jura was remote enough to be very cheap. Father said whilst picnicking on the hill above the farm during a rough shoot that Arthur had first been attracted to Asknish point. Gillie Mackie Campbell of Stonefield has the same story.”

In 1292 the Asknish lands of Malcolm McIver were erected into the Sheriffdom of Lorne by Act of Parliament. These lands were forfeited in 1685, for Iver McIver’s part in the Rebellion, by Archibald Campbell, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll. It is said that after the restoration of the Campbell fortunes, following the defeat of James VII and II in 1690, that the Earls of Argyll imposed upon the McIvers the condition that they adopt the surname Campbell in return for their forfeited estates. The lands of Asknish



remained in the hands of the MacIver Campbells since that time.<sup>7</sup> In the opening paragraph of James Arthur Campbell's journal begun in 1903, in which he recorded the planting operations on the Arduaine Estate, he wrote:<sup>8</sup>

"In May 1897 I purchased three farms, Asknish, Kilbride and Barnlannich, from Colonel McIver Campbell Lochgair. As a part of the bargain was that I was not to call myself "Campbell of Asknish", I called the Estate "Arduaine", ie (Gaelic for) the "Green Point", from the greenness (sic) of the point on "Asknish Farm" on which Arduaine House is built."

In reality it was Ethel's fortune that enabled them to purchase the three farms, build a home and develop the garden, as Arthur did not have the ruthless 'business' streak needed to make his own fortune. Whilst the area is generally referred to as Loch Melfort, from the name of the sea-loch that runs inland in a north-easterly direction, Arduaine House and Garden actually look out over Asknish Bay, at the northern end of the Sound of Jura. It is worth noting that at the time Arthur purchased Asknish Farm the 1000 yard peninsula was almost completely bare, windswept, poor farming pasture, apart from "7 ash trees at back of garden . . . . . about a dozen stunted oaks on the hills near the garden", the remaining trees that made up a total of 92 were located close to the main road:<sup>8</sup>

"I wished to commence operations for laying out a Garden & building in the summer of 1897 but the farm Tennant (sic) Mr. MacKechnie would not allow me to do anything until his lease was up on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1898. In the summer of 1898 Mrs Campbell and I came here in our yacht Calisaya and lay in Asknish Bay for some days – we then fixed definitely the sites for the House, Stables and Garden . . . I then moved up from Kilbride (one of the three farms purchased from the McIver's) a two roomed wooden building which I had erected there the previous year for a Keeper & put this up in one corner of the gardens as a tool shed and put a stove in it & used one room as a "bothy" for a man to live in. Simpson (his father's gardener at Auchendarroch) and the man then fenced in the ground laid off for the Garden with a wire fence & Rabbit netting and then commenced to lay out this garden."

A note in the margin records "1<sup>st</sup> sod of the Garden was turned in August 1898." Arthur's comments relate to the establishment of a kitchen garden to supply "Arduaine Mansion House" on which building work commenced in September of the same year. Work on the structure of the house got off to a bad start as the contractor's work was shoddy, so the partly completed structure had to be demolished and rebuilt. The specifications for the construction of the house clearly stated that no sea sand was to be used in the mortar since it, 'makes fir a damp house'. It was started in stone but when the walls were shoulder high, Arthur noticed a shell sticking out of the mortar and made the contractor Falconer pull it all down. Falconer went bankrupt. So, a young contractor called Carmichael was given the job, but with the loss, the materials had to be brick and harling, with concrete or wood facings in place of stone. Carmichael went on to found a successful business, which lasted into the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

It would be 1905 before the construction of the two-storey House with its gabled dormers was completed. One wonders if the initial attempts to create a kitchen garden fared any better, as there were numerous references to the ravages of the rabbits, so in 1902 this area was enclosed by a stout wooden fence. The timber-framed Arduaine Cottage, built in 1903 in the garden to accommodate the Head Gardener, was probably lived in by Arthur & Ethel until the House was completed.

Arthur was clearly a 'man on a mission' as the planting of shelter for Lower Garden, the area running from the Inside Garden down to the sea, had commenced in the autumn of 1898 when the Glen was fenced and planted with Douglas firs. These were quickly decimated by the rabbits to whom the fence was not a barrier given their burrowing capabilities! The Lower Garden was envisaged as a semi-formal garden with shrub borders and a pond, however, an extensive part of this area was originally bog-land. Oral tradition has it that shortly after the property was purchased a start was made on developing an area of semi-formal gardens close to the House, however, this project had to be abandoned because of the predominately south-westerly winds which, laden with salt-water, funnelled-up the neck of the promontory and damaged the young plants. The planting of a shelter-belt in this area would have entirely spoilt the dramatic views from the front of the House, so the semi-formal garden was laid-out adjacent to the vegetable garden, some distance away from the House. Arthur continued his experimentation with shelter-belt planting at least up to 1907 and the plantings were ultimately mainly of European larch; the first bamboos being planted in 1903.

Arthur & Ethel were friendly with that exceptional Highland gentleman of outstanding foresight, Osgood Mackenzie. Dignified by a massive flowing beard, he was a highly regarded naturalist, a man of many skills and a very great gardener. There are many similarities between the estate and garden that Osgood created at Inverewe and that which Arthur was seeking to establish at Arduaine. Looking at a photograph of Inverewe, taken from across Loch Ewe in 1900, it is clear that the gardens at both places are located on the south side of a promontory, the House was built at the neck of the promontory, the upper levels of the promontory were still bare moorland whilst the lower elevations are covered with areas of shelter-belt plantings that Arthur needed to replicate. Wooden fencing was used in an effort to control the numerous rabbits and deer whilst stone was used to surround the Walled Garden. One can conjecture that the Campbell's small yacht *Calisaya* was a regular visitor to Loch Ewe, where there was anchorage for yachts close to the house, as the Campbell's would have had an able mentor in Osgood Mackenzie.



**Above: The bare peninsula as work commences on Arduaine Garden c.1899**

**Right: The outline framework of the Garden and shelterbelt is in-situ c.1929**



**Below: James Arthur Campbell at Arduaine in c.1900**

**Courtesy: Inverawe Campbell Archives**



ditions to the Himalayas, although no records have been found to date.<sup>9</sup> Planting in the woodland garden had commenced by 1922 when George Watt, the Campbell's last chauffeur and sometimes referred to as Mr. Watt, started work at Arduaine and the first rhododendrons were planted in 'The Glen'. These first plantings included *R. arboreum* ssp. *zeylanicum*, raised from wild seed collected on the central plateau of Ceylon, and the plants sent to Scotland in a tea chest. "Six wonderful specimens have survived and are said to be the best in cultivation."



**Above Left: Portrait of James Arthur Campbell in 1920s**

**Above Right: Portrait of Brigadier Bruce Atta Campbell in 1920s  
Courtesy: Inverawe Campbell Archives**



**Left: John Brennan, 7th Battalion (Fife) Black Watch. Head Gardener at Arduaine c.1920 - 1929  
Courtesy: Etta Mann**

Bruce Atta Campbell (1888 – 1954), Arthur’s eldest son, spent most of his life in active service; however, he had a heart problem whilst rowing at Eton, so could not go to Sandhurst to train as an officer as he had hoped. Bruce had joined the Territorials (Scottish Horse) in 1908, which he was able to gradually rise through the ranks prior to serving in Europe in WW1, so fulfilling his

ambition as a professional soldier despite his disability. Immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities he married Margaret Helen Macrae-Gilstrap. Her father had married a Lancashire heiress called Gilstrap, and with her funds restored the famous Eilean Donan Castle, which had been associated with the Mackenzies. Bruce was wounded at Gallipoli in 1916, and at some stage appears to have met John Brennan, an Irishman, who was Head Gardener (Domestic) at Moncrieff House, near Perth, prior to enlisting in the Territorials at the outbreak of The Great War. Brennan was also wounded at Gallipoli, and later gassed and wounded in France, but following the cessation of hostilities he became Head Gardener at Arduaine, although the date he took up this role is unknown.<sup>10</sup> During the 1920's there was a team of six gardeners working on the estate including John Brennan.<sup>18</sup>

Through the many 'connections' of the wider Campbell Family, Arthur was able to source and exchange plant material with many of the illustrious Scottish rhododendron enthusiasts in the years before and after the First World War, thus by the late-1920s there were some 220 varieties of rhododendrons growing at Arduaine, of which the majority were species.<sup>8</sup> Notable amongst these are three plants of *R. griffithianum* that have thrived to become very large specimens, *R. arboreum* ssp. *nilagiricum* from the Indian peninsula [a close relative of *R. arboreum* ssp. *zeylanicum*], the August flowering *R. auriculatum* that forty-five years ago had reached 30ft in height and 35ft in girth and amongst the large-leaved specimens a superb *R. protistum* var. *giganteum* and the first of its species to flower in the Britain. George Watt remembered the *Eucalyptus urnigera* being planted in the early 1930s.

Besides Osgood Mackenzie at Inverewe, and later Sir George Campbell at Crarae [Sir Ilay's father], Arthur knew Col. F.R.S. Balfour of Dawyck whose glen garden arboretum was later to become an outstation of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. Arthur mentions having letters of introduction from 'Balfour' when in San Francisco in 1914, where Col. Fred Balfour's father's firm had an office – Balfour-Williamson, the Liverpool shipping line. J. Arthur Campbell was clearly not without financial means whilst visiting California in April 1914, as he was residing at the Hotel del Monte in Monterey, California's most famous seaside resort complex, originally built by Charles Crocker, one of the four speculators behind the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, which became the Southern Pacific Railroad (S.P.R.). The massive Gothic structure standing in a large botanic garden was designed by Arthur Brown, an architect of the S.P.R. and built by the company's workmen. It was 'the' destination for wealthy travellers on the Pullman cars of the 'Overland' Transcontinental railroad to the West Coast. Arthur was a long way from home at a time when hostilities were looming on the horizon in Europe.

Whilst most references credit Arthur with the original development of the garden it is clear from various documents that the Ladies of Arduaine House had a significant impact on the layout, the plantings and the maintenance of the garden. This is to some extent evident in the words of Arthur when he described how in 1898 he and his wife had “fixed definitely the sites for the House, Stables and Garden.” Sometime later, probably around 1910, instructions on the setting-out of the paths and beds in the lower part of the garden were apparently issued by Mrs. Campbell from the top of the knoll outside the garden gate. Shortly after the Rhododendron Association was formed in 1927 Mrs. Ethel M. Campbell became a member of The Rhododendron Association, probably around the same time as Sir George Campbell of Crarae Lodge.

Osgood Mackenzie passed away in 1922 and Arthur was deeply affected by the loss of his mentor. When James Arthur Campbell passed away in 1929 the Arduaine estate passed to his son Bruce, although his mother continued to live at Arduaine House.

#### **The Gradual Decline of Arduaine Garden:**

In the immediate aftermath of J. Arthur Campbell’s death in 1929, and with Bruce away in the Services, there appears to have been a lack of leadership and little sense of direction so far as Arduaine garden was concerned; certainly any further development of the garden seems to have been put on hold indefinitely. John Brennan, Arthur’s head gardener, who appears to have been frustrated by the cessation of the garden’s development and didn’t get along with Bruce, decided in 1929 to seek pastures new at the site of a major garden under development at Larachmhor, Arisaig.<sup>10&11</sup> After the death of his mother in 1936 Bruce moved with his wife to Arduaine House, some of the gardening staff were retained and the gardens are said to have been well maintained up to the outbreak of hostilities in WWII, but no further development work took place. During this period Bruce and his wife, Margaret, were spending a considerable period away from home as a result of Bruce’s career in the Armed Services and Margaret’s voluntary work, that in time, led to her being Head of the Red Cross in Scotland. Despite these major distractions, they both took an interest in the garden as and when time permitted. Given Bruce’s disability and his wounding in WWI it is not surprising that his capacity for work in the garden was limited. Nevertheless, they corresponded with several horticultural friends and botanical institutions, and Margaret Campbell in the 1930s became a member of The Rhododendron Association, probably taking over the membership of Bruce’s mother, Ethel.

Their daughter Jean took over responsibility for the maintenance of the garden, aided

by Miss Yuille, the former family nanny. Nanny Yuille came to Arduaine to look after Bruce and Margaret's children, Jean and Iain, when they and the garden were in their infancy. She stayed on after the nursery days to give her full-time attention and expertise to the garden. Unfortunately, the onset of WWII had a major impact on the garden. Bruce hardly saw anything of Arduaine during the war and was stationed at Callander for a period where he trained commandos and then army cadets. He also commanded the 8<sup>th</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, becoming their Hon. Colonel from 1940 to 1953. Margaret was involved in voluntary work with the Red Cross, Jean left home to serve with the Royal Navy and whilst Nanny Yuille valiantly struggled on in the garden, she was unable to cope on her own. Jimmy Ferguson, the estate odd job man, was the only person who was expected to work in the garden, but since he had to do everything else as well it is probable that the garden will have seen little of him. Given the high rainfall, together with the high rate of growth in the temperate climate, the woodland area quickly grew too dense, choking-out the plants beneath it, and much of this area of the garden became wild. During the war, and afterwards, a series of severe gales caused chaos in various areas of the garden and many plants were damaged by falling trees. The loss of trees caused gaps in the shelter-belt and allowed the wind and salt spray to penetrate the woodland areas.

In the years following WWII the Estate could not afford the cost of gardeners; indeed, it is often forgotten that the post-war taxation was extreme and was intended to do away with any inherited property or wealth. Bruce and Margaret were no exception in finding this regime particularly difficult to handle in financial terms. In any case, all able-bodied staff were directed to take-up work to assist the improvement of the post-war economic climate and it was impossible to obtain staff for garden work, to say nothing of the difficulties of getting staff to move to this remote location. The return of Jean from war service provided another pair of helping hands but the task was too large for her and Nanny Yuille. In 1946 Margaret Campbell became a member of the newly-formed R.H.S. Rhododendron Group. Iain Campbell and his wife Colena, the eldest son of Bruce and Margaret, were both experts in the field of horticulture and lived away from Arduaine. In 1948 Bruce received a knighthood in recognition of his years of service with the 8<sup>th</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the following year became Lord Lieutenant of Argyll, so saw little of Arduaine. Brigadier Sir Bruce Campbell died in August, 1954, his wife passed away on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1957 and the estate passed to his son Iain, who with his wife Colena took on the maintenance of the garden.

A number of previous reports have suggested that the Campbell Family had little

interest in caring for and maintaining the garden after Arthur Campbell passed away. Discussions over the years with members of the family indicate this view is completely erroneous, and there is a world of difference between the work needed to upkeep the garden as it was when Arthur died, in comparison with funding the labour involved to continue opening-up the woodland areas and developing the garden. It is often forgotten that many gardens, such as Arduaine, were essentially family gardens, and the other ‘branches’ of the family would also help at times to look after the garden, as Gillie Mackie Campbell, of the ‘Stonefield’ Campbells, recalls:<sup>12</sup>

“Iain & Colena Campbell came back (after WWII) to Arduaine about 1947 or so. My husband (Lorne) & Colena were brother & sister and Colena & I had been friends for years over our shared enjoyment of Highland Ponies. During the late-fifties & early-sixties, when the National Trust *Meteor* was on her West Highland cruises (each May), Colena and I ‘inspired’ all available family & friends to give the garden a tidy before the cruise came. Also living at Arduaine were Iain’s sister Jean (an ex-market gardener), Nanny Yuille who had been Ian & Jean’s Nanny, Mr. Watt the chauffeur, handyman & gardener, & the nanny to the youngest Campbells, Iain & Colena’s Nigel & Sheila, Nanny Bonner. We all used to set to and make the garden tidy.

I remember Nigel, aged about 8, whizzing around on a miniature tractor called an ‘Iron Horse’, to the danger of us and the assembled family dogs! Sheila, aged about five could rattle off the names of rhododendrons & other shrubs to the astonishment of the guests from the cruise boat! I reminded her of that when I contacted her but she has no memory of it!

The last time I took some of the family there, we had four twelve year olds – there is a large notice that all children must be under supervision & our four disappeared and hid. Finally, we left them – having said loudly we were going back to the cars to have our picnics – they appeared pretty quickly!”

By this time the garden was becoming increasingly mature, the trees having grown up with the shrubs they were protecting, and the intended selective thinning not having taken place meant that both the trees and plants were being drawn-up towards the light, resulting in them being thin and spindly instead of the natural spreading growth. Of necessity, Major Iain and Colena Campbell’s many activities left them less time to take up the challenge that the garden represented in those years. Major Iain was heavily involved with the affairs of Scottish Agriculture and it fell to Colena, Jean Campbell and Miss Yuille to persevere with the garden. They continued to have some voluntary help from George Watt (Sir Bruce’s chauffeur) and Mr. Bates, Major Iain’s houseman.

Major Iain and Colena entered trusses in the early Scottish Rhododendron Shows, inaugurated by the N.T.S. in 1953 and held in the McLellan Galleries in Glasgow’s



teeming Sauchiehall Street. Competition was fierce amongst the highly regarded gardens on Scotland's West Coast, nevertheless, Arduaine gained many awards up to the early 1960s. Colena was also responsible for the inspired planting in the 1960s of the row of cherry trees (*Prunus* 'Kanzan', *P.* 'Tai Haku' and *P.* 'Ukon') along the pathway that links the garden to the House.<sup>17</sup>

In 1960 the decision was taken by the 'Stonefield' Campbell's to sell Stonefield Castle, the estate being divided into two lots, the House and Gardens being sold as a hotel, and the southern policies being sold to the Forestry Commission. Some years ago Gillie Mackie Campbell and the author discussed the origin of the heron statue in the Lower Pond at Arduaine. It appears that the Campbell Family removed a number of items prior to the sale of Stonefield Castle Estate; as Gillie recalls:<sup>12</sup>

"It is quite odd about the heron in the Lower Pond (at Arduaine), as neither Nigel or Sheila knew that it had come from Stonefield and Colena only told me at about the time she left Arduaine . . . . Apparently, she & Iain had gone down one night and "abstracted" it from the South Lodge pond!

When Mr. Davidian (R.B.G.E.) was staying with us (at Stonefield House) & trying to impart some rhododendron knowledge into our heads, I remember going up to Arduaine and being astonished by the *Magnolia campbellii*. Mr. Davidian really got Lorne and I enthused."

With the passing years, and the advancing age of these hard-working volunteers, it became necessary to consider the future of the garden. So, in 1964 it was reluctantly decided to split up the Arduaine Estate into lots for sale and Arduaine House was cleared ready for separate sale.

Diarmid Campbell explains:

"I do not think there are any Arduaine archives now at Inveraray other than the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Notes on the Campbells of Inverawe* (1999) which I produced with Niall, son of the author of the 1st edition (1951) in the library. George Watt, the family chauffeur, rescued most of the family papers (family history, not estate and garden papers) when told to put them on the bonfire that burned for 2 weeks when Iain was clearing out the house to sell it, and Watt hid a trunk full in the boathouse. He then told my uncle Richard where to find them – which he did."

Arduaine House was sold in 1964 and became the Loch Melfort Motor Inn, later renamed the Loch Melfort Hotel. Around the same time clearance work also took place in the garden itself as it was hoped that someone with the resources to fully restore and look after the garden would purchase it. Sir Ilay Campbell recalled in 1966:<sup>6</sup>

“In the last few years, however, large-scale rescue operations have taken place; clearing and judicious removal of some of the overgrown plants has given space for the development of those remaining. Careful thinning has provided room for new plantings, and it is now possible to see these really inspiring shrubs to their full advantage.”

When Major Iain sold Arduaine House in 1964 maintenance of the garden seems to have ceased completely. Nanny Yuille retired to her own little house in Bendorloch, Argyll and she was very upset about the state of the garden and its future. Nanny Yuille is fondly remembered by all the family; Gillie Mackie Campbell has written:<sup>12</sup>

“I think a tiny part of Arduaine Garden, close under the entrance block, is still called ‘Nanny Yuille’s Garden’. She was tiny & bent double & she loved all the tiny plants – they were on the same level!”

Prior to retirement Nanny Yuille continued to labour for long days in the garden, often after twilight had passed, when one of the family would notice she was missing and someone would be deputised to go and look for Nanny Yuille with a torch! It is very appropriate that when she passed away it was arranged for her ashes to be scattered in the garden. Some means of recognising the many years of caring for Arduaine by Nanny Yuille, George Watt and Jean Campbell through WWII and the difficult times that followed the cessation of hostilities, is long overdue. Diarmid Campbell notes:

“If any means of remembering Nanny Yuill’s work in the garden were found, it should also remember the work the work that both George Watt and Jean put in, attempting to keep the Lower Garden in shape to be visited. I have strong memories of arriving to find Jean deep in one border and Nanny in another, with Watt tending a bonfire somewhere.”

Little interest was shown in the purchase and restoration of the garden, so hope that a new owner could be found was gradually fading and some other use for the property seemed inevitable. Nothing had as yet been decided when, on the night of January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1968 a stiff south-westerly wind that had been blowing all evening reached hurricane force around midnight along Scotland’s West Coast. During the storm, which lasted until 4.00am, the anemometer at the Royal Navy base at Faslane, on the Gareloch, was blown down registering a wind speed of 118 m.p.h.; and there were suggestions that the severity of the hurricane may well have been greater at the more exposed locations along the Coast.

It was not until daylight that the devastation at Arduaine became apparent; the hurricane had felled a large number of the taller trees, the woodland area being the worst

affected, and these were strewn around all over the place, as if in protest at the incomprehensible power and capacity of Nature for destruction. Some trees were supported by others, whilst some leaned dangerously on their neighbours. Many of the trees covered the under-plantings and there were large areas of the garden that were inaccessible. Only seven years earlier the Campbell Family had cleared the fallen trees and debris from the main areas of the garden, and perhaps it was not surprising in the aftermath of the hurricane that the Campbell Family decided it was no longer viable to sell the property as a garden and it was thought the land might eventually become part of a holiday home development scheme.<sup>7</sup>

In the late-Winter of 1971 the property was advertised for sale through the Edinburgh office of John D. Wood, the well-known International Estate Agents, the property particulars indicated that the agents had obtained a verbal understanding from Argyll County Council that an application for planning permission, i.e., building developments of some kind, would be allowed within the confines of the existing garden.<sup>10</sup>

#### **The Restoration of Arduaine Garden:**

Seven years had passed since the garden had received any maintenance, a longer period than the duration of WWII whose adverse effect on gardens is well documented. In 1971 Edmund A.T. and Harry C. Wright were engaged in the creation of a garden at Duror, to the north of the village of Appin, some 27 miles north of Oban. The Wright Brothers were retired nurserymen from Cranham, near Upminster, Essex, where they owned and managed the Royal Oak Nurseries which sold a wide range of shrubs and trees, including rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias.<sup>13</sup>

These two horticulturalists were intrigued by the challenge of having the opportunity to rescue and restore Arduaine Garden, having visited the property only days before the closing date for offers. Edmund and Harry were concerned as to what might happen to the garden if the unique site had fallen into the hands of a property developer, however, what they required to make the purchase viable was a supply of clear water for both domestic and irrigation purposes. So, the discovery of two clear water springs in the garden was instrumental in the decision to raise their offer on the morning of the final day for offers to be considered. Thus the deal was clinched; it had been a very close-run thing that a life-line became available for rescuing the garden, and Edmund (Ed) Wright explained their thoughts and activities in the immediate aftermath of acquiring the garden:<sup>10</sup>

“We took over the garden on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1971 and in the remaining weeks up to Christmas

our activities centred round the old timber cottage (Arduaine Cottage) dating from 1903. It was necessary to make it reasonably habitable, it having been unoccupied since 1943, or thereabouts, according to George Watt. George was to prove a mine of information having started work with Arthur Campbell in the early twenties. We spent Christmas in Essex with our family, and whilst there took the opportunity to buy many of the tools we were going to need on our return to Argyll in the New Year.

On arriving back we immediately set to work, our main task being to open up paths long overwhelmed by nature and so the smoke from bonfires hung over the garden for the remainder of the winter and became a familiar sight to a neighbour who lived on the Isle of Luing. In the spring she came to see us and said her visit was prompted by the clouds of smoke that she had seen rising from the garden during the winter . . . .”

The Wright Brothers had no illusions that years of work lay ahead of them, not only in terms of clearing the storm damage, scattered debris, undergrowth, saplings, and the removal of plants and trees that were dead or in poor condition; but also in regard to developing the garden from the wider foundations that had been laid by Arthur Campbell. In the years following Arthur’s death in 1929 virtually no new areas had been planted and much of the woodland area remained to be opened up and developed as a garden. Accordingly, the work needed to be planned and taken forward a stage at a time and in the winter of 1978 Ed Wright reviewed the progress that Harry and himself had made in the Inside Garden, the Lower Garden and in the woodland area over the past seven years:<sup>14</sup>

“Visitors enter the garden on its eastern boundary . . . . . At a slightly lower level on the left is a small lawn. A newly constructed flight of steps and gravel path lead off through beds of rhododendrons and shrubs towards the sea. Much alteration has been made here in the last six months; gone is the tangle of *Pernettya* and heathers, previously a haven for rabbits. Several plants have been re-sited . . . . . quite a number of additional young plants can be seen, mainly species, and all recently planted.

A little further on and we begin to see the start of our major alterations. Gone is the fence that enclosed the vegetable garden, the old fruit trees and the bushes have been taken out and the paths and plots grassed over. Now one looks across a large lawn to a mixed bank of trees and shrubs. There are many diversions possible but we shall continue along the present path. The small glass-house contains a number of tender rhododendrons, all very small and in due course destined for planting outside. The old yew hedge which grew on the seaward side of the path has been removed and the whole area is much improved. We now approach a junction in the path, on the left is the start of the Water Garden . . . . . we can now continue straight on in to what was then a wilderness . . . . . The path now turns left on to the garden road (later The Glen). To the north it is bounded by a steep rocky bank, with the “Wood” above that. This bank has now been cleared of the existing trees and undergrowth, a retaining wall has been built alongside the road, and planting of the bank has begun. It is, however, extremely dry and things will be difficult to establish. Across the road



is a newly constructed sunken path. This was excavated to take in one of the old drainage ditches, which was not particularly attractive, after having been cleared of the tangle that grew there. The area is now planted with dwarf rhododendrons,

**Above: Ed & Harry Wright dwarfed by *R.rubiginosum* in the Spring of 1991**

**Courtesy: Christopher Simon Sykes**

**Left: The pathway leading to the garden entrance**

**Below: There has been a greenhouse in this location since the 1930s**



primulas and hostas and in a year or two this will be a great improvement. We are now approaching the start of the woodland.

I will give a brief description of the state in which we found (the woodland), and of the work that has been done over the past seven years. It is doubtful if much thinning had ever been attempted. The



**Above: This part of the garden was created by the Wright Brothers from an area of boggy land**

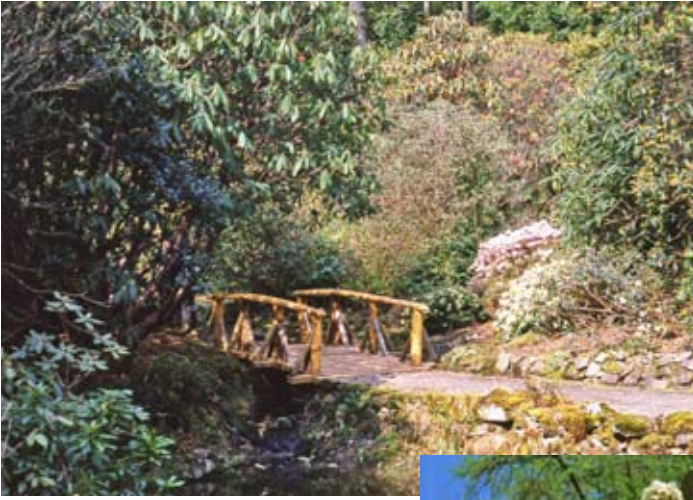
**Right: The ornamental Heron has seen many changes in the past fifty years**



**Below: View across the garden towards the Cliff Path**



choked for years. The second winter saw us felling a few trees here and there and continuing the removal of undergrowth and rubbish. During this time we visited several other local gardens, and noted how essential good light was to the growing of rhododendrons in the west of Scotland. Drastic action was called for if we were ever going to see some of our best plants in full flower, but felling trees in a wood full of rhododendrons is not an easy task, particularly when the trees



**Above: An attractive little bridge marks the transition between the more formal areas of the garden and the woodland garden**

**Right: *Rhododendron sinogrande***



**Below: A number of zig-zag paths and a wide variety of interesting plants**



are some ninety feet or more high. In the last five years the trees have been carefully thinned and the light has flooded in . . . . . Needless to say, we are still felling trees and this spring will see several of our old rhododendrons in flower for the first time.”

Ed Wright’s understatement of “felling a few trees here and there”

cannot begin to convey the enormity of the physical work undertaken by the Wright Brothers to transform the garden. After clearing away the dozens of trees strewn around by the 1968 hurricane, Ed & Harry felled hundreds of huge conifers, which needed to be sawn-up and carried away; then vast amounts of brambles



**Above: The Cliff Path provides some superb views across the Inside Garden out across Asknish Bay**

**Below: Maurice Wilkins, N.T.S. Property Manager at Arduaine at an S.R.S. Show  
Courtesy: NTS**



and shrubbery were carefully cut way without disturbing the established plant collections lying beneath. In the midst of this the Wright Brothers retained ownership of their Royal Oak nurseries for many years, which was a distraction that necessitated regular visits to Essex.

**Looking to the Future:**

By the early 1990s two decades of continual heavy work in the garden, often from dawn to dusk seven days a week, had more than begun to take their toll on Ed & Harry Wright and they began to consider their options as to the arrangements under which the future of the garden could be assured. Reminiscing in 1996, about the years they had spent restoring the garden since the purchase of the garden in 1971, Ed wrote:<sup>10</sup>

“During the next 21 years the work continued (it may sound a long time) and the seasons came and went with what seemed increasing speed, a recognised reality as one gets older, but the work continued. Vast quantities of undergrowth had to be removed and the roots grubbed out, bonfires seldom went out during the winter months. The woodland was scoured for rock with which to build retaining walls and when we ran out within our own boundaries we brought it in from the beach or off the hill behind the garden. Equally large amounts of gravel and stones for making new paths came in from the beach, indeed we cleared the beach of such material and had to wait for the annual scouring effect of the winter storms to renew the deposits.

New lawns were levelled, often necessitating the removal of thick mats of *Montbretia* which



had naturalised and become almost as bad as the common bluebell, of which there are millions. Old drainage ditches were piped and filled in with gravel from the beach.

The existing ponds were tiny, the round pond in the grove being more in keeping with a suburban garden, they were all enlarged. The pond now referred to as the Heron Pond was about a third its present size and surrounded by bushes that made it seem even smaller. It was excavated by hand to its present size and the other ponds at a higher level are all new and excavated from a wilderness of undergrowth and rubbish that had been dumped in a boggy area over many years. Paths in the vicinity of the ponds were virtually non-existent – likewise the area paved with stone which was laid after the ponds had been extended.

There is little point in attempting to describe all that was accomplished over the next twenty one years – suffice it to say that once the years of neglect had been dealt with, there is hardly an area of the garden that wasn't altered in some way – by cutting of new paths and beds, the construction of stone walls, the excavating of new ponds, drainage work, and of course the introduction of new plants, most importantly rhododendrons, although many other genera have been planted, particularly those from areas with a high rainfall.”

At the author's request in 1991, the late George F. Smith wrote an excellent article in liaison with the Wright Brothers that details the wide range of rhododendrons to be found at Arduaine and this is recommended as further reading.<sup>15</sup> After much meditation over the difficult subject as to how to secure the future of the garden, Ed & Harry decided that the only realistic option was to gift Arduaine to the National Trust for Scotland (N.T.S.) and, whilst the Brothers had some concerns about this course of action, the handover took place in early 1992. Achieving this object was no easy task, as Diarmid Campbell recalls:

“Considerable work was done by two of Arthur's grandsons in convincing the N.T.S. to consider the garden seriously; Sir Hugh Campbell-Byatt and his brother R.A. Campbell-Byatt, both retired diplomats living in Argyll. Their mother Olga, Lady Byatt was Arthur's only daughter.”

Maurice Wilkins was appointed as Property Manager/Head Gardener, but his attempts to liaise with the Wright Brothers came to naught. A few years earlier the Wright Brothers had built a new house, Arduaine Lodge, on the bluff above the garden entrance and its location provided an excellent view of the garden. Ed and Harry retained Arduaine Lodge, together with its separate area of garden, and thus were able to monitor the way of approach of the N.T.S. in regard to managing the garden, which not surprisingly, was in many regards markedly different than their own and contrary to their expectations. And sadly, as the months passed, a major rift developed between the Wright Brothers and N.T.S. concerning a number of issues. On the one hand one could have some sympathy for Ed and Harry who strove for perfection in the laying-out of plant collections carefully framed in a variety of woodland garden settings; on the other hand the N.T.S. had limited resources and an inbuilt drive to do things in their own time and in their own way to turn the property into major visitor attraction to support its upkeep costs. Suffice it to say that many of the contentious issues are in the past and, central to the problems on both sides, has been a lack of communication, an unwillingness

to admit that things could have been done differently, and a determination not to be seen to compromise.

It has been a hard lesson for all concerned, including many observers who have come to realise only too clearly the reality that, from the date a property has been ‘gifted’, the future of the property is completely outwith the control of those who made the gift, irrespective of what may have been agreed verbally, or in writing, prior to the handover taking place. And, in the case of a garden, the new ‘owners’ will inevitably want to make their own mark on the property. Sadly, in the midst of the debate as to how the property should be cared for, Harry Wright passed away suddenly in late 1996; he was nearly 80.

Twenty years on from the time the N.T.S. took over the garden Maurice Wilkins is still in the driving seat and caring for the garden he has always had a great affection for. It is to Maurice’s credit that he has quietly maintained a high standard in respect of managing the upkeep of the garden in a way that continues to suggest private ownership, gradually making the inevitable changes that become necessary with the passing years as mature plantings begin to decline. With a view to attracting visitors throughout the year Maurice has very successfully introduced a wider range of plant material, however, this has been done with care and in sympathy with the existing plantings in the garden. In 1996 Maurice wrote the text of a very useful and well-illustrated guidebook to the garden, which has been updated several times since and is available from the N.T.S.<sup>16</sup>

It was Gillie Mackie Campbell who on reflection said to the author, “It seems very odd to be talking about my recollections of Arduaine as though it is history. It doesn’t feel like history. It feels like yesterday!” And, despite the impact of nature and man across eleven decades of development, Arduaine remains one of Argyll’s most romantic gardens, a magical garden planted with great skill and perception that continues to be visited by groups of horticultural enthusiasts from all over the world.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

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WWII. I am also indebted, firstly, to Jean Maskell, Office Manager of Ardkinglas Estate, who has provided information about the Brennan Family; secondly, to Etta Mann, great niece of John Brennan, who is continuing to research her family history; thirdly, to Maurice Wilkins, N.T.S. Property Manager/Head Gardener at Arduaine, who has been most helpful and also made a transcript of the relevant notes written by James Arthur Campbell in his Arduaine Estate Journal; and finally, to Edmund & Harry Wright, whose articles, letters and enclosures have helped outline their mammoth task of restoring the garden.

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Pictures by John Hammond except where noted.

## **Back to Sichuan May 2012**

**Gilles Rouau**

**Translation: Catherine & Aube-Anaïs Canela**

Addiction to rhododendron is an illness which first appeared in Great Britain but it seems it is now well rooted in Armorique too. In its more serious forms the patient is hardly interested in anything but rhododendron species in a quasi-compulsive way. For the most severely affected, the treatment requires repeat travels to the Himalayas, to see rhododendrons in their awe-inspiring environment, to photograph them, to spot the finest specimen. Here are the basic ingredients for a cure...

Our group of Breton people is getting treatment that way with, on our passports from previous travels, Chinese visas (Yunnan, Sichuan, Tibet) and Indian stamps for Arunachal Pradesh, that Eldorado where we trekked three times, each more difficult than the previous one. During the last one in 2011, we reached our limit. If you want to discover unknown areas, it gets harder and harder to put everything in motion. So in 2012 a trip, but an easier one. We had to make up our minds on the destination: somewhere with many endemic species, good infrastructure and hotels. China offers such a profile but it needs efficient organisation to avoid the well-known local shortcomings such as the bureaucracy, the tyrannical schedules, rivalry between provinces and their reticence concerning the taking of seed. People on a trip to Sichuan-Tibet in 2005 suffered a lot from these drawbacks, although the area had shown all its richness. After reading the remarkable book 'Seeds of Adventure' by P. Cox and P. Hutchison, we made up our minds. These Scottish veterans and famous explorers, praise the wealth of north Sichuan still wild and forested.

As far as the south of the province and the north-east of nearby Yunnan are concerned, the report in 1995 was alarming: wooded areas disappearing, reduced to nearly nothing by a voracious agriculture but still sheltering some residual populations of exclusive endemic plants. These areas had however been the favourite hunting places of our famous forerunners: the missionaries David and Delavay. What's more, it seemed north Sichuan had hardly been visited since before the war and Handel-Mazzetti.

So, we were to do a road trip for two weeks from Chengdu with day-treks, at the end of May, between snow and monsoon. You need a very efficient tour operator. We had

been looking for this hard to find person for a long time. Finally Henry Cheng was recommended to us by the British plant-explorer Alan Clark. A few clicks later, with the magic of the internet, the deal was done for our future happiness.

Henry is a tall, thin person of Han origin who speaks good English. His help is Michael, a young student. All Chinese in contact with foreigners give themselves occidental names. A smiling driver took us around in a 10 seat Iveco van. Chengdu which counted 3 million inhabitants in 2005 has now more than 9 million people. A huge Tibetan district has developed, in the middle of which was our hotel. An old nearby area, Jing-Li, has been rehabilitated (or rebuilt?), half medieval, half Disneyland. It is kitsch but clean and very attractive. The local cooking still uses dynamite as seasoning!

There were no more bikes but electric scooters, hybrid vehicles, and buses and lorries running on natural gas. They are rather ahead of the rest of the world here.

After a first air-conditioned night we were on the road again. Going south on a motorway we observed the road network has become very modern. Alas, from what Henry had told us the night before about the first stage of our journey, things were not going to plan.

Originally, we were going to climb Emei Shan (famous Mount Omei) and stay the night at the top. On Henry's insistence, we were to ascend Wawu Shan nearby, not so touristic but at least equal as far as plants and flowers were concerned. We were to spend the night there in a hotel. When we arrived, Henry told us there were three problems: the road was closed, as were the cable car and the refuge, all this due to exceptionally heavy winter snow. And it fell all at once... in May. China, even though it has become digital is still mysterious. In distrust, we decided to go and have a look. The road goes up along huge dam lakes, which, surprisingly at the end of winter, are nearly dry. This was done on purpose, for the huge earthquake in Wachuán in 2008 weakened all the buildings. As we arrived at the bottom of Wawu Shan, we had to accept it was blocked. Climbing would not be possible for several months. It was hard to accept but at least we had two spare days, which could be very useful at the end of the trip. So, on the road to Ebian, a town located at the bottom of the Dadu Gorges. As we arrived, there was a festive atmosphere. The population was gathered on a large terrace above the river, dancing under huge masts decorated with multicolored strings of fairy lights. Our superb hotel was located above it with a computer in each room. This was a chance to check that all western websites were blocked!

In the next stage towards Meigu, we hoped to see some interesting plants and the climb from the valley revealed a great number of specimens of *Magnolia officinalis* and *Davidia involucrata* in full bloom. At the altitude of 2,600m we saw our first rhododendron, a huge Argyrophylla Subsection specimen, maybe *R. ririei*, already full of seeds. We finished the climb of the potholed track of the Yizi pass at 3,300m on foot. It marks the entrance of the Dafengding Park, the furthest south panda reserve.

Happiness at long last! Lavender coloured *Rhododendron davidsonianum*, pinkish *R. racemosum*, bright pink *R. rubiginosum*, purplish *R. polylepis* with long deep-veined leaves, are bustling on the road side. A Subsection Argyrophylla rhododendron exhibiting trusses of about twenty corollas was probably *R. pingianum* (now *R. ebianense*). There were a few specimens of *R. longesquamatum* and *R. maculiferum* but all this was insignificant compared to a profusion of enormous *R. rex* ssp. *rex* amazingly floriferous with trusses bright purplish pink and a black blotch. It is a form absolutely exceptional and not yet introduced!

On the way down to Meigu, through the 50,000ha of the park, we did not see any pandas but bushes of white and pink, scented, *Rhododendron decorum*. The town was of no interest and we were happy to be leaving the next day. We were going to Leibo through another area of the reserve just as rich as the first one.

The slopes were covered in blue waves: *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* in the hollows, *R. nitidulum* on the banks, the whole area dotted with *R. decorum* and *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes* which are very similar although the latter is much later flowering. As we arrived at the top, blue gave way to purple with *R. concinnum*, while haze made the distant ravines indistinct.

We were lucky to have wonderful views before enduring the hard descent towards the Yang Tse Kiang on a winding road often bordered with *Paulownia fargesii* with white or periwinkle-blue flowers, *Cornus controversa* and *Davidia involucrata*, white handkerchiefs hanging from all branches. All this before spending ten hours in the dust of a monstrous construction site: the Quiluodu dam, the second biggest in the world. There is a motorway built on stilts overhanging at the height of 115m which will be almost level with the surface of the future lake. The valley is densely populated so many people will have to be relocated.

After Leibo we were in Yunnan. The north-east of the province is a poor, overcrowded

area where agriculture (corn, beans, potatoes) literally invades every inch of land, including the banks and sides of roads and motorways and this up to 3,500m.

There was nothing of interest, up to Yiliang, a sinister town where lodgings were full and western faces aroused curiosity and lack of understanding. The police turned up at our hotel for a 'passport control' and photos of us were taken for the local papers. Xiaocaoba is a mythical range of mountains which have escaped cultivation. It is an isolated and unique sanctuary of rare species situated 35km away. It was the day after and in the rain that we arrived.

Stunning *Rhododendron simsii*, enormous red to orange coloured bushes hung from the cliffs. The forest tops an uneven limestone plateau culminating at 2,700m, covered with marshy humus. A single track crosses the park and the surroundings are amazingly rich.

A first for us in China, we noticed numerous camellias, which were out of bloom. There were three species: one with thin pointed leaves (*C. cuspidata?*), one with large reticulate leaves (*C. pitardii?*), one with small brilliant-red young leaves (unknown). The deciduous forest was packed with *Prunus serrula*, *Betula albo-sinensis*, *Acer davidii*, *Aesculus wilsonii*, *Magnolia officinalis* with, at a lower level, lots of *Enkianthus*, *Styrax officinalis*, *Cornus kousa*, *Hydrangea heteromalla*. But what about rhododendrons? The most frequent lepidote was *R. lutescens*, out of bloom, but with ornamental mahogany coloured new shoots. Among elepidotes, their blooming season over as well but with silk threads sticking out of its stems, *R. strigillosum* was the king together with very tall *R. calophytum*. Two others still had their corollas, *R. denudatum*, white dotted with tiny purple spots and leaves with thick woolly indumentum but mainly *R. huianum* with delicate mauve flowers and narrow and acuminate shaped leaves.

As we followed the track, deep ravines cut through the plateau, zigzagging down; at each bend there was a majestic cascade of bluish water feeding a pool under lots of *R. denudatum* jutting out over the cliff and on the point of collapsing under the weight of their corollas. Very few places have ever been so much worth the trip. Our only regret is that we could not find the rare *R. ochraceum* which is mainly found, as far as we know, on these cliffs. However, we did see a field obviously planted by human hands with specimens which looked like *R. coeloneuron*.

After a second night in Yiliang, we headed on towards another mystic area: Wumeng

Shan, as it is called locally, the eastern Yunnan range. On the way, we had to cross the new town of Zhaotong which is said to be the future haven for the refugees of the Leibo-Quiluodu dam. It was a Dantesque sight: a metropolis crisscrossed by eight-lane motorways, punctuated by traffic-lights, shaded by blocks of skyscrapers. Fifteen kilometers of uninterrupted buildings... and not a soul in sight. A brand new ghost-town has been created! Our goal was called Huize and, just above it, the Dahaico range which is over 4,000m. We got there late afternoon after enduring a bumpy road up to 3,600m.

Our trip started from a barren top, into a valley. Very rocky and wild at the beginning but as we went down, became an oasis of greenery. Taliensia Subsection rhododendrons were the best: *R. phaeochrysum*, *R. bureavii*, *R. x pubicostatum* (a hybrid of *R. bureavii* with indumentum in small tufts); they formed compact groves on the banks of the gorge. White *R. rex* sheltered in hollows. To our surprise we discovered there were also small semi-deciduous plants with flat yellow flowers which were obviously related to *R. trichocladum* which is rarely found in west Yunnan. But it was nearly the end of the day and it was getting cooler; we could not go further on this promising trek although treasures seem to be within our reach.

As we arrived at the bus, we had bad news: Jean-François was missing. We had scattered, feeling safe as there is only one path. And then, in a thick fog, the loner went up the wrong valley, exhausted himself and wandered about. Luckily we got off with a good fright as the lost one was found just as night was falling. It was a good occasion to check the efficiency of the Chinese rescue teams Henry had meanwhile alerted. On our way down we met the local police and emergency medical services that had come to the rescue. Two energetic-looking young women doctors asked to examine the survivor who escaped being taken to hospital only by dancing a wild jitterbug, patent proof of his resurrection! Finally, we arrived at Huize too late to have dinner and we spent quite an agitated night.

The next stage took us further than the Yang Tse and we were back in Sichuan after a round trip in Yunnan confirming what had been predicted: endless kilometers, a despoiled nature where only a few protected islands survive in the rare areas where agriculture is impossible. But we had been given the opportunity to see what very few western people had seen before (and probably after).

On the road again, towards Quaojia, a border town on the river and then to Huili, a superb medieval town, well preserved and authentic where it is nice to walk around





even if the western tourist is obviously very rare and the object of laughs and chuckles from elegant young ladies sheltering under their sunshades.

Alas, the next day was an umbrella-day. Henry had planned a trip above the town in the mountains where the mythical *Rho-*

**Above:** *Rhododendron hippophaeoides*

**Right:** *Rhododendron bureavii*

**Below:** *Rhododendron bureavioides*



*dodendron lacteum* is supposed to be found. But the only ballasted track which leads there, severely eroded by the rains, was obstructed by a huge pile of gravel recently unloaded. Who wants to walk



uphill for 20 km in the rain?

Unsurprisingly, the other option met with general approval. We kept going towards Xichang, two hours away and not far from there, we took a cable car to Luoji Shan, the ‘Mountain of the fiancés’, a garden of Eden according to local tour-

**Above: *Rhododendron concinnum***

**Right: *Rhododendron roxieanum* var. *cucullatum***



**Below: *Rhododendron lacteum***



ist leaflets. The photos which describe the place are amazing; you can see the ‘yellow giant Puge rhododendron’ and it looks like a YELLOW *rex*. That would be a scoop! We were very excited as we arrived at the large cable car park, proof that Luoji is a major local tourist attraction. We started at 2,700m and the cable car took us 1,100 m

higher to a group of glacial cirques with, at their bottom several lakes set in the alpine forest. Forty-five minutes in the cable car took us to the station and as when we left the cabin, we were in SHOCK! Enormous yellow *R. lacteum* with a red blotch still had a few flowers. It was brand new territory for this species, never seen so far north. There were two variants: yellow buds for one and red for the other. Also were some white *R. pachytrichum* with a black blotch and to keep them company, superb *R. bureavii* as beautiful as the famous 'Ardrishaig' clone!

After settling in our surprisingly comfortable hotel, we had some time for a stroll around the first lake which is the largest. To the exquisite charm of the place, heaven gratified us with a warm sun that wrapped us in its late afternoon golden light. Blue skies, crystal clear water and pink bushes from pastel to bright shades were reflected in the lake. There was an incredible concentration of *Rhododendron souliei*, of a shade darker than any of us have ever seen. This was not all: next to majestic *R. phaeochrysum* plants, an unknown Subsection Taliensia showed its pointed leaves, the largest undoubtedly of the subsection. With a varying discontinuous indumentum, thick and hairy wood, large white flowers with pink stripes and red spots, this gorgeous stranger would be classified by K. Cox as a new form of *R. bureavioides*.

Walking on a network of remarkable pontoons, duckboards and steps, part wood and part concrete, we arrived at 3,900m where two more wonders unveiled themselves: a Taliensia with curved orbicular leaves, their spongy underside a fawn colour, resembling *Rhododendron clementinae*. (K. Cox would name it *R. sphaeroblastum* var. *wumengense*) and *R. roxieanum* var. *cucullatum*, with the underside of its leaves, a bright orange, proudly exposed to the eye!

Not bad for a first contact. We enjoyed another happy day during which, one must admit, our treasure hunt would not get much richer: a bluish-purple Subsection Lapponica (*Rhododendron amundsenianum* according to K. Cox). Around each corner were a thousand colourful sights where, under *Abies delavayi*, the rarest rhododendrons were the kings.

After a night in heaven we must come back down to earth. In a cable car? Not at all. There were concrete steps winding down which offered us a few more novelties. Firstly, the colour of *Rhododendron souliei* faded as we went further down, to finish completely white at about 3,500m. Secondly, the wonderful *R. rex*, presumed to be yellow, were huge trees between 3,500 and 3,000m. We were too late to check what their exact colour was: they were no longer in bloom. We noticed a few more

plants: *R. floribundum*, *R. heliolepis*, *Magnolia sinensis*. After 3,000 steps, we were extremely happy to see the bus. Unluckily, on a hairpin bend, it squashed a tri-car but luckily nobody was hurt.

After a quiet night in Xichang, a lake-side town with Mediterranean vegetation, a long day on the road, going north through the Yi country was awaiting us. The Yi are a privileged minority allowed to have two children, to keep their own language and have their own laws. They build very beautiful villages and protect their environment. We went towards Gonga Shan (7,500 m). Lots of people go there mainly because of its glaciers and hot springs. Before reaching our next stop, Moxi, we came across a motorway under construction. So as not to be bothered by landslides, the new policy is to build on stilts which are anchored at the bottom of the valley in sediments. It looks like some kind of endless viaduct de Millau at a breath-taking height!

High up, Moxi looks like a winter sport resort for well-off tourists with its hand-craft shops, numerous bars and night life. It has preserved a jewel: a French catholic mission dating back to the beginning of the 20th century which had sheltered Mao Zedong during the 'Long March'.

We spent a good night in the best hotel of our holiday before we started towards Kangding, 80 km away. As we drove towards Yajiangeng pass (over 4,000 m) we discovered a valley incredibly coloured with large bright orange rocks which flashed in the haze. This is due to lichen, the only one of its kind, apparently. Successive stops let us discover botanically wonderful sights, like the landscape.

The most common plant was *Rhododendron ambiguum*, the most beautiful yellow of Triflora Subsection, except that here, it is not only yellow but all the shades between gold and salmon. *R. concinnum* could also be seen and hybrids between. When drops of water became iridescent on the corollas, it was a magic sight. This was even brighter on the large rose funnel-campanulate flowers of *R. selense* ssp. *dasycladum* which thrived in the area. This was unknown to us.

Large numbers of *Rhododendron longesquamatum* and *R. calophytum*, both of the best quality, grew everywhere without any flowers unfortunately. We could see flowers however on two species very different from one another: the small epiphytic *R. dendrocharis* which sheltered its tiny hairy leaves and pale pink corollas in large conifers and *R. prattii* spreading its large dark limbs, with white spotted flowers. Long strands of fog made for supreme beauty.

Kangding was not far away but we hardly recognised the place we stayed in 2005. A very large military camp spoiled the access to the valley and concrete suburbs had grown. We were looking for virginal mountains. The next day we were very disappointed. It had snowed a lot so our trek was cancelled. Henry suggested we botanise a new road opened in 2012 leading to Ta Gong, on the edge of the Tibetan high plateau, through a pass at 4,200m and a valley called Zhong Gu.

Very green at the start, as we climbed, the gorge became colonised by rhododendrons. Higher, the landscape became more barren. First, we discovered some *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii* which were weighed down by pink iridescent flowers, *R. concinnum* their corollas a colour between ruby and beetroot, *R. watsonii*, their big pale leaves with a wide triangular base extending into a flat petiole. There were also tiny, creeping and protruding *R. phaeochrysum*. Another Taliensia Subsection with narrow flowers and spongy indumentum might have been *R. adenogynum* and one with narrow shiny leaves and a chocolate coloured indumentum, *R. wasonii*.

In a dry meadow, among *Incarvillea* we found bushes of *Rhododendron trichostomum* with small pink *Daphne*-like flowers. Above 4,000m at least three different species of Subsection Lapponica colour the slopes in bluish purple dotted with yellow and deep blue poppies (*Meconopsis integrifolia* and *M. quintuplinervia*). The cloudy sky, the wind moaning, the infinite melancholy of the high altitude steppe, all added to the beauty of the place. Numerous yurts of Tibetan nomads occupied the sheltered hollows.

The following day, starting again from Kangding, we got to Mugecuo Lake. We had hardly seen this site in 2005 when it was still in a natural state and known as “lake of the seven shades”. It is an area where hot springs are found at different levels in the forest, below a big lake situated at 3,600m. Each spring feeds a pond, which micro-organisms colour or make iridescent in different shades, before flowing into the main river.

But here again the building fever has hit, incorporating a station, in a kitsch neo-Tibetan style with a huge car park, gazebos, kiosks, rows of flashy prayer-wheels and religious ribbons everywhere. It is a (somewhat) Buddhist and (very) touristy paraphernalia. There are shuttles to reach the upper lake and at last we were allowed to walk down the gorge on imitation wood pontoons made of real concrete. But joking aside, the site is still fabulous. A forest of Taliensia Subsection surrounds the upper lake with a mix of *Rhododendron phaeochrysum* (the most ubiquitous of the

subsection) and probably *R. elegantulum* with pink flowers and thinner leaves. *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii* and *R. concinnum* colour the landscape from pearly pink to deep purple.

In the vale, on each side of waterfalls, two rhododendrons were co-starring: spreading *R. watsonii*, showing the bearing of a “real big leaf” with loads of pure white flowers, but mostly typical *R. bureavioides*, deep green foliage, orange indumentum and deep pink flowers. Some specimens had a crimson blotch. Most of them are over 5m high, a perfect sight to finish on a high note. For, yes, it was over and our return to Chengdu was getting nearer. We would have liked to forge ahead eastwards and go on a pilgrimage to Baoxing, the headquarters of Father David. Alas, the whole area is still forbidden and impenetrable since the 2008 earthquake, which destroyed so many roads, dams and even towns officially killing 90,000 people.

We had to backtrack through Kangding and the bad roads of Erlang Shan. We had had the pleasure of having lifted the veil on a new exceptional site, Luoji. To the question we had before we started, the answer is now clear. Yes, China has lost some of its political-police apparatus. The feeling of freedom is real; it seems you can do a lot here; travel as you like.

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Pictueries by members of the group: Gilles Rouau, Gilles & Béatrice Stephan, Jean-François & Jacqueline Petton.

## Half a Century of Plant Hunting Part 2 1998-2012

Peter A. Cox

1998 saw me back in Tibet, this time heading for the well-known Ludlow and Sherriff territory of the Tsari valley. But as bad luck would have it, the Indians had just set off A-bomb trials which had upset the Chinese who closed the Tsari just before we were due there. So a change of plans or aborting the trip was necessary, luckily everyone wanted to do something so we settled for the Bimbi La and the Sur La, both ways down to the Tsari valley though of course we were not allowed to go too far into the valley itself. We hit most of the rhododendrons perfectly with great shows from *R. aganniphum* (pink), and the apparently related, what for the moment we are calling *R. phaeochrysum* yellow, but which is undoubtedly a new species first found by Ludlow and Sherriff. Although they were often growing together, there was no sign of any natural hybrids. Other species at their best were *R. laudandum* var. *temoense* and *R. fragariflorum*. Camping near the top of the Bimbi La was the highest I ever camped, near 4,300m, and I hardly slept due to altitude and cold.

In spring 1999 Peter and I went off to China on our own and we were given a rather elderly and lazy professor of glaciology to take charge of us. It soon became apparent that we were going to have difficulties with somebody who insisted in his comforts and a large mid-day meal every day. Also he refused to take us to Fanjing Shan in north-east Guizhou which had been one of our principal objectives. When we did eventually get to this mountain in 2009, we realised that in 1999 we would probably have had to walk up the whole way which the professor would never been able or willing to do. Later Peter and the professor had a major row and I had to try to mediate between them, actually on Peter's birthday when they produced a large cake. We did go to a few partly worthwhile places including Jinfo Shan in Chongqing province from where we were able to introduce the splendid *Rhododendron platypodum* and the *R. valentinianum* relative *R. changii*. Jinfo Shan is an amazing mountain with huge limestone cliffs and caves and a plateau on the top.

Spring 2000 saw us back in west Yunnan starting with a trek from the Salween side of the Salween-Mekong divide. The star turn here was finding *R. fletcherianum*, a very rare species only previously found by Joseph Rock, another probable relative of

*R. valentinianum*. Again they were building a new road, this time up the west bank of the Salween and again their blowing up of the splendid marble cliff was hazardous. We then retraced our steps up the Pula river, the new road had already become impassable owing to a landslide but from the road we did find some different species including *R. coriaceum* and *R. coryanum*. This time we got well over the Nam Wa pass back into forest and collected some old seed of the huge twisted branched *R. hylaeum*, the newly collected *R. lateriflorum* and a new species of Subsection Monantha with white flowers.

Autumn 2002 proved to be the toughest trek I ever made, returning to Arunachal Pradesh for the first time for 37 years. This gave us the excitement of completely virgin territory. No westerners had ever been on this track if you can call it a track, many parts of it proving highly dangerous. We started by crossing the Subansiri river on a bridge made of rusty wire and a few twigs as were other bridges later. Wild bananas with fruit full of hard seeds lined the path for ages until we eventually climbed to 3,700m, then down into the Siyom valley, a tributary of the great Dihang/Brahmaputra. There was an unbelievable variety of rhododendron species. One out of three big-leaved species is probably new, alas far too early into growth to be of any use. *R. hookeri* had much bigger leaves than found in west Arunachal but the ridge gave us perhaps the greatest treasures including a Ludlow & Sherriff species never introduced by them *R. trilectorum* and a plant very special to me which I never thought I would see in the wild, *R. ludlowii*, which I have used so much in hybridising yellow dwarfs. I felt really elated that I had managed to complete that trek at the age of 68. I just regretted that being autumn, there was no flower.

Spring 2004 saw me back in Arunachal, this time in the west in far easier territory to traverse. We first walked towards the Poshing La and then from Naga GG to near the Se La which we had been refused permission for in 1965. Our path took us to the Bhutan frontier and the Orka La. The weather had been nasty with no visibility, but very early one morning shouts of 'its all clear' had us out of our tents into glorious sunshine which we had for the rest of the trip. We were camping near a small lake surrounded with *Rhododendron bhutanense* in full flower, ranging from near red to white. The primulas were at their best including the rare *P. kingii* which the Sherriffs grew so well at Ascreavie. We also saw *Meconopsis grandis* just beginning to come out.

2006 and again back in Arunachal when we tried to visit the ridge between the Kameng and Subansiri divisions, which had been our main goal in 1965. Although





**Above: *Rhododendron ludlowii* in a garden in Scotland from the 2002 expedition**

**Right: Beautiful lake surrounded by all shades of *Rhododendron bhutanense* looking towards the Orka La**



**Below: Peter at the top of the Orka La**



*R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum* with its amazing stripes was superb.

Spring 2007 saw me back to China with Gary Luo who organised the rest of my Chinese trips. We started in Baoping (formerly



Moupin) which I had not been to before where we were able to visit Pere David's church which was still in very good condition. We went north on the road over to Xiaojin where we stayed in 1989. To begin with there was much destruction due to new roads and a dam but then good virgin forest followed with good Sub-

Above and Right: *Rhododendron flinckii* pink form

Below: *Rhododendron dalhousiae* var *rhabdotum*



section Taliensia rhododendrons higher up. We were lucky to see local wildlife including a beautiful cock Lady Amhurst pheasant and after dark, Chinese water deer being fed. Later we saw two cuckoos. South of Erlang Shan we had an epic day's drive on a very bad road including passing

through an enormous quarry, eventually reaching our hotel at 10 o'clock. Further south was a valley full of the yellow *Meconopsis pseudointegrifolia*, totally unexpected in this area. It was great to see some beautiful pink *R. rex* in full flower. I was surprised to find this species quite common and widespread both on this trip and later in 2012. Another species I have seen in several places is *R. bureavii* but few plants had such good indumentum as the original introduction from north-west Yunnan.

I cannot cease to be amazed how virtually every small town now has the equivalent of three and four star hotels. Private enterprise has hit the mining industry and at one stage we were held up by a string of trucks when the obvious local mafia leader came up to us and said if we had warned him in advance he could have cleared the road for us! We finished by getting to the top of Emei Shan. Being a World Heritage Site they are making a great but partly misguided effort. Areas near paths had been cleared of undergrowth to prevent fires. Hordes of litter pickers were armed with enlarged chopsticks. Tourists had got into feeding the monkeys who are liable to snatch ones lunch bag. In front of my very eyes I saw a bottle of pop being taken by an alpha male, the top unscrewed and the contents drunk.

Spring 2009 saw me going south to Guizhou and Guanxi with Peter this time. Our first stop was Maoer Shan which other people had found good recently including the young-flowering and compact Fortunea Subsection *Rhododendron yuefengense* which has proved such a success in cultivation. For some reason they had now closed the reserve, apparently until May, but in 2010 we were told it was banned to all foreigners which was sad plus the nearby Huaping Reserve with the same result. The little-grown rhododendrons from Sections Azaleastrum and Choniastrum were in full flower with pink to white flowers and made quite a show. These are largely a bit tender and require more heat than we can give them in Scotland. Dayao Shan proved a spectacular mountain with sheer cliffs and pinnacles, on this occasion not frightening as we could not see anything for the mist. In 2010 it was very different, absolutely clear, and even Steve Hootman was frightened. On Steve's third visit in 2012 he found the much searched for *R. dachengense*. Leigong Shan proved to be well worth our visit with splendid trees of *Magnolia sprengeri* covered in its pink flowers. Sadly Steve damaged his eye in endeavouring to take a photograph and decided to go home the following day as it was so bad. Luckily he soon recovered. Big rounded bushes of *R. fortunei* were covered with scale insect. We found just three plants of the rare *R. glanduliferum*.

Fanjing Shan was reached at last and now there is a road almost to the top. This is the

highest mountain in east Guizhou and therefore the richest in the area. We found *Rhododendron haofui*, *R. liliiflorum* and *R. oligocarpum* as Jim Russell had found them in 1984 plus *R. auriculatum* which he apparently did not find on his route to the top. *R. argyrophyllum* ssp. *nankingense* and *R. petrocharis* were further up. Also here is the superb *Enkianthus serrulatus* with large white flowers. A Section Triflora which the Chinese are calling *Rhododendron ambiguum* was also here but it is not this species. Our second last area was Dashaha near Jinfo where Peter Wharton had been on his first Chinese trip. There we saw Peter's species nova Triflora in flower with its curious pink and white flowers and scruffy leaves. Then Jinfo Shan again where we did not achieve anything, with wild *R. platypodum* alas not in flower yet (some had been moved to full sun, resulting in them being half dead and attempting to flower).

Autumn 2010 saw us back on Jinfo where Steve Hootman's one goal was to see wild *R. platypodum* and this was eventually achieved on top of a rock in the big Stone Forest. Sadly the Chinese are trying to landscape an area with a bulldozer using leggy old plants out of the forest with no chance of success. We have heard since that more damage has been done trying to develop a ski area. We drove on to west Guizhou to the supposedly highest peak of Jiucaiping which turned out to be almost devoid of vegetation but there were a few *R. rubiginosum* cum *R. polylepis* and what I would call *R. decorum* var. *cordatum* which Steve thinks may be *R. nymphaeoides* which I had not heard of before. Further east is the 100 League Rhododendron Park where there are lots of *R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi*, *R. irroratum* and a multitude of hybrids between them. A cleared area had been well planted with rhododendron seedlings, the first time we had seen this, including *R. annae* and *R. glanduliferum*, both rare in the wild.

After covering some old territory, we went well south in Guangxi to Daming Shan, new territory for us all. While only about 1,300m, what we found on the top could not get any higher, so hardness is very much a question. *R. faithae* is a comparatively large-leaved Fortunea Subsection of which every plant was being devoured by caterpillars and it was now November. The other species *R. wumingense* is a small, white, scented Maddenia Subsection, which looks at first sight to be close to *R. moupinense*.

I could not get over the neon lights in even quite small towns, which could rival those anywhere. I do not know how much electricity they use but it did seem a waste to me. Another thing that struck me on this trip was the bedding plants, in one place all along a main road for what appeared to be for miles. A third point was the state of the roads.

Motorways now go through some amazingly rough countryside and seem to consist almost entirely of viaducts and tunnels. Heaven knows what a severe earthquake would do to them. I feel they are making these motorways for show and are neglecting many of the minor roads.

Autumn 2012 proved to be my last trip to China and I only did half of it. We tackled new country in western Sichuan going straight up Long Zhou Shan by car to 3,500m with no acclimatisation to altitude. I soon found that one step up hill made me feel horribly dizzy and I made up my mind there and then this was the finish. We found nothing new but fine *Rhododendron bureavii* and *R. rex* plus Triflora Subsection. Then on to Da Hei Shan: not much good except for *R. spinuliferum* which grew to quite a size, followed by Gesala Eco Tourism Park. This proved different to anywhere else we had been with a large area of dwarf pine and oak. Laoji Shan has been explored by several people recently and is well set up for tourists with miles of board walks. The top reaches 4,000m and we got the cable car to 3,400m. Luckily I was much better and made it to 3,900m. This mountain is outstanding for its Taliensia Subsection with *R. bureavioides* aff., *R. lacteum*, *R. phaeochrysum*, *R. sphaeroblastum* var. *wumengense* and best of all *R. roxieanum* var. *cucullatum*, the type locality. Another good plant is *R. souliei*, which has proved easier to grow than the old form from Kangding but not as attractive with the flowers less saucer-shaped. We walked down to the road head, mostly on steps, which was perhaps a mistake as all our knees and feet suffered. The track did not follow under the cable car route, which looked more interesting.

A few months after returning from China I developed a type of Parkinson's disease so obviously my decision to quit going to south-east Asia was correct. For those considering going to collect seed I recommend searching out capsules from the middle of a population rather than off the first plant you come to, attempting to avoid hybridisation. However, the Nagoya Protocol has now come into being, making collecting and selling wild seed illegal.

For those seeking more detail of the trips 1962 to 2002, read Peter's and my book *Seeds of Adventure* and for 2004-12 articles I have written.

Pictures in this article by John Roy.

# **Twenty Years of the Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute**

**Sue Thornley**

Sir Ilay Campbell in his article “Giants of the West” ‘RHS Rhododendron and Camellia Yearbook 1964’ describes the near-perfect growing conditions for rhododendrons in the west of Scotland and gives examples of many magnificent plants and gardens where they can be seen. In his view rhododendrons grow at least as well as in south-west England (often viewed as the Mecca of the genus) and to prove the case Sir Ilay highlights a number of giants that have achieved huge stature. He suggests that “a leisurely tour along Scotland’s Western Seaboard might well be a rewarding experience for any lover of rhododendrons”.

Anyone embarking on a tour of the deeply indented west coast will encounter gardens and rhododendrons that reflect the various periods of plant exploration that stretch back as far as Joseph Hooker’s expedition to northern India and Sikkim in 1849–1851. Rhododendrons collected from that prolific period of plant exploration before and after World War 1 are also widely represented as well as the more recent introductions following the opening up of China in the early 1980s. However while rhododendrons might often predominate, a huge range of other genera also vie for attention and it is this diversity, as well as the gardens’ beautiful and varied locations, that capture the imagination.

Thus by the end of the twentieth century there were a number of gardens in different states of development, some with historic collections, others reaching their full maturity and others that were either new or undergoing restoration. In order to promote this varied heritage Argyll and Bute Council produced and published three leaflets in the early 1990s that promoted 10 gardens. However, it was in October 1994 that 8 garden owners and managers attended an inaugural meeting to set up a marketing group, at a time, when the Council was actively working with West Highlands and Islands Tourist Board to encourage visitors to their area. Indeed the Council were keen to include 2 of their own properties, Ardenraig on Bute and Kilmory Woodland Garden at Lochgilphead in the fast-emerging group that became the Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute.

At the beginning, Sam Macdonald of Angus' Garden at Barguilean and Mark Sands from Ardkinglas were the combined driving force. By January 1995 18 gardens were signed up and had paid their membership fees to allow the initial printing of a garden brochure for the planned launch of the group at the end of March. All the gardens agreed to the basic objective of encouraging visitor numbers by increasing awareness of the gardens. In addition, each garden would be open from approximately March to October, sign up as members of their local tourist organisation and be committed to improving and maintaining their gardens as well as the principle of joint marketing.

The launch at the Oyster Bar, Loch Fyne was a great success and created the first joint marketing group for gardens in Scotland. The group continued to meet almost monthly into 1996, in turn at member's gardens. They attended the Travel Trade Fair in April and met with Philip McMillan Browse of the Great Gardens of Cornwall who provided helpful guidance. For 2 years the group built full show gardens at the RHS Scottish Gardening Show at Strathclyde Park (1997 and 1998). Sponsorship was sought and provided in 1998 by the Daily Express who ran an extensive campaign of articles on all the gardens prior to the Show, where the Glorious Gardens won 'Best Show Garden' with "Taming the Wilderness". Since this time the group have participated at Gardening Scotland each year, designing exhibits representative of the Argyll gardens.

Members of the current group are private owners, NTS gardens, the RBGE Benmore Botanic Garden, other private trusts and Council owned gardens. But it is inevitable that for some, circumstances change, owners die and their properties are sold, families move elsewhere and new owners want their garden for themselves. Continuing to develop and maintain a garden requires a single-minded approach, not one easily handed on down the generations. Island gardens in particular struggle to attend meetings and inevitably are less active in the group. Thus, over the years, wonderful gardens such as Jura House have been closed to the public while other gardens such as Ardtornish have joined the group.

Over the next 12 months, the Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute are aiming to raise the profile of our gardens to encourage more people to visit and explore our world-class plant collections. If you are a visitor to Scotland, finding good information about gardens can be difficult. Scotland's Gardens publicises details of those gardens open for charities, either for a special day or more regularly through the season. Area based groupings such as Perthshire Gardens Collection, Scotland's Garden Route in Galloway and the Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute give information on their

member gardens and recently, Discover Scottish Gardens has been set up as a network to cover gardens throughout Scotland eventually, much in the way of Ken Cox's book 'Scotland for Gardeners' (now in its second updated edition).

SRS members understand that the majority of the rhododendron gardens are in the south and west of the country (with significant exceptions such as Glendoick and Blackhills). When considering the west of Scotland many visitors do not appreciate the subtle variation between say the south west with its lowland maritime climate, the north west with wild windswept islands and coast where gardening is only possible in protected glens or man-made shelterbelts, and the mid west of Argyll and Bute with a mix of dramatic coastal scenery, mountains and glens, woodland and almost frost-free pockets where horticulturally anything is possible.

With some funding from Visit Scotland the Glorious Gardens will be creating a new website, working with Argyll and the Isles Cooperative, holding the initial Festival of Rhododendrons throughout April and May 2015 and developing new leaflets to show routes linking the gardens and other places of interest in Argyll and Bute. There will also be plenty going on behind the scenes with attendance at several travel trade events all over the UK. Overall we aim to increase visitor numbers and add a few new members to the Glorious Gardens. For 2015 Ascog Fernery is again open to the public and rejoining the group and the St Columba and Argyll Hotels on Iona, who have splendid kitchen gardens supplying fruit and vegetables for both hotels through the season, will also become members.

During the Festival of Rhododendrons, starting Easter weekend at the beginning of April, each garden will hold at least 1 event where locals and visitors can meet the gardener or owner. These will range from guided walks on specific themes such as sections of the plant collection to exhibitions of photographs, art and craft events and special openings of areas not generally viewed by the public. A diary of events is being prepared and will be available from the end of January on the new website [www.gardens-of-argyll.co.uk](http://www.gardens-of-argyll.co.uk) We will also link in with Scotland's Gardens to include properties open for a day or longer in this period.

We hope that this will be the first of many Rhododendron Festivals, starting quite small but gradually extending to other areas and eventually Scotland-wide. The SRS are supporting us by holding the annual Scottish Rhododendron Show at the Gibson Hall, Garelochhead on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015.



# The Gardens at Ashridge

## Mick Thompson (Head Gardener)

Ashridge in Hertfordshire is one of the most beautiful and historically significant gardens of England. Within its 190 acres are the finest examples of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century high horticulture and the monumental mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century extravaganzas of a 20 hectare arboretum with long wooded avenues and exotic planting of rhododendrons and azaleas. They survive intact, little altered and are of great rarity. Today they are designated Grade II\* by English Heritage.

Their preservation is of great national importance and currently a programme of garden restoration is underway, including the restoration of the 390 metre Rhododendron Walk lying within a 400 metre Wellingtonia Avenue where *R. ponticum* rootstocks have taken hold.

### **A brief history of Ashridge:**

There are seven centuries of history at Ashridge dating from monastic beginnings in 1283 when Edmund of Cornwall, nephew of King Henry III, founded and endowed the College of Bonhommes. Between 1536 and 1541 it survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII when it became a royal home for his children Mary, Elizabeth and Edward, eventually passing to Princess Elizabeth who lived there for eight years before becoming Queen Elizabeth I.

After her death it was bought in 1604 by Sir Thomas Egerton, her Lord Keeper and over the next three hundred years the Egertons, as Earls and Dukes of Bridgewater and their descendants, the Brownlows, greatly enlarged the estate and developed the gardens until in the 1920s, on the death of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Brownlow, it was broken up and sold. Ashridge House with its magnificent gardens and grounds became an educational foundation and the Parkland was purchased by the National Trust.

Today, the Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust is one of the world's leading business schools. It is a registered charity with a duty of care to preserve the House and its gardens for the benefit of the nation and works in partnership with the National Trust to maintain and protect the heritage of the entire Ashridge estate.

### **The Gardens:**

The gardens as we know them today began when the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bridgewater replaced

the crumbling monastic buildings between 1804 and 1814 with the present 1000ft long white Gothic mansion and commissioned Humphry Repton, the greatest landscape gardener of the time, to design the gardens. Repton presented designs for his "Pleasure Grounds" in a trademark leather *Red Book for Ashridge* in 1813. The gardens, including a rosary, Monks' garden, souterrein and grotto were completed in 1823 and are the finest remaining example of Repton's work. His original Red Book is now in the ownership of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

### **Grand extensions and the introduction of Rhododendrons:**

In 1849 the estate was inherited by the Brownlow family who introduced greater splendour to the gardens on an heroic scale, especially Lady Marian Alford, mother of the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl, who ran the estate for twenty years. She created the Italianate garden and skating lake, built a Fernery and planted a 20 hectare arboretum and ever-green avenues of Holm Oak and Cypress in the south of the garden. In 1858, only five years after the species had been introduced into the country, she planted a 400 metre avenue of *Sequoiadendron giganteum* - or Wellingtonia, known as California Big Tree, native to the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. The avenue was aligned directly with views from the house and was later flanked with *Aesculus hippocastanum* - common horse chestnut. In the 1860s a flint-lined moat 215 metres long with a bridge over was added to separate the high horticulture of Repton's Pleasure Grounds from the newly developed south garden. The canvas was now ready to receive its colour.

It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Brownlow who introduced rhododendrons and azaleas into the gardens in the late 1870s and early 1880s in beds either side of the moat and with rhododendrons planted in three rows on both inner sides of the avenue of *Sequoiadendron* so providing a colourful foil to the trees in the views from and to the mansion during spring and early summer. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the gardens at Ashridge were now at their most extensive as the flamboyant and wildly colourful setting for one of the grandest of aristocratic country mansions.

### **The Rhododendrons:**

Based on a box of inherited Victorian lead plant labels, a list of the hardy hybrids, planted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was put together a few years ago but enquiries showed that most were no longer in cultivation. We have identified Waterers at Knaphill and Bagshot and Standish and Noble as the major nursery suppliers.

The selection of early rhododendron hybrids made by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl for wide-ranging



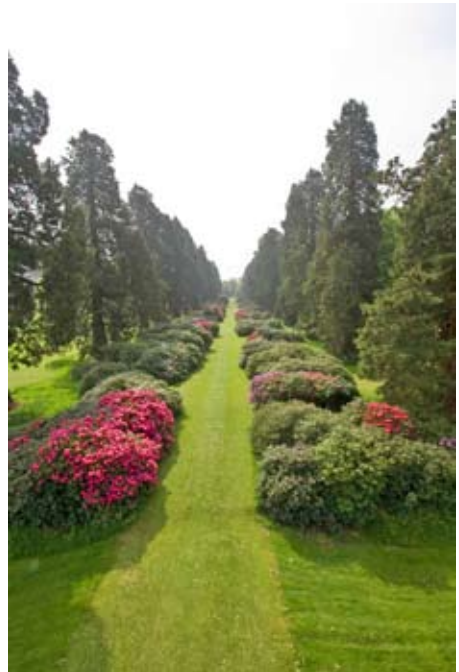
**Above: Early 20th century showing the moat**



**Left: 1928 aerial photograph**

**Below left: Early 20th century view of the Rhododendron Walk**

**Below right: The Rhododendron Walk today**





**Above: The House and lawns  
Below: New plantings in the Rhododendron Walk**



colour flowering in April, May and June was not entirely good for a garden in middle England some distance from the milder climates of the south west, though plants such as *R. 'Lady Eleanor Cathcart'* (*R. maximum* x *R. arboreum*, J. Waterer before 1850) meant the less hardy *R. arboreum* species crossed with the hardiness, good foliage and late flowering period of *R. maximum* would have worked well. Some of his choices however would rather quickly have been superseded by a wider palette of plants in the late Victorian period and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (e.g., *R. 'Cynthia'*, *R. 'Pink Pearl'* and *R. 'Jean Marie de Montague'*).

A good number of these early plants unfortunately were grafted on *Rhododendron ponticum* stocks by the nurseries long before it was realised how vigorous the species is and this of course accounts for clumps of *R. ponticum* in many old gardens today, including Ashridge.

### **The Restoration of the Rhododendron Walk:**

The rhododendrons were heavily pruned in the mid 1950s after neglect during World War II and, most recently, 12 years ago. The horse chestnuts were removed for overcrowding the *Sequoiadendron* in 2004. Over time some of the hybrids have died out and in large areas *R. ponticum* have dominated. We are currently working with Ken Cox of Glendoick Gardens in Perth, on planting suggestions and identifying the remaining hybrids - if these cannot be replanted, it may be possible to propagate and graft from collections of Victorian hybrids held in other gardens in England and Germany.

Recommendations for planting have taken into account the many improvements in hybridisation over the years in order to add a range of spectacular colours and flowers for a longer flowering period. The restoration will ultimately include elements of early plant-hunter larger leaved hybrids bringing added interest of leaf shape, form and colour, Victorian hybridisation and modern cultivars to hopefully satisfy everyone. Ken Cox believes the Rhododendron Walk at Ashridge could ultimately be one of the greatest plantings in the UK.

### **The Planting:**

The *Sequoiadendron*, some now rising to 140ft, currently stand at over 22 metres apart in the line and the avenue is 38 metres wide. The grass strip of just over 6 metres is mown down the centre of the avenue.

From the original planting the nearest rhododendron was between 6 and 7 metres

from the Sequoias and this allows for a planting strip of approximately 8 to 8.5 metres wide along both sides of the avenue. Allowing for planting distances of 2-3 metres in the groups this will allow for three rows of larger hybrids. Within this planting it is possible to include groups of three species rhododendron planted at the rear mid-point between the Sequoias. In terms of numbers of rhododendron, there is a requirement for a minimum of 390 plants on each side giving a minimum total of 780 plants.

Grant funding from charitable trusts and foundations together with individual donations have enabled us to purchase the first batch of hybrids allowing Ashridge's own Team of professional and young trainee gardeners to begin restoration work last year. Grubbing out the *R. ponticum* and soil preparation along the southernmost end of the Walk began in early 2013 and in November 180 hybrids were planted up to a length of between 6 and 7 Sequoias. Details of the plants are given in the table below. On this basis, we anticipate the restoration will take three or four seasons.

*List of rhododendrons planted November 2013*

Captain Jack	L	7
Christmas Cheer	E	7
Cynthia	L	7
Fastuosum Flore Pleno	L	7
Glendoick Petticoats	ML	7
Glendoick Velvet	ML	7
Glenna		7
Gomer Waterer		7
Horizon Monarch	ML	7
Jean Marie de Montague	ML	5
Lem's cameo	M	7
Lem's Monarch	ML	7
Loderi 'King George'	ML	7
Mrs T.H Lowinsky	L	7
Nancy Evans	ML	7
Nobleanum	VE	7
Polarnacht	ML	7
Rabatz		7
Rasputin	L	7
Rex		7
September Song	ML	7
		145
<b>Elepidote or larger species</b>		
Arboreum var. Cinamomeum	M	5
Falconeri	M	5
Hodgsonii	EM-M	5
Praestans	EM-M	5
Sinofalconeri	M	5
Sutchuenense	E	5
		35
Total		180

**Summary:**

This is such an exciting restoration project for our Gardens Team who year round conserve and maintain Ashridge's magnificent 190 acres. Importantly also, the restoration is an invaluable experience in the management of an historically significant site for our three young trainees, two of whom are Ashridge's own young gardeners and the third an annual placement from the UK Professional Gardeners' Guild. Ashridge is one of only six UK "top gardens" selected by the Guild to host its trainees - the others being Osborne House, Chatsworth, Waddesdon Manor, The Garden House (Devon) and The National Botanic Garden of Wales.

We would be delighted to see Members of the Scottish Rhododendron Society at any time of year should they wish to come and visit us, especially during the rhododendron flowering season, to see what we are trying to achieve here. Please do get in touch if you would like more information or if you feel you can help with the restoration in any way. My email is: [mick.thompson@ashridge.org.uk](mailto:mick.thompson@ashridge.org.uk) and telephone +44 (0)1442 841042. or visit <http://www.ashridge.org.uk/about-us/ashridge-house/the-house-and-gardens-at-ashridge/> for more information about the gardens.

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**Half a Century of Plant  
Hunting with Peter Cox.**

**Right: Identifying a yellow  
flowered *Magnolia***

**Below Left: Finding  
*Rhododendron  
arunachalense***

**Below Right: Drying off at  
the camp fire**



