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Volume 2, 2018. Part 1 - Rhododendron Organisations in Countries with American Rhododendron Society Chapters

Contents

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From the Editor

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Rhododendrons International (*RI*) is an online journal distributed free to all the world's known rhododendron associations for their internal distribution. It can also be accessed on the American Rhododendron Society website at https://www.rhododendron.org/ri-index.htm. This second issue of *RI* consists of two parts: Part 1 continues with submissions from countries having rhododendrons societies, while Part 2 initiates the reprinting of articles from the world's rhododendron societies or organisations that are deemed to have international relevance, and as such, should be more widely distributed.

The reason for Part 1 here is that in *Rhododendrons International* Vol 1 (2016), the article on the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) mentioned that there were chapters of that society in a number of other countries, specifically Canada, Denmark, Finland, India, Scotland, and The Netherlands, and so a decision was made not to also include in that volume articles from the national societies in those countries, in part because of space limitations (the volume was already very large, consisting of three parts) but also because some of the rhododendron activities in these countries were already partially described in the ARS article. While intentional at the time, it was however recognized that this did a disservice to the consideration of rhododendron-related activities in these countries, and so the plan was that in Vol. 2, the histories of rhododendron organisations in these other countries would be included. The exception was with Sweden, which although it also has an ARS chapter was included in RI Vol 1, as it had both a rhododendron society that was associated with the ARS (the South Swedish Rhododendron Society) and one that was not associated (the West and East Divisions of the Swedish Rhododendron Society). So, RI Vol. 2 has articles, in alphabetical order, from Canada, Denmark, Finland, India, Scotland, and The Netherlands.

Rhododendrons International Vol 2: Part 2 includes three articles modified slightly from those printed initially in *The Rhododendron*, a joint publication of the New Zealand Rhododendron Association and the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust, and later in the journal of the American Rhododendron Society. It also includes two articles from *Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias*, a publication from one of the RHS Groups. In future issues, I will search in publications for other worthwhile rhododendron articles deemed to be of international significance, and will also welcome submissions from authors of such material that I might not be aware of.

Canadian Rhododendron Societies

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Canada is a large country, with a distance between St. John's, Newfoundland, and Victoria, British Columbia, of 5060 km (3145 miles, Fig. 1). Its northern areas are suitable habitat for only the hardiest endemic rhododendrons, such as *Rhododendron tomentosum* (northern Labrador tea,

Fig. 1. Map of Canada, showing its ten provinces and three territories.

previously *Ledum palustre*), *R. groenlandicum*, (bog Labrador tea, previously *L. groenlandicum* or *L. latifolium*) and *R. lapponicum* (Lapland azalea), but its southern coastal areas (the eastern Maritime provinces (roughly 44-46° N); southern British Columbia (BC), 48.4-49.4° N) and in the St. Lawrence River watershed from Windsor, Ontario, to Montreal, Quebec (roughly 42.3-45.5° N) have a suitable climate for many temperate growing rhododendrons and azaleas. The Maritimes and St. Lawrence River area can periodically experience cold continental winter weather conditions (as low as −37° C (−36° F)), whereas south-western British Columbia (Vancouver area and Vancouver Island) seldom now have temperatures below -10° C (14° F). Summers in central Canada are on the whole warm and humid with a daily maximum average of 26 to 27° C (79 to 81° F) in July, but temperatures in excess of 30° C (86° F) are common. The coastal areas on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts have a more moderate milder summer climate. There are six endemic rhododendrons in Canada, two circumpolar *(R. lapponicum* and *R. tomentosum*), three in western Canada (*R. macrophyllum (*western rose bay), *R. albiflorum* and *R. columbianum (*western Labrador tea, previously *Ledum columbianum*), and two in eastern Canada (*R. canadense (*rhodora) and *R. groenlandicum).*

There are thus four Canadian areas particularly suited for growing most rhododendrons: southwestern BC, southern Ontario, south-western Quebec and the four Maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland (Fig. 1). The separate French Société des rhododendrons du Québec has been summarised by Bélisle (2016), and so this article will just summarise the history of rhododendron societies in A. British Columbia (Jamieson) and B. in both Ontario and the Maritimes (Yarmoshuk). All the rhododendron societies in these Canadian areas are now chapters of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), but this was not always the case. The general characteristics of the ARS have been summarised previously by Jamieson (2016), but here we will go into greater detail about the history and characteristics of each Canadian region's rhododendron societies.

A. British Columbia

Geography

British Columbia is a large province, exceeding in size the combined areas of California, Oregon and Washington State. However, most of the province is either too mountainous or too cold or dry for the survival of most of the garden rhododendron cultivars and species, so BC ARS chapters are all confined to the extreme south-west of the province adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, i.e., the Fraser River valley around Vancouver (called the Lower Mainland), and to Vancouver Island (Fig. 1). Vancouver Island, with BC's capital city Victoria at its southern end, is the 15th largest island in the Pacific Ocean, and among

Table 1: Pacific Ocean islands most suitable for growing the more temperate climate rhododendrons, i.e., excluding the endemic vireya rhododendronislands. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Islands

Name	Area (km^2)	Country or Countries	Population	Population Density/km^2
Honshu	227,960	Japan	103,000,000	*451.8*
South Island	145,836	New Zealand	1,038,600	*7.122*
North Island	111,583	New Zealand	3,393,900	*30.42*
Tasmania	90,758	Australia	514,700	*5.671*
Hokkaido	77,981	Japan	5,474,000	*70.2*
Taiwan	35,883	Republic of China (Taiwan)	23,000,000	*641*
Kyushu	35,640	Japan	13,231,000	*371.2*
Hainan	35,400	People's Republic of China	8,900,000	*251.4*
Vancouver Island	31,285	Canada	759,366	*24.27*
Shikoku	18,800	Japan	4,141,955	*220.3*
Hawaii	10,434	United States of America	185,079	*17.74*

temperate island rhododendron growing areas, is almost as big as Taiwan (Republic of China), Kyushu (Japan), and Hainan (People's Republic of China), and is three times larger than the Big Island of Hawaii (USA) (Table 1.). Vancouver Island's population of about 750,000 is largely confined to its southeast because of its fjordal west coast and its central mountainous areas.

Early History

There are presently seven ARS chapters in British Columbia (Fig. 2) – five on south-eastern Vancouver Island in the cities of Courtenay/Comox (North Island Chapter), Parksville/Qualicum Beach (Mount Arrowsmith Chapter), Nanaimo, Duncan (Cowichan Valley Chapter) and Victoria, and two around the mouth of the Fraser River on the mainland, in Vancouver and in the Surrey/Maple Ridge/Langley/Abbotsford (Fraser South Chapter) area of the lower mainland. Within the last decade, two lower mainland chapters closed because of declining membership, the Peace Arch and Fraser Valley chapters, but because they were only a few tens of kilometers from the two remaining mainland chapters, their remaining members and assets were folded into them. However, an interest in rhododendrons in British Columbia goes back almost a 100 years, and to a large extent began with the establishment of three nurseries

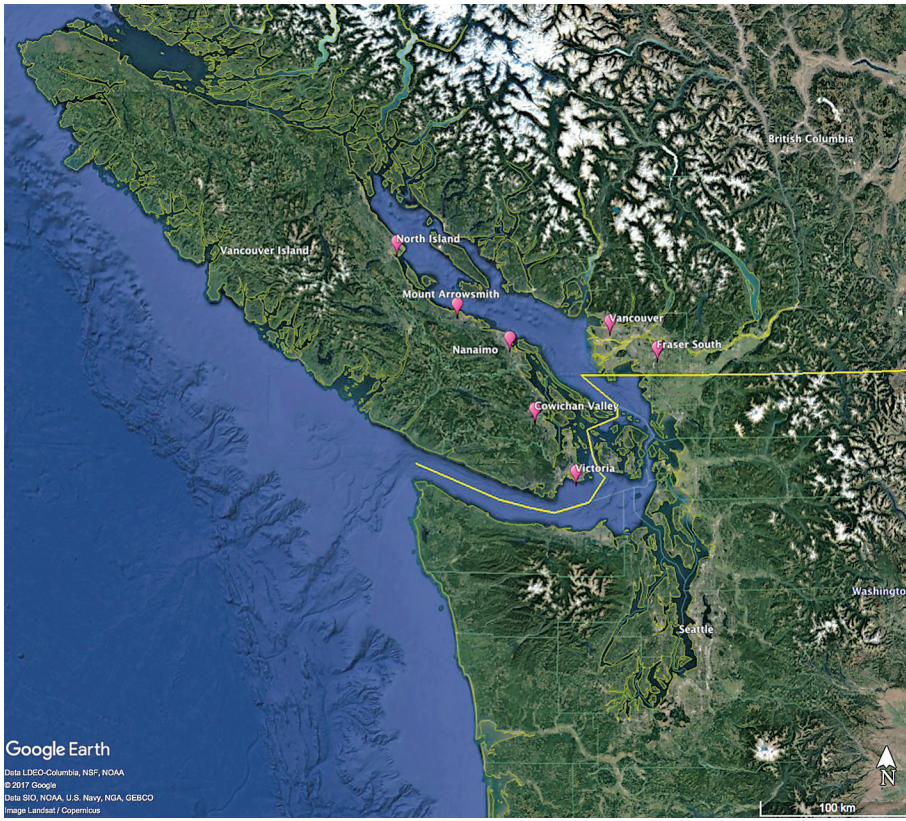


Fig. 2. The locations of the seven current ARS chapters in British Columbia.

on Vancouver Island, one in Ucluelet on the west coast of the island, another by Lake Cowichan and the last in Royston near Courtenay on the Strait of Georgia, now the Salish Sea.

The Scotsman George Fraser (1854-1944) was the first influential rhododendron enthusiast in the province, and was an experienced horticulturist when he arrived in Victoria, BC, in 1885, his last position in Scotland being as head gardener at the large country estate of Auchmore in Killin, Perthshire. In Victoria, he oversaw the development of Beacon Hill Park before realizing his dream of running his own nursery, which he ultimately established in 1894 in Ucluelet, a tiny, remote fishing village on the west coast of Vancouver Island that could only then be reached by sea. From there, he maintained an extensive correspondence with experts around the world, with whom he exchanged seeds and sold plants, especially of his own hybrids. His work was recognised internationally and recorded in the *Gardener's Chronicle* of London. Plant explorers and botanists corresponded with him, as did staff of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew and the Arnold Arboretum, Boston. In 1919 he sent a rhododendron to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, England, which is now called the Fraseri Group. Ucluelet has a marble memorial in his honour and now periodically celebrates a George Fraser Day in May.

The second influential rhododendron collection was created by Susan and Richard Stoker, both keen naturalists that had spent many years in India where they became familiar with rhododendrons when in Sikkim. They established a nursery specializing in alpine plants in 1903 on the north side of Cowichan Lake, about 40 km (25 miles) west of Duncan, BC, and about 100 km (60 miles) by road northwest of Victoria, BC. Nine years later, George Buchanan and Jeanne Simpson moved there as well, became friends of the Stokers and began a garden, and in 1924, they established their own nursery. Both couples depended on seed obtained by mail from England, Scotland, the USA and India, and this being the time of great explorations for new plants in the Himalayas, seed was obtained either by subscription to expeditions or by sharing purchased seed between enthusiasts. There were also exchanges between this Cowichan Lake group and George Fraser in Ucluelet. While both nurseries sold alpine plants, rhododendrons became of particular interest to the Simpsons, and in 1967, Jeanne arranged for many of their rhododendrons to be moved to Finnerty Gardens at the University of Victoria. However in recent years, some of these rhododendrons were transferred back to the Town of Lake Cowichan where they now form the nucleus of the Lake Cowichan Memorial Rhododendron Garden, established to commemorate the pioneering work of both the Stokers and the Simpsons in the Lake Cowichan area.

The third major rhododendron collection, Ted and Mary Greig's, was

located at a nursery in Royston, BC, about 213 km (130 miles) up island from Victoria. In 1934, the Greigs purchased the Alpine Nursery of the Buchanan-Simpsons at Cowichan Lake. Alpines interested them, rhododendrons didn't, and only George Buchanan's insistence "that they'll grow on you" made them include the rhododendrons, which was also encouraged by their son Jim Greig. They moved the plants from Cowichan Lake to Royston, again about 180 km (112 miles) further up island, but despite a great effort on the part to keep the alpines alive, their Royston beachside location and lack of cold winters resulted in a loss of this stock over the years. However, the rhododendrons in the nursery flourished, and Mary Greig became both a continental expert on rhododendrons and one of the early North American rhododendron hybridizers. She was particularly interested in adding species to her collection, which she obtained both from seed exchanges and plants sent to her from many locations. To this end, the Greigs subsequently received the Gold Medal from the ARS in 1966 for their pioneering work on cultivation, selecting and identifying species and hybridizing rhododendrons. In 1952-1953, the Greigs gave many rhododendrons to both the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, which now form the basis of the UBC Botanical Garden collection, and to Finnerty Gardens in Victoria.

When the Greig's decided to close their nursery in 1965, most of the remaining rhododendrons were sold as a single collection to the Vancouver Parks Board. Over the next two decades, plantings of these rhododendrons created the large rhododendron displays in Vancouver's Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park and VanDusen Botanic Garden. Some species were also given to the newly formed Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden (RSBG) in Federal Way, Washington State; again to the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden; and on Vancouver Island, to Filberg Park in Comox, Milner Gardens [now owned by Vancouver Island University] in Qualicum Beach, and to both Finnerty Gardens and Playfair Park in Victoria (Efford 2018).

British Columbian Rhododendron Societies (listed chronologically in the order they were established)

1) Vancouver

The Vancouver Rhododendron Society (VRS) was originally founded as the Vancouver Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) in 1955. Mary Greig, from Royston on Vancouver Island, was the first Vancouver Chapter meeting speaker and gave a talk about species rhododendrons. In those days, the only people who were interested in growing and buying species rhodos were Pacific Northwest Americans. Species rhododendrons were still considered unsuitable and difficult plants for most Canadian gardens, although Mary had been long recognized by Americans as a leading authority on species.

It has been suggested that that talk played a part in helping to pave the way for the establishment in Ceperley Park (part of Vancouver's Stanley Park) of the living plant legacy of rhododendron species that the Greigs raised from seed, along with a few of the hybrids they created. In 1970, the chapter hosted the first ARS Annual Meeting and Convention held outside the USA, and in both 1979 and 1997 this chapter again hosted an ARS Spring Convention. In 1981, the chapter began bus tours of gardens to relatively far away places such as Olympia, Washington, and the Rhododendron Species Foundation Garden in the Seattle/Tacoma area. Membership was then 181, and subsequent tours were to Portland, Oregon, gardens (1982); Victoria on Vancouver Island (1983); and back down south to Tacoma and Seattle (1984). These distant tours have not been held in recent years, but an annual May VanDusen Garden tour was later augmented by tours through the UBC Asian Garden and the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden in Stanley Park, with the tours alternating, returning to each garden every third year. In addition, an annual Spring Show and Sale is held, typically at either VanDusen Gardens, UBC or at the Park and Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver. The current ARS membership is only 33, and like that of many large city chapters, has decreased significantly over the past few decades. However, this chapter, like that in Victoria (see below), has some non-ARS members "Friends" in it (currently more than ARS membership), so actual monthly attendance is larger.

In 1985 Vancouver chapter members voted to re-register as a British Columbia Society with a change of name to the Vancouver Rhododendron Society (VRS), a chapter of the ARS. A British Columbian constitution and bylaws was more in keeping with provincial and Canadian law and practices, which allowed the giving of Canadian Income Tax receipts for societies that had charitable tax status, which this chapter could then acquire. In June 1989, the chapter placed a commemorative plaque in the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden in Stanley Park, acknowledging them as the source of most of the plants there. This Stanley Park garden was shortly after nearly eliminated entirely, as the Parks Board, along with a good number of VRS members, preferred to move all the rhododendrons from the Greig collection to the nearby VanDusen Garden. However, a compromise was reached in that while all the species rhododendrons were moved, the hybrids were allowed to remain in Stanley Park.

2) Victoria

The next District 1 chapter to be established was that of Victoria at the southern tip of Vancouver Island in 1980. The decision to create it was because Vancouver Island residents that belonged to the Vancouver Chapter became tired of always having to take the 1.5 hr ferry ride each way to the

mainland for meetings, and so decided to form their own chapter, the first on Vancouver Island, in Victoria. Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia, is the most southerly part of Canada west of Ontario, and like all of coastal British Columbia, has a mild maritime climate and is thus a great gardening city, with many public and private gardens. Some of the most well-known are Finnerty Garden at the University of Victoria; Beacon Hill Park; the garden at Government House, the residence of the Province's Lieutenant Governor, who represents Her Majesty the Queen at the provincial level; Royal Roads; Playfair Park; Abkhazi Garden; and in the nearby community of Brentwood Bay, Butchart Gardens (Efford 2018). As mentioned above, the history of rhododendron culture on the island extends back to the early 1900s with the influence of George Fraser, and this tradition has been continued and expanded upon ever since. In late February each year, for example, the city undertakes a "flower count," which numbers in the many millions, data that is sent out to people in central and eastern Canada to boast about the early onset of spring on the West Coast!

Victoria has an active ARS rhododendron society, and has hosted spring ARS conventions in 1989, 2005 and 2015. The 2015 convention profit was shared equally to the chapters within District 1 to thank the Vancouver Island chapters that provided assistance in conference organization and implementation. It does not have an organized garden tour within the Victoria area, nor does it organize tours to the areas of other chapters. However, it does open gardens for members and their friends and families to visit, or as requested by other chapters. These openings are done on a volunteer basis, and visitors are always welcomed.

It has a very active Rhododendron Propagation group, and is now producing so many species and hybrid rhodos that their own propagated plants are the only rhodos they now sell at their plant sale, which is now held annually at a member's property. Members visit other gardens to take cuttings and over the past three years, have in particular propagated cuttings from many of Jim Barlup's American hybrids, including 79 mature Barlup plants that have been gifted by him to the chapter's propagating group for use in support of the chapter. This cross border cooperation is a first within the ARS greater community.

The chapter holds a non-formal judged truss show every spring, where each member receives a specified number of beads for the categories, and then votes for the truss in each category they think is the best truss. This less judgmental, top down judging system has created a more vital participation in both entries and membership attendance. At each regular meeting, members donate plants for a raffle, where tickets are sold for $1 per ticket. If a member remembers

to wear their chapter name badge, they receive a free ticket. Donations range from 15 to 40 plants/items per meeting.

Like the Vancouver and Fraser South chapters (33 and 19 ARS members, respectively), not all its members are required to be ARS members, as from its conception, its by-laws permitted both ARS members and non-ARS members, with the latter termed "Friends." At present, about 25% of the Victoria chapter's members roughly 100 members are Friends. This has created some challenges at the District level, as chapter Friends pay a reduced chapter membership and do not contribute to the District fund to support the District Director's travel expenses to ARS meetings. Each ARS member in the district is assessed $2.50 per annum for this purpose, making it possible for the less affluent to seek the District Director's post. Although only ARS members receive the Journal of the ARS (JARS) and can be elected to the chapter's executive [the ARS requires that all chapter executives be ARS members, since they are involved in electing their District Director], the Friends nevertheless benefit from being associated with the ARS since many chapter activities involve collaboration with other ARS chapters. The inclusion of Friends of a chapter are not included in the constitutions of the other four Vancouver Island ARS chapters.

3) North Island

The North Island Rhododendron Society (NIRS), located in the Courtenay/Comox area, was founded in 1984, led by Harry Wright, a local hybridizer involved with rhododendrons for many years, who felt that there were enough rhododendron enthusiasts in the area to support a chapter. The most northerly of the Vancouver Island chapters, being about 225 km (140 mi) north of Victoria, this chapter has maintained an active membership over the past 37 years, currently with 72 members, and has an annual plant sale, garden tour and more recently, a propagation group that meets quite frequently. There is considerable collaboration with the other island chapters re monthly chapter speakers and as with the other island chapters, has associate memberships from members in these other chapters. This chapter has not yet hosted an ARS convention, as there is no appropriate venue yet in their community, but members have supported and even participated in organizing conventions hosted by the more southerly island chapters. Its members are also strong and active supporters of the rhododendron species garden being currently established at Milner Gardens & Woodlands (MGW) in Qualicum Beach, which is further described below. It should also be noted that Royston, a small community just outside Courtenay, is where Ted and May Greig had their nursery, so there is a long history of rhododendron cultivation in the area.

A main activity of this chapter has been the creation of the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden, which in 2017 celebrated its 20th anniversary. It is

maintained by members, with work parties once a month to rake, prune, transplant, deadhead, etc., followed by a social get-together with drinks and food. The NIRS has fostered a positive relationship with North Island College in Courtenay, and offers free student ARS memberships to first year students in its horticultural program.

4) Fraser South, Fraser Valley and Peace Arch

To understand the history of District 1 ARS rhododendron societies in British Columbia's lower mainland, i.e., the Fraser River valley region around Vancouver, it is necessary to have some appreciation of the area's geography and road network, and how the latter has changed over the past 40 years or so. Vancouver is at the mouth of the Fraser River, and members in the mainland area's rhododendron societies mostly live between the communities of Lions Bay, about 35 km (22 miles) west of Vancouver, and Harrison Hot Springs, about 134 km (83 miles) east of Vancouver. This part of the valley is bordered on the north by an inaccessible (by road) mountain range and by the USA border to the south, with the river going roughly down the middle of the valley. Until 2009, when the Golden Ears Bridge was completed, easy access across the river between Harrison Hot Springs and Vancouver was only by bridges in the Vancouver/Burnaby area, which meant that ARS members prior to 2009 that lived on either side of the river could not easily access areas nearby on the other side of the river. The result was that members on both sides of the river therefore initially belonged to the Vancouver ARS Chapter.

Over the last four decades, the region has experienced huge population growth, outpacing the national average and having increased by 6.5% between 2011 and 2016 alone, and although the population density in Vancouver has increased, much of this growth has been in community expansions in the valley east of Vancouver on both sides of the river. This has significantly increased travel times between the region's areas, with the result that by the late 1980s, people in the middle regions of the valley could not easily attend evening meetings in Vancouver. Rhododendron gardening was in an upsurge at that time, and the result was the formation of new ARS chapters in the middle area of the valley, firstly north of the river, the Fraser Valley Chapter in Maple Ridge in 1988, and then south of the river, the Fraser South Chapter in Langley in 1989. The area south of the river is larger, and again long commuting times resulted in the formation of another chapter, the Peace Arch chapter in White Rock, close to the American border, in 1993. However, memberships in both the Fraser Valley and Peace Arch chapters were never large (< 35 members each) and like many ARS chapters, gradually decreased over time, and with the completion of the Golden Ears Bridge across the Fraser River towards the middle of the valley in 2009 and some improvements in the regional

road network, both these latter societies folded in 2011, with many of their members then joining the Fraser South chapter (48 members in 2016/17, but now only 19). ARS membership, although now stable, has recently declined for a number of reasons, some common to most ARS chapters (e.g., age, more condo dwellers, etc.). Some reasons are unique to this area though, such as the sale of now highly valued homes in the Lower Mainland and the moving of ARS members to Vancouver Island, where properties are much less costly and other ARS chapters exist to join!

Fraser South has regular monthly (September to May) meetings with speakers, a potluck Christmas party and a potluck picnic in June, periodic tours to member's gardens and in the past, have taken more elaborate tours, such as to the Seattle Flower Show a few years ago. There is a plant sale every April, emphasizing plants grown by our members, as essentially all of the remaining rhododendron specialty growers (both hobbyists and commercial) in the Fraser valley are members of our chapter. There is also a flower truss show in May, the "Fraser South Justly Famous Beer Bottle Truss Show" [trusses are held up in beer bottles], which involves such light-hearted categories as "the most elegantly weevil-notched" and "the best last year's truss" classes, as well as the conventional species, colour, etc., classes. Judging is done by chapter members by each of them placing a token in a cup at the base of the truss they think best in each category; the category cup with most tokens wins. One of the prizes is the "Lionheart Cup" for the best yellow, established in honour of the late Mike Trembath and her hybrid 'Lionheart'.

It should also be noted that an American chapter, Komo Kulshan located just south of the border in the American portion of the Fraser River valley just south of Langley, BC, was also part of District 1 from its creation in 1977 until 1987, when it then became part of District 2, located in northern Washington State. District 2 has now been combined with District 3, so all of Washington State is now District 2/3.

5) Cowichan Valley

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society (CVRS) was founded in 1989 when a collection of enthusiasts decided to bud-off from the Victoria Rhododendron Society and establish a new branch of the ARS in Duncan, 60 km (37 miles) northwest of Victoria. Anyone who has driven the 50 kilometres (31 miles) over the Malahat Summit highway (356 m (1156 ft) elevation) between Duncan and Victoria, especially on a dark rainy or snowy night in winter, will understand the reasoning behind such a step. Since 1989, membership has fluctuated from the initial 20 members to 82 in 1992; the most recent number is 49. In 2000, the society hosted the ARS Fall Western Regional Conference

Fig. 3. Cowichan Valley Chapter Garden Fair, 2017. Photo by Ian Efford.

The Society has a long history of touring member's gardens each spring and in many years, this activity has been shared with the Cowichan Valley Garden Club and sometimes the Mill Bay Garden Club. The result is that members visit a large number of the gardens in the Valley. Members are also invited to take part in garden tours organised by the other four ARS chapters on Vancouver Island, some of whose members also have spectacular gardens.

Recently, the main source of income for the society has been an annual bus tour that attracts most of its participants from outside its chapter membership. The latest tour was an extensive tour of Whidbey and Bainbridge Islands and the area south of Seattle, including a visit to the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden in Federal Way, and these tours have generated thousands of dollars for the chapter. Exchange visits with other ARS branches have added a social dimension to garden visits, and have allowed members to get to know their counterparts throughout the island, from the BC mainland and even from Washington State. During these garden visits, members have learnt about different rhododendrons, companion plants, garden design and propagation techniques. Unlike the Victoria Chapter, the CVRS propagation group is rather loosely knit and does not meet regularly, although a number of members are active propagators and produce a steady stream of plants that are brought in for a raffle each month. The CVRS's most recent international tours were one that started in San Francisco and toured the Pacific coast north to Victoria,

BC, and another that toured Cornwall and central England, ending at the Chelsea Flower Show.

The chapter's annual plant sale, now expanded and called a Garden Fair (Fig. 3) since it now involves other nurseries and retailers of garden equipment, etc., with the intent that it will become an annual regional garden event and attract as many people as possible. The main vendors remain the specialized rhododendron nurseries from Vancouver Island, with a few from the mainland, and the total number of vendors now exceeds 30. To help both with the expansion of regional gardening activities and to enhance the chapter's own awareness, sales booths are provided to any local non-profit garden or nature clubs for a nominal cost of $10. To date, the Garden Fair has not proved to be more profitable than the old simpler plant sale was, but it is believed to have the potential to improve, as larger companies are now beginning to pay for large booth spaces down the centre of the hall.

One of the outstanding rhododendron activities that this chapter has supported during the last 25 years has been the development of the Lake Cowichan Memorial Rhododendron Garden. This project is the result of the initiative of Ingeborg Woodsworth, a past chapter president, and members of the Lake Cowichan Communities in Bloom. This group has led a very active programme to establish the garden right beside the visitors' centre in the middle of town. The idea was to commemorate the work of two families mentioned above, the Stokers and the Buchanan-Simpsons, who were early residents of the area and who grew and hybridized rhododendrons using seed collected in Southeast Asia by the early plant hunters. Recently, ARS funding allowed the installation of an irrigation system.

6) Mount Arrowsmith and Nanaimo

The Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society (MARS), with a current membership of 81, was founded in 1989 when a collection of enthusiasts decided to bud-off from the North Island Rhododendron Society and establish a new branch of the ARS in Parksville/Qualicum Beach, 80 km (40 miles) southeast of Courtenay/Comox. Four years later, the Nanaimo Chapter (NRS) was formed, located about 40 km (25 miles) further south from Parksville, currently with 53 members. Again, travel times that were felt to be too long over narrow, winding unlit roads were the main incentives. The result was that on Vancouver Island from Comox to Victoria, a distance of about 225 km (140 mi), there are now five active, viable ARS chapters (Fig. 2), with a total ARS membership of about 330, and all the island ARS chapters have stable, if not growing, memberships at present. With the mildest climate in Canada and relatively low property values, and least compared to the larger Canadian cities, the area is a popular destination for retirees, many of whom

are gardeners, and gardening is definitely one of the areas main activities. Parksville/Qualicum Beach, for example, has over six different garden organisations, with a combined membership of about 700, from a total local population of about 40,000. Island communities in general are not particularly large, mostly have single family homes, and all have adjacent rural areas.

Like the other island chapters, both chapters have monthly meetings with speakers, a spring plant sale, social potluck dinner events and while MARS has had a community garden tour for decades, Nanaimo had one for the second time last year. Both chapters are strong, active supporters of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden, the first in Canada, currently being established at Milner Gardens & Woodland in Qualicum Beach, along with the other island chapters. The MGW is a 28 ha (70 acre) seaside garden (four ha (ten acres) of garden (Fig. 4), 24 ha (60 acres) of woodland) that has been identified as one of the ten best public gardens in Canada by Canadian Geographic Travel. Originally the private heritage home of Ray Milner and his wife Veronica (Fig. 5), a relative of British royalty, the site has been visited by Queen Elizabeth, Prince Phillip, Prince Charles and Princess Diana. In 1996, Malaspina University-College, now Vancouver Island University, was

Fig. 4. Rhododendron Garden, Milner Gardens and Woodland. Photo by Gus Thompson.

Fig. 5. The Cottage, Milner Gardens and Woodland. Photo by Gus Thompson.

gifted 17 ha (42 acres), followed by a further gift of 11 ha (28 acres) in 1999. The MGW is supported by both the Milner Gardens and Woodland Society and Vancouver Island University, and with respect to the rhododendron species garden, by all the island ARS chapters. In addition to supporting the rhododendron species garden with their own funds, the island chapters were also successful in acquiring additional support for plant acquisition from the ARS Research Foundation. All rhododendron species being planted have their provenances confirmed by the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Federal Way, WA, and the garden is being structured to showcase a total of about 158 species from a selection of different geographical areas: North America, the Himalayas, Northeast Asia, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Europe. Mary Greig and Veronica Milner worked together on the early garden and consequently there are many Greig hybrids, as well as some species throughout the existing garden. The new species garden has one section set aside to highlight parent species related to the Milner hybrids, and another to establish a collection of 28 identified vulnerable to endangered species, with at least three of each species. The opening ceremony for this garden was held on April 22, 2018, and among the roughly 175 attendees, about 55 were ARS members from island chapters.

MARS is in the process of establishing a propagation group, and is planning to host the 2019 ARS Fall convention. Previously, MARS hosted the 1995 Fall Conference and Nanaimo more recently hosted the 2012 Fall Conference, both of which were quite successful. A unique aspect permitted by the relatively close proximity of the North Island, Mount Arrowsmith and Nanaimo chapters

is that they each hold their monthly meetings during the second Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each month, respectively, from September to May each year. For many months, this means their meetings are on consecutive nights, which has allowed the sharing of travel costs for more expensive and sometimes exotic speakers, if they are prepared to stay longer on the island and give a total of three talks. This has allowed these chapters to host speakers they otherwise would have been unable to acquire. Finally, in mid-winter, MARS traditionally invites a well-known general garden/botanical speaker to attract members of the greater community, especially members from other local specialist garden clubs like the alpine and native groups. These meetings can have up to 200 in attendance, and help unite the gardening community both in the Parksville/Qualicum Beach area and on the island in general.

MARS and Nanaimo will jointly be hosting a one day mini-conference in October 2019 to provide a fall event that will bring together island chapter members. If successful, this will hopefully become an annual event, and gardeners from other gardening clubs (alpine, etc.) also being invited to attend, with some hopefully ultimately becoming ARS members. The 2018 theme is titled "Gardening Myths: Fact or Fiction," which should be of interest to a wide range of gardeners.

Both chapters bring in a steady stream of plants in for a raffle each month, and Bob and Jean Rhodes, Nanaimo chapter members, hybridized many of the rhodos that we grow regionally today, such as 'Bob's Blue' and 'Haida Gold' ('Haida Gold' was grown and selected by Bob from a seed lot received from Bovees Nursery in Portland, OR). Like the NIRS, MARS has also fostered a positive relationship with its local university, Vancouver Island University (VIU) in Nanaimo, as it runs much of its horticultural program at the Milner Gardens and Woodland. MARS offers free ARS memberships to students in that program.

Non-Chapter District 1 Activities

District 1 has an up-to-date website (http://www.rhodos.ca/chapters.html) that provides a great deal of information about each of its seven chapters. These include past monthly speakers, monthly newsletters and links to each of the chapter websites. All chapter meetings are always open to the general community without charge, with the hope that some visitors may ultimately become chapter members. Recently, there have been two very well-attended training programmes in the district that attracted members from throughout the district and the USA. One took place in 2010 at UBC, led by Douglas Justice and was titled "The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference." This conference focused on all aspects of cultivation and identification. Participants

at this three-day conference included a number of rhodo experts, such as staff from the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden (RSBG) in Federal Way, WA, and knowledgeable ARS members from other ARS Districts in both Canada and the United States The other meeting, held in 2012, was a propagation workshop, again with experts from the RSBG and elsewhere, that took place at Ken and Madeleine Webbs' home in Victoria.

Twice a year (typically March and August), the presidents of all District 1 chapters (or their alternates) meet with the District 1 director to identify and discuss common interests, both within the district and relative to the ARS itself, and determine how best to work together. For example, the plant sales of all the chapters are collaboratively timed so that they are on different spring weekends, so as not to compete with each other in vendor solicitation. There are not that many local commercial rhododendron propagators, and most of these sellers will try and attend as many of the district chapter plant sales as possible. Each all-day meeting is hosted by a different chapter, with one meeting each year held on the mainland and the other on the island. The spring meetings are now scheduled if possible so that they coincide with the host chapter's monthly evening meeting, so that chapter presidents, if they can stay, can also attend the host chapter's monthly evening meeting, get to know that chapter's members and see how that chapter operates.

Finally, District 1 chapters each contribute $2.50 per ARS member to provide the funds that support the District 1 president or alternate to attend ARS executive meetings, most of which are a considerable distance from BC. This allows members with less financial means to consider to become executive members of District 1, and to represent the District at distant ARS Board meetings. This is an example of the conviviality and willingness to work together that signifies the membership of District 1.

British Columbia Summary

District 1 (British Columbia, Canada) is unique in that nowhere else within the ARS are there seven chapters, with a combined current membership of 382, all located within a 230 km (143 mi) radius. The result is that there is considerable cooperation, collaboration and exchange of ideas on almost every topic related to rhododendrons, including their propagation and culture. All chapters have monthly meetings (September to June) with speakers, plant sales, and/or social events, and all island chapters have growing or at least stable memberships. Many chapter members are associate members in other chapters, and thereby frequently attend the monthly meetings of more than one chapter, especially to hear speakers not invited in that month to their own chapter or to attend a social event. There is collaboration among chapters in

hosting ARS conventions, with individuals from different chapters often taking responsibility for specific activities, such as the plant sale or silent auction. The result is a dynamic District with many active members spread across the chapters, especially on Vancouver Island!

It's interesting, however, to note that most District 1 members are on Vancouver Island (329), with only 52 members in the lower mainland, even though that area around Vancouver had a population in 2016 of 2,832,000 (60% of British Columbia's total population), 3.8 times that of Vancouver Island's. This discrepancy reflects the situation being encountered in many areas of North America, where urban memberships are declining while the more rural ones are more stable. With increasing urbanisation expected in the future and an aging ARS membership in general, a major challenge in many areas of Canada is to keep rhododendron societies relevant and engaging.

B. The Rhododendron Society of Canada: Its Founding and Development

Overview

The organization and growth of rhododendron societies proceeded in different ways in eastern Canada compared to western Canada. Development in both locations was influenced by climate, soil conditions, individual experiences with successful growth of ornamentals, proximity to native species and the presence of individuals with whom sharing of individual successful experiences was possible. The climate of eastern Canada was perceived initially as being too harsh for successful growth of rhododendrons. In eastern Canada, governments in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland provided foci around which individuals could gather to obtain information and shared experiences of success with rhododendrons.

The overtly stated task in the formation of the Rhododendron Society of Canada, as written by Dr. Edmund Frank Palmer in 1972, Founding President of the society, was for the new organization "to fully represent Canada coast to coast" and to act "as a strong unifying force" across Canada.

Although four rhododendron species are reported as native to eastern Canada (Fig. 6), no colonies of native rhododendron have been identified in Ontario.

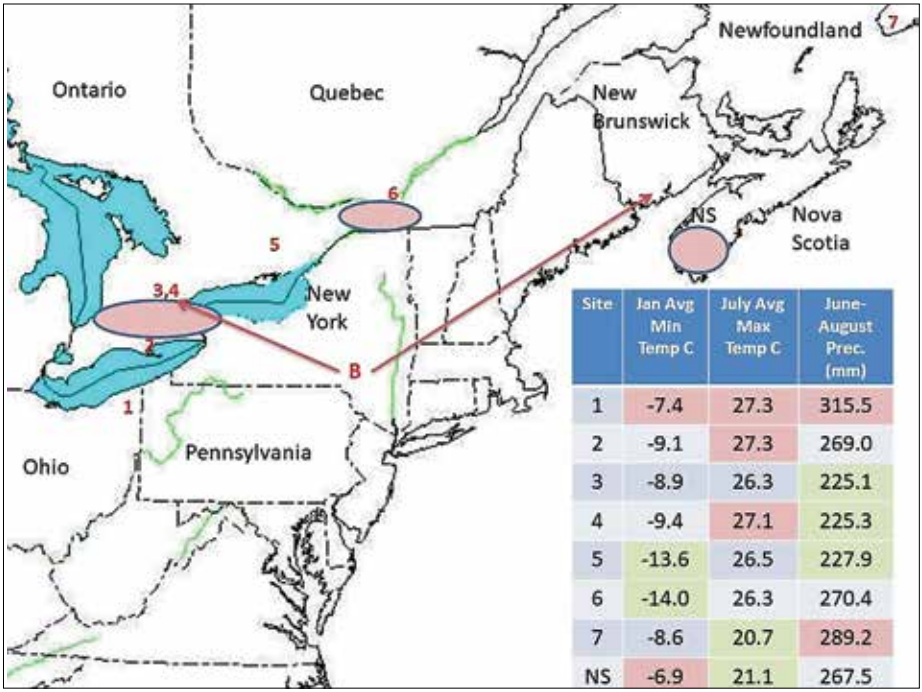
R. canadense *R. lapponicum* *R. groenlandicum* *R. prinophyllum*

Fig. 6. The four rhododendron species reported as native to eastern Canada.

Plant catalogues from the 1850s revealed that only rhodora (*R. canadense*) and the rosebay rhododendron (*R. maximum*) were offered in Toronto and in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario. Whether these plants were obtained from natural colonies in Canada or imported from the United States is not certain. Rhodora occurred extensively in Nova Scotia during this period and some colonies remain viable today. While there are historical accounts of the rosebay rhododendron in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, none of them have been authenticated. The newly developed rhododendron cultivars of the late 1800s did not appear in Ontario-based plant catalogues until the early 1900s. Development of a wide interest in growing rhododendrons thus had to await for a wider range of cultivars to be developed for the relatively severe climate conditions of Ontario and Quebec, collectively termed Upper Canada.

The success of rhododendron plantings in Nova Scotia was not an issue as enormous specimens planted in the late 1800s and early 1900s are still growing in Halifax and in other Maritime communities. Captain Dick Steele wrote of reports of *R. maximum, R. canadense,* and *R. atlanticum* being grown in 1875 and that good plants could be obtained in 1876 from both the commercial purveyors Hovey & Company and the Nonatum Nursery Nurseries, Boston, MA. Maritimers with means had thus imported potentially hardy cultivars being developed in Britain and the United States at a much earlier date than occurred in Upper Canada. A cold climate did not nevertheless prevent development of the Azalea Walk at the Reford Gardens (also known as Jardins de Métis, designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1995) established between 1926 and 1958 in Grand Métis (43 km east of Rimouski, Quebec, in the Gaspe Peninsula) where the St. Lawrence River meets the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Grand Métis is well outside the growing areas of native American azaleas and the ones now grown there do not exceed two metres (6 ft) in height and have a compact form to protect them against the weight of heavy snows. Seduced by the remarkable and extraordinary range of colours of azaleas, Elsie Reford imported plants in the 1930s from some of the great gardens of England, including Lionel de Rothschild's Exbury Gardens.

The growth of organized rhododendron societies in eastern Canada (Fig. 7) was greatly influenced by the early development of government funded agricultural and horticultural centers in Kentville, Nova Scotia, and at both the Ontario Agricultural College (now Guelph University) and the Horticultural Research institute of Ontario (now the Vineland Innovation and Research Centre) in Vineland Station (now Lincoln), Niagara Region, with their attendant Display Gardens. Ornamental plant research in Quebec was initially focused in research institutes at Laval University, Quebec City, at the



Site	Jan Avg Min Temp C	July Avg Max Temp C	June-August Prec. (mm)
1	-7.4	27.3	315.5
2	-9.1	27.3	269.0
3	-8.9	26.3	225.1
4	-9.4	27.1	225.3
5	-13.6	26.5	227.9
6	-14.0	26.3	270.4
7	-8.6	20.7	289.2
NS	-6.9	21.1	267.5

Fig. 7. A map of eastern Canada showing the noted locations: **(1)** Leach Research Station, Holden Arboretum; **(2)** South Coast Gardens; **(3, 4)** Rodney, Guelph and Simcoe, Niagara Region, and Riverwood Conservancy, Mississauga, Ontario; **(5)** Kingston, Ontario; **(6)** Montreal Botanical Gardens, and Société des rhododendrons du Quebec.; and (7) Memorial University Botanical Gardens, St. John's, Newfoundland. "B" are the locations in both New Brunswick and Ontario where Dr. Brueckner, a significant eastern Canadian hybridizer, worked in both the Maritimes and in Ontario to develop cold hardy rhododendrons. Figure by Kevin Kavanagh.

University of Montreal and later at the Montreal Botanical Gardens. At these locations, there initially were a small number of individuals with an interest and means to acquire and grow rhododendrons, relying on their personal experience and explorations and occasional consultations with experts. Figure 7 identifies locations where extensive collections of rhododendrons are grown in Ontario and Quebec, south of the areas mentioned earlier.

The Rhododendron Society of Canada (RSC)

The Rhododendron Society of Canada was formed on October 3, 1971, with 90 charter members. Leslie Hancock, the driving force behind the founding of the Society, believed in the importance of immediately establishing a means of communication among members distributed at vast distances from each other. A quarterly Bulletin of the Rhododendron Society of Canada (RSC)

was created and the first issue appeared in spring of 1972, with Hancock as its first editor. Of the 17 persons on the Board of Directors of the newly formed organization, 14 resided in Ontario, two in Nova Scotia, and one in Montreal. The number of RSC Charter members by Region:

Toronto, Ontario	12
Niagara, Peninsula	10
Other Ontario	48
Nova Scotia and New Brunswick	12
Montreal, Quebec	4
British Columbia	3
Pennsylvania, USA	1
Total	**90**

In the Bulletin's first editorial, it was noted that experimental planting of this genus "in arboreta and government stations have shown that the hardiest species and varieties can be grown successfully north of the Great Lakes" and "the '*raison d'etre'* for the Society must be to search out and publicize any information regarding hardiness and our watchword must be 'hardiness and yet more hardiness.'" Further, it was asserted that "Only by this emphasis can we be of value to our friends from Revelstoke, British Columbia, to Ottawa, Ontario, from Montreal, Quebec, to Fredericton, New Brunswick or from St. John, New Brunswick, to St. John's, Newfoundland."

In 1971, at the time of the Society's founding, efforts in Eastern Canada to systematically study rhododendron culture had been in progress for more than 30 years. Of course, individual enthusiasts had been attempting to grow rhododendrons since the late 1800s, some with considerable success as noted by the size of some rhododendrons known to exist in the 1960s. Thus, in the early 1970s, mature plantings of rhododendron display gardens were available for public display at some major, publicly-funded centres in both Ontario and Nova Scotia.

The Central Experimental Farm of the Plant Research Institute, Ottawa, contained a large collection of both rhododendron species and hybrids grown in protected lath houses. Edwards Gardens in Toronto was noted for its collection of deciduous azaleas and the Woodland Nursery in Mississauga had 1.6 ha (four acres) of woodland over which were scattered species and hybrids of both evergreen and deciduous rhododendrons. The Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario in the Niagara Region had probably the most representative collection of species and hybrids in Ontario, together with large plantings of unnamed hybrids bred at the institute.

In Nova Scotia, the Halifax Public Park had very old established plantings of both evergreen rhododendrons and deciduous azaleas, including large thickets of especially vigorous Mollis azaleas. In his 1971 report, Captain Dick Steele reported that a number of "very old" *R. catawbiense*, *R. maximum* and some older

Iron-clad hybrids [*R. catawbiense* was hybridized with other rhododendrons to introduce cold and heat hardiness in rhododendron hybrids and the first group of rhododendrons to become popular in gardens were the hybrids called the "iron-clads." These were a group of early British hybrids involving crosses of *R. caucasicum*, *R. catawbiense*, *R. ponticum* and *R. maximum* that survived the coldest winters at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. In 1917, Ernest Henry Wilson published a list of what he termed were the "Iron Clad" rhododendrons, meaning those that had been planted in the Arnold Arboretum and were able to survive many winters successfully.] with 46 cm (18 inch) trunks existed at the Halifax Public Gardens. He asserted that they were likely planted there in 1876. Similarly, somewhere near the navy base at Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, is a group of old rhododendrons imported from the old Anthony Waterer Nursery in England.

The Kentville Agricultural Research Station, where Dr. D.L. Craig started his rhododendron breeding program with George Swain in 1958, had been the home of mature rhododendrons for several decades prior to 1971. The Bulletin of the RSC asserted that "without question the finest development of mature plantings of both species and hybrids in eastern Canada" was located there. "Rhododendron Sunday" at Kentville was introduced by Dr. Craig as a means to showcase rhododendrons and their development at the Research Station.

These public gardens, funded by respective municipal, provincial or federal governments, served as important venues to demonstrate that rhododendrons were viable garden plants to grow. It was around some of these centres that individual eastern Canada rhododendron growers coalesced to form regional RSC chapters whose members focused on their local interests and needs.

The Toronto Chapter, RSC

In the first issue of the 1974 Bulletin, the editor wrote that the new society had achieved stable status, with some 275 RSC members from across Canada, 45 members from Canadian provinces outside Ontario, with at least one member from eight of the ten provinces. Fifteen members were from the eastern United States, about 15 from Quebec and 200 were from Ontario. The majority of Ontario members came from Toronto with approximately 60 from communities positioned along 211 km (130 miles) between Clarington and Niagara Falls, and northeast and southwest of Toronto. Toronto was seen as a center where gardeners interested in rhododendrons could meet to share information

Not all members of the RSC were hybridizers, horticultural professionals, or committed to newly discovered plants; many were simply enthusiastic grow-

ers of a variety of plants including rhododendrons and azaleas. Active members like the Deans, the Hintons and the Hansens appeared to identify with Toronto as far as shared interests in rhododendrons were concerned, and their presence at informal meetings in Toronto was welcomed for their ability to grow rhododendrons in never-thought-before locations, which prompted interest among those in more mild climates, as well as in more distant regions where growing conditions were perceived as equally inhospitable. This undoubtedly prompted others to become growers and active in the RSC, and to become members of the Toronto Chapter, but living in communities outside of Toronto.

Fig. 8. Hancock's Woodlands. Photo by L. Hancock.

In 1975, thirteen members from the Toronto area met and passed a formal motion to become an official Region of the RSC. The application was accepted by the RSC executive and so the Toronto Region of the RSC was born. The first meeting of the RSC Toronto was held in February, 1976. While it is important to note that the first Region of the RSC to be formed was named after Toronto, the most dynamic activity was occurring among members resident in suburb municipalities outside of Toronto, notably in Mississauga, Oakville, Orono, Hamilton and areas north and southwest of Toronto. Two important and influential examples follow:

Mississauga Gardens

1) Woodland Nurseries: Woodlands Nurseries was developed by the late Leslie Hancock, eastern Canada's pioneer in promoting and commercializing rhododendron and azalea culture. Hancock's Woodlands (Fig. 8) is a beautiful 1.6 ha (four acre) woods today located in the heart of a residential area of Mississauga. Maturing rhododendrons, azaleas and mountain laurel ecologically share space with native flowers, beneath a tall canopy of ancient pine, oak, beech and hemlock.

For many, Leslie Hancock is the father of rhododendron horticulture in this portion of southern Ontario and arguably, in Quebec. His early source of rhododendrons was from growers in Holland, and from these early plants he

created hardy strains suitable for the local climate. In the decades after World War II, Hancock's reputation as a naturalistic landscaper grew, as did that of his nursery and landscaped gardens. This allowed him to introduce rhododendrons wherever there was a possibility for their survival. The progeny of his earliest crosses such as 'Jolly Red Giant'*, 'Dorothy Macklin'*, 'Fundy' and his later work with lepidotes such as 'Hancock's Pink Pompon'*, 'Little Boy Blue'*, and 'Evening Sky'*, have shown themselves to be very suitable for the southern Ontario environment. It also showed his astuteness in promoting species by recognizing that smaller sized, slow growing lepidotes would be important for

Fig. 9. The Mississauga Brueckner Rhododendron Garden. Photos from Brueckner Gardens web pages.

Fig. 10. Brueckner hybrids. Top Row: L-R, 'Limoncello', 'Abeille', 'Isola Bella'. Bottom Row: L-R, 'Ma Chere', 'Toronto', 'Joseph Brueckner'. Photos by Christina Woodward.

Fig. 11. *R. schlippenbachii* and un-named rhododendrons in family residence Mississauga. Photo by Christina Woodward.

use in the limited spaces available in small urban properties.

The challenge of mastering the propagation of rhododendrons and azaleas soon took precedence over landscape contracting, and eventually Woodland Nurseries was fully devoted to plant production. Leslie Hancock was honoured formally with such awards as the Trillium Award of the Ontario Nurseryman's Association, the Maple Leaf Award of the International Shade Tree Conference, and the Award of Merit from the International Plant Propagators Society. There is a Leslie Hancock Memorial Rhododendron collection at the University of Guelph, and the Leslie Hancock Rhododendron Collection at the Montreal Botanical Gardens.

Because of his rhododendron propagation and as the RSC Bulletin editor, and a major contributor to its content in the early years, Leslie Hancock became known affectionately in eastern Canada as "Mr. Rhododendron," and many of those currently active in District 12 of the American Rhododendron Society owe their introduction to rhododendrons to Leslie's kind encouragement and mentorship.

2) The Mississauga Brueckner Rhododendron Garden: Dr. Brueckner began his research in cold hardy rhododendron hybridizing in St. John, New Brunswick, but soon moved with his rhododendrons to Mississauga, Ontario, where he continued his hybridizing work (Fig. 9). He was a charter mem-

Fig. 12. Vineland HRIO azaleas in front of Rittenhouse Hall. Photo by William Warkentin.

ber of the Rhododendron Society of Canada and later, the Toronto Region Chapter. His rhododendron hybridizing legacy is a large body of work characterised by 26 registered cultivars, some tested in Nova Scotia and all tested in Mississauga, and approximately 52 hybrids currently being systematically tested in five regions in Quebec, Ontario and Ohio. Some of Dr. Brueckner`s registered hybrids are shown in Figs. 10, 11. Among others are 'Bluenose', 'Nahanni', 'Karin Seleger', 'Lionel's Red Shield', and 'Igloo' which are some of the 19 registered hybrids developed by him.

His hybrids are still in propagation and are valued plants in North America and several European countries, as well as in England's famous Exbury Gardens. The extensive

Fig. 13. Vineland woodlot. Photo by Al Smith.

notes and correspondence from the Brueckner plant breeding program are housed in the University of Virginia Archives.

In 1983 Dr. Brueckner donated more than 1300 rhododendrons to the City of Mississauga for a lakefront garden in Port Credit, Ontario, now one of Canada's largest publicly-owned collection of rhododendrons. Situated on the north shore of Lake Ontario in the heart of Mississauga, the unique microclimate and massive white pines of the garden nourish and shelter the rhododendrons.

Niagara Region Chapter

Nursery catalogues dating back to 1856 suggest that *R. rhodora* and at least one of the native deciduous azaleas were grown in the Niagara Region long before the arrival of rhododendrons at the Horticultural Institute of Ontario (HRIO). The HRIO, founded in 1906 as an experimental station to develop commercial fruits and vegetable, was a great asset to the development of fruit growing in the Niagara area, with azaleas later introduced as floriculture research at some time before the 1950's.

Bob Fleming, a new Guelph University graduate arrived at Vineland in 1951 to do ornamental plant research and development. While roses were his specialty, the existence of a small collection of azaleas at the station captured his interest and he decided to add more of these plants to the existing collection. He obtained new azaleas and rhododendrons, with which he expanded the azalea bed and established several new beds of broadleaf rhododendrons.

One of the Research Station Directors, Dr. E.F. Palmer, with his wife established a trust fund to be used in the development of rhododendrons in memory of their son who was lost in World War II. This fund enabled the station to hire a rhododendron specialist and in the late 1950s, Roy Forster came on staff to work with Bob Fleming on ornamental plants. A Kew graduate, Roy began plant breeding using hardy named varieties and selections from outside sources. A group of seedlings from an Oregon nursery formed the nucleus of the Exbury azalea breeding there that has resulted in the introduction of several "Vinecourt" azalea selections (Fig. 12). 'Vinestar' and 'Vivacious' were introduced, and the woodlot garden became the principal test grounds for the hybridizing program.

Ken Begg succeeded Roy Forster in 1969 and he continued the rhododendron breeding project with primarily evergreen, broadleaf forms (Fig. 13). 'Vinecrest', a rich yellow evergreen rhododendron discovered among a group of seedlings in the nursery, was subsequently introduced. As a somewhat yellow yet hardy elepidote, it is widely used by hybridizers.

Al Smith was appointed in 1974 as a rhododendron and azalea hybridizer

and as an expert in the propagation and culture of rhododendrons. His interest in all matters regarding rhododendrons started in 1953, and over the next 20 years, he learned about the importance of good drainage, wind protection, mulching, and proper watering, by seeing and trying to understand why half of his plants died over a period of two years.

He worked with the Ironclad rhododendrons, but found Ghent, Mollis Exbury and Knaphill azaleas easier to grow than elepidotes, and over time, his interest also included evergreen azaleas. All these efforts influenced gardeners in the area, with many gardeners in Niagara becoming members of the RSC long before discussion regarding formation of a Regional Chapter started there in 1975. The importance of Al Smith and of the HRIO as catalysts in bringing together a disparate group of people to form the Niagara Regional Chapter of the RSC cannot be overstated. At its organizational meeting held in April, 1976, 35 voted to become the Niagara Peninsula Region of the RSC. This name was chosen, after debate, because members wished to avoid the possible perception that the name Niagara Region would suggest exclusion of locations away from Niagara Falls City.

Fig. 14. From a 1893 importation to the Halifax Public Gardens from the Waterer Nursery. This is reputedly a *R. catawbiense* or hybrid of the same.

Atlantic Rhododendron Region

As we have noted previously, rhododendrons were grown in Nova Scotia since the second half of the 19th Century. In the 1970s, some of the most magnificent specimens (Fig. 14) could be observed at public sites in Halifax and in

private gardens in many communities along the eastern coast, from Cape Breton to Lunenburg, and along the western coast of Nova Scotia along the Bay of Fundy from Scots Bay to Digby. Among the notable enthusiasts growing rhododendrons in this area were two passionate plantsmen, Captain Dick Steele, a retired naval officer, and Don Craig, a strawberry and other fruit researcher at the Government of Canada research facility at Kentville, Nova Scotia. Despite their strong support and participation in founding the RSC, in 1971 their leadership was insufficient to convince other rhododendron growers to form an Atlantic Chapter of the new RSC at an early date.

In 1973, the editor of the RSC Bulletin prodded members in all areas to form chapters: "Of all the areas in central and eastern Canada where rhododendrons and azaleas can be grown and enjoyed, Nova Scotia has the happiest conditions. A moist sea climate and naturally acid soil provide the two most important considerations other than

Fig. 15a. Kentville Research Station early 1950s. Photo by Don Craig.

Fig. 15b. Kentville Research Station early 1964. Photo by Don Ells.

Fig. 15c. Kentville Research Station in 2016. Photo by J. Weagle.

latitude. Nova Scotians could lead the way, with their own officers and annual programme." With chapters already in existence in Toronto (1975) and Niagara (1976), the Rhododendron Society of Canada, Atlantic Region, (aka, the Atlantic Chapter) was formed in 1977 by founding members Barbara Hall, Aileen Meagher, Walter Ostrom, George Swain, and John Weagle, led by Dick Steele and Don Craig.

The importance of Dick Steele and Don Craig to the development of rhododendron gardens in Nova Scotia and to the founding of rhododendron organizations in eastern Canada in the second half of the 20th century cannot be overstated. While the Kentville Research Station was designed to fulfill the fruit crop requirements for the agricultural communities of the Annapolis Valley, Dr. Craig's appointment introduced a scientist who was also inured with an interest in rhododendrons, with motivation to create a pleasant horticultural environment, to display his achievements to their best advantage and to encourage others to collaborate in similar endeavours.

Dr. Craig arrived at Kentville in 1952 and starting with a collection of some ironclads planted probably in the 1920s, Dr. Craig rooted 200 ironclad cuttings in 1953 to start his 50-year odyssey. In the following year, he obtained seed and plants from sources in Sweden, Japan, Great Britain and from every notable

Fig. 16. The Kentville Research Station in 2016. A collection of several plants from a grex of *R. fortunei* × *R. smirnowii.* Cross by Rad Pike in Maine, seed grown by Don Craig. This grex produced 'Bellefontaine'. Photo by J. Weagle.

hybridizer in the United States and Canada. By 1957, 545 rhododendrons and azaleas were in permanent positions and by 1975, 50 beds contained 1000 rhododendrons and azaleas (Fig. 15). A conservative estimate of the number of people that viewed the plantings from 1967 to 1983 was in excess of 100,000. The success of this Station in determining the adaptability and suitability of many rhododendron cultivars and species was a factor in the decision made to form the Rhododendron Society of Canada in 1971. The introduction of "Rhododendron Sunday" at Kentville created a surge in rhododendron plantings about the province (Fig. 16). The popularity of rhododendrons in the province still climbs to this day and the wide range of cultivars available in the province is astounding.

Captain Steele was a dedicated plantsman who helped create gardens for the joy of others. He worked to integrate the work of other

Fig. 17a. 'Nancy Steele'. Steele hybrid selected in 1980. Photo by J. Weagle.

Fig. 17b. Steele hybrid 'Boulderwood Blue' at Boulderwood. Photo by J. Weagle.

Fig. 17c. A Steele hybrid 'Catalgla' **X** *R. wardii* F3. Photo by J. Weagle.

hybridizers, and proselytized about rhododendrons with every opportunity offered to him, including on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) nationwide radio morning shows. He was a mentor to several generations of plant lovers and showed great kindness and generosity of spirit. Captain Steele's contribution to rhododendron development in the Atlantic Chapter and in North America is probably best described in the citation to the Gold Medal of the American Rhododendron Society he received in 1998 at its Convention in Niagara Falls, Canada. He was lauded for his systematic study of species with T. Hope Findlay at Windsor Great Park and helping George Swain and Dr. Donald Craig at the Kentville Research Station to develop many of their beautiful and hardy plants. In particular, his contributions of plants to develop gardens at Boulderwood, Pine Grove Park, Oxen Pond Botanic Gardens, Norfolk Botanical Gardens, the Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor's Garden, the Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens, and in gardens of hundreds of people in Atlantic Canada, helped to encourage the use of rhododendrons in home gardens. His own Bayport Plant Farm planted with 30,000 plants of exquisite quality and beauty (Fig. 17) were ranked with those of gardens in the United Kingdom and on the USA west coast. Bayport was a source for home gardeners to obtain Steele`s renowned plants and accurate instruction on their culture.

The Twenty Years from 1971 to 1991

Six years after the founding of the Rhododendron Society of Canada in Toronto, the organization's structure was completed. Vibrant chapters in Toronto (1975), Niagara (1976), and Atlantic Canada (1977) were being led by enthusiastic leaders: Leslie Hancock in Toronto, Al Smith in Niagara, Dick Steele on Nova Scotia`s Atlantic Coast and Don Craig on Nova Scotia`s Bay of Fundy coast. Each champion was deeply committed to the successful promotion of the genus and contributed both time and energy to share their knowledge and experiences with grateful gardeners hungry to add these new magnificent blooms and colours to their gardens.

Membership expanded to more than 400 RSC members by 1977, with 300 more by 1982. Garden clubs vied for speakers to discuss rhododendrons and their culture. The four leaders, with a small number of knowledgeable colleagues, were indefatigable in responding to these requests. Several sample plants would be brought to an event by a speaker, and these were sold at auction, which invariably brought $25 to $40 for a blooming plant in a four l (one gallon) container. The talk was usually of how to grow rhododendrons and where to get them, and was accompanied by well-done slideshows showing many colourful plants.

In this early period, rhododendrons were still largely unavailable in the average

local garden centers. Plants could only be obtained at very small nurseries that were created by new enthusiastic horticulturalists, or at occasional sales created by executive members at central locations in each RSC region. During that early period before the Regional Chapters were formed, customs records show that only 27 rhododendrons had been imported into Canada at the Fort Erie and Niagara Falls/Queenston, Ontario, entry ports, and all of these by Al Smith!

Executives in each region organized auctions and annual plant sales to raise funds. In Ontario, plants were imported largely from the Turtle Nursery, near Buffalo, New York, or from Van Veen Nurseries in Oregon. Initially, balled and burlapped plants were favoured, preferably in larger sizes, but soon only eight litre (two gallon) sized plants were available, and they too were eagerly accepted. Imports from Van Veen Nursery were usually in "liner size" and were much in demand. A total of several hundred liners would typically be ordered in "for a members only" pre-order program where only names and some photographs were used to identify what was being requested. In Niagara, Al Smith was a generous supplier of plants that were derived from his hybridizing work. His discards, but only those that warranted growing but not commercial introduction, were eagerly accepted as gifts by members who attended meetings, sometimes by being delivered unannounced to members' front doors, as it was assumed that all members had a keen interest in obtaining more plants.

Such importation from the United States during this period was less important in the Atlantic region, since Steele`s Bayport Nursery became an important supplier of plants along with Don Craig`s rhododendron program at the Kentville Station.

Annual spring rhododendron flower shows were organized in each Region with massive attendance to view each show. Usually held in church basements, meeting halls at the local government experimental farm or at public horticultural centers, entries in the several hundreds of blooms were common at each show. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of "Rhododendron Sunday" at Kentville was a massive success, which brought in thousands of people to view the rhododendron trusses in a pristine setting.

Regional meetings were held occasionally where society business was conducted. The principal person in each Region usually, but occasionally by another experienced grower, showed slides or talked about current growing conditions under local weather or disease challenges. The meetings would also include discussion of promotional ideas to encourage expansion of community interest and/or how to create a new garden at a church or other public venue. With cookies, tea and coffee, meetings were as much social friendship gatherings

as they were informational meetings and sources of the still difficult to obtain but much in demand plants.

In 1980, the three regions were joined by a fourth Region, the Georgian Bay-Lakeland Region north of Toronto, with 30 members. This was an active group of knowledgeable enthusiasts who lived or vacationed near the east coast of Lake Huron and among the many lakes of that region. Although this area is classified as Hardiness Zone 4, growing many rhododendrons is possible, as long as one is satisfied with plants that never exceed a height determined by the previous winter's deposit of snow. This area is famous for its high levels of snow fall caused by the "lake effect" [Lake-effect snow is produced during cooler atmospheric conditions when a cold air mass moves across long expanses of warmer lake water, warming the lower layer of air which picks up water vapour from the lake, rises up through the colder air above, freezes and is deposited on the leeward (downwind) shores.] which deposits snow at a remarkable rate starting in mid-November. This group produced several useful articles highlighting the importance of snow cover to enable growing and flowering of rhododendron in temperatures below -25°C (-13°F).

Annual conventions of the RSC were held on a regular basis throughout this period. Most of the meetings were held in Toronto but on several occasions, meetings were held in either Niagara, Newfoundland, Montreal or Halifax. The attendant flower shows were held on each occasion with Captain Steele and/or Don Craig and other competitors travelling in vans many hundreds of kilometres (miles) with ginger ale infused water in beer bottles holding precious trusses, many of which being destined to become "best-in-class" winners. Entries of the order of 400 and more trusses were common at these competitive shows, where some 14 trophies were awarded for various categories of entries.

The semi-annual Bulletin of the RSC was the principal binding link among the four regions. Its editors for the first nine years were either Leslie Hancock or his daughter Marjory Van Alstyne. The Bulletin contained news about events in each of the regions and throughout its life, articles about grower's experiences with rhododendrons. New members with their location information were listed in each issue, along with regional reports and events, decisions on local matters, and flower show awards both locally and at the RSC annual convention flower show. Don Craig, Dick Steele, Al Smith and Leslie Hancock were frequent contributors. Stories from the Atlantic and Niagara Regions were rich with growing techniques and new results from their respective hybridizing work. Articles from university researchers in the United States and other areas were sometimes included, along with articles from growers in New Zealand and Great Britain.

The first sign of angst about the challenge to continue the up-to-then

progress of the new Society appeared in 1980 when it was indicated that a new volunteer editor for the Bulletin could not be identified. A series of editors followed but in 1988, the then editor explained in an editorial that the Bulletin was about to cease publication for its inability both to locate publishable local material and to find members willing to be volunteer editors. The one element that acted as a mechanism to bind the three regions that were separated by both culture and distance was about to disappear.

Concurrent with this difficulty were other social and administrative events that removed important underpinnings to the loosely tied society. Important founding members in the activities of the society had then either passed away or were inactive due to age. Most of these had been employed in industry or government in horticulturally relevant occupations, and their enthusiastic voices and commitments were now lost to the membership.

In May 2003, the newsletter of the Atlantic Horticultural and Rhododendron Society published an article by Don Craig that described the rhododendron progress made at Kentville in growing rhododendrons. In its introduction he wrote: "In 1983, the Kentville rhododendron programmes, like similar programmes in Canada, e.g., the rose breeding programme at the Central Farm in Ottawa, came to a halt because of economic constraints, a shortage of money and labour and because of the need to prioritize the region's most pressing horticultural needs. Breeding was terminated and the display beds relegated to very minimal maintenance."

A few years later in July 1986, the Vineland project was terminated by the Ontario government on the day after Al Smith retired. The consequences to the plantings on the site were identical. Even the records seem to have disappeared. Craig also wrote: "Over time our project revealed much new information about the diversity of the genus *Rhododendron*—its forms, habits, adaptability and great spectrum of colour. The endorsement of our work by the public and media was a source of inspiration. I hope that this report will be useful to the home gardener and anyone contemplating a similar programme, be it large or small."

Craig was too modest to mention that he helped to promote the growth of rhododendrons in eastern Canada.

Following the announcement of the impending demise of the RSC Bulletin, three more issues were published. The final issue carried a report on the June 7-10, 1990, Annual Meeting of the RSC, held in Oxen Pond, St. John`s, Newfoundland. The President's report at that meeting noted 60 people at the Convention and a one sentence paragraph reported that "there was a vigorous discussion about the merits of affiliations with the American Rhododendron Society which should lead to further healthy discussion among our members."

The official minutes of the meeting stated: "A lengthy discussion was held on the question of affiliation with the American Rhododendron Society. Several suggestions were presented but no action was taken other than a direction for the executive to continue to study the matter."

Included in the final issue of the Bulletin was the full proposal for affiliation

Fig. 18. The full proposal for affiliation of the RSC with the ARS.

Proposal for Affiliation of the Rhododendron Society of Canada With the American Rhododendron Society

It is proposed that the Rhododendron Society of Canada affiliate with the American Rhododendron Society thereby increasing in a major way the benefits provided to the members of the Rhododendron Society of Canada by adding those offered by the American Rhododendron Society while at the same time enhancing the international aspect of the Rhododendron Society.

1. **The Rhododendron Society of Canada would continue to function within the terms of its existing constitution with the exception of membership fees.**
2. **There would be no change in organizing or holding such key events as the Annual Meeting and the Annual Flower Show.**
3. **The RSC awards and trophies would be given as in the past, and the Society would continue to operate a seed exchange (if this was the wish of the membership), in addition to the ARS seed exchange.**
4. **Membership fees in the Rhododendron Society of Canada would increase to the level of the American Rhododendron Society and members would receive the American Rhododendron Society of Canada Journal as well as an amended format Rhododendron Society of Canada Bulletin.**
5. **Members would enjoy all the privilege of membership in the American Rhododendron Society. The Rhododendron Society of Canada would enjoy the same status as a District of the American Rhododendron Society thereby ensuring representation on the Board of Directors.**
6. **It would continue to issue Canadian Income Tax receipts for contributions to the Rhododendron Society of Canada. Arrangements would be made to strike from time to time a Canadian Funds membership rate for deposit in Canada to avoid currency transfer charges to all members.**
7. **Arrangements would be made to accommodate current Life Members of the Rhododendron Society of Canada in a way equitable to the American Rhododendron Society, the Rhododendron Society of Canada and current Life Members.**

Expected Benefits

(1) To Individual members

- **Receipt of the very professional ARS Journal.**
- **Access to the ARS Seed Exchange.**
- **Opportunity to participate in the ARS National Convention with its traditional fine Plant Sale.**
- **Greater opportunities for discussion of all aspects of the genus Rhododendron through the greater contact provided.**
- **Enhancement of meeting content through sharing of information and speaker lists.**

(2) To the RSC

- **Greater opportunity to have our voice heard through participation on the ARS Board.**
- **Enhanced program activity through idea sharing and through speaker exchanges. Research grants.**
- **Opportunity for research in Canada through funding of programs by ARS research grants.**

of the RSC with the ARS.

The Winter, 1992, issue of the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society (JARS) reported:

> As a result of negotiations over an extended period of time, the Rhododendron Society of Canada (RSC) will become affiliated with the ARS as District 12, effective Jan. 1, 1992. The RSC will retain its name and may continue all of its activities and services, as long as they are consistent with the bylaws of both societies and the laws of Canada and the United States. The RSC will appoint a District Director to serve until the regular election process can be implemented next year. The RSC currently has three regions, the Atlantic, Niagara and Toronto Regions, which will become ARS chapters. Representing the RSC at the ARS National Board meeting were Sophia Maitland, current RSC President, and Charles Sale, past RSC President. The ARS warmly welcomes the RSC and happily anticipates the mutual benefits that will accrue as a result of the affiliation!

The RSC as District 12 from 1992 to 2018

As a result of these changes, a new generation of leaders had to be identified or a means found to encourage participation in leadership, and new regional linking mechanisms had to be created that would serve the same linking function lost in the demise of the RSC Bulletin and the appearance of strident voices from Upper Canada to join with the American Rhododendron Society.

Following this linking of the RSC with the ARS, very little actually changed in the three chapters. The fourth chapter, the Georgian Bay-Lakelands Chapter disbanded with members joining the Toronto Region, but they continued to grow rhododendrons. Chapter activities appeared to remain as they had been, but enthusiasm to organize massive flower shows waned and finally disappeared in the early 1990s. Despite their disquiet voiced at affiliation with the ARS, the Atlantic Chapter was incorporated as the Atlantic Horticultural and Rhododendron Society in 2003 as a not-for-profit Nova Scotia organization, while maintaining its relationship with the ARS as a chapter of District 12. The Toronto Chapter followed suit by similarly incorporating and changing its name to the Toronto Horticultural and Rhododendron Society and associating with the Ontario Horticultural Association; it maintained its relationship with District 12 and the ARS. Niagara has remained a Chapter of District 12, independent of other horticultural organizations, focused on rhododendron related activities but developing close relations with sister horticultural societies in the Niagara Region.

An important decision was made in 1994 that would impact on the future of District 12 and particularly that of the Niagara Chapter. Sophia Maitland, the then District Director convinced the membership of the Chapter to sponsor the 53rd Annual ARS Convention and to hold the Convention in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. She recruited the then current President of the Niagara Chapter and a former RSC President, who also was a Niagara member, to

Co-Chair the organization of the Convention. The Convention attracted some 400 people and was deemed a success in terms of attendance, finances and quality of speakers and tours, even though an exceedingly early, warm spring devastated many of the rhododendron blooms several weeks before the Convention date.

The euphoria created as a result of the Convention continued in Ontario for several years after the convention. For example, membership grew and in 2001, was 340 local and ARS members, the largest membership since 1987. In 2001, the Atlantic Region continued in its tradition of spawning active hybridizers in the tradition of Captain Steele. Niagara was embarking on a restoration of the Vineland HRIO woodlands and attempting to save a section of Lyall Fretz's oldest plants as a garden for the Mennonite Home that was morphed from Lyall's farm. Toronto participated in "Canada Blooms" and attracted unspecified new ARS members to its chapter through that effort.

The picture changed for the worse in 2008. Ontario leadership challenges again were experienced in both the Toronto and Niagara Chapters, attendance at meetings had fallen precipitously, membership numbers were unclear, attempts at resurrecting the Vineland plantings were discussed and worked on, but no clear program of chapter development existed. However, in the Atlantic Chapter, the program of international speakers, meetings, developing hybrids and contributing articles to JARS continued.

The following year, Anitra Laycock reported a major improvement in outlook in Niagara and the continued excellent work and promotion in the Atlantic Region. In Niagara, its website and newsletter became major mechanisms for informing members of new elements that would add value to members' participation and membership. A "Plant for Members" program was introduced, special relationships were established with two local rhododendron purveyors and a speakers program that included local, international, and USA-based rhododendron experts was established. In subsequent years, a unique rhododendron evaluation test program, supported by members and in part by the ARS Test and Display Garden Committee, was devised though which members would be involved in field testing the body of hybridizing work left by the late Dr. Joseph Brueckner. Membership involvement in such activities produced results. Attendance at meetings grew from ten to 50 per meeting over a period of six years.

Anitra Laycock also reported in 2009 that the Atlantic Chapter continued its dynamic involvement with both local and worldwide rhododendron events. The chapter had been bringing in plants for more than 30 years and was now planning a project to gather information on these plants in support of the Rhododendron Mapping Project (Morsink and McKenney 2008). Rhododen-

drons 101, an hour long program of slides and practical information on choosing and growing rhododendrons developed by ARS Atlantic member Cora Swinamer, was being requested and shown to enthusiastic receptions at garden clubs around the region.

She also reported: "The Dick Steele Garden now showcases more than a hundred rhododendrons associated with Captain Steele and his colleagues. The culture of Joseph Brueckner hybrids are also being extensively evaluated around Nova Scotia, and John Weagle recently gave members a fine insight into the Brueckner legacy in a talk to the chapter. As part of the annual Steele Lecture Series, Barry Starling from Exeter, England, a 1970 RHS Award of Merit recipient for his plant *R. keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy', gave talks on his trip to Yunnan and on ericaceous plants. Alpinist Peter Korn, visiting from Sweden as part of the 2008 North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) Speakers' Tour Program, spoke to an enthusiastic reception on al-

Fig. 19a. Private garden in St. Catharines, Ontario. Photo by Wanda Yarmoshuk.

Fig. 19b. Private garden in St. Catharines, Ontario. Photo by Wanda Yarmoshuk.

Fig. 19c Niagara garden. A collection of unknown evergreen azaleas and lepidotes. Photo by Wanda Yarmoshuk.

pines. Other recent presentations by local members have included Gardens of Japan, The Flora of Turkey, and Plant Hunting in Bhutan."

InApril, 2018, the Regions reported their membership numbers as follows (not all members of the different chapters are ARS members):

District 12 ARS Chapters	District 12 ARS members	Total membership
Atlantic Region	27	283
Niagara Region	27	106
Toronto Region	13	Unknown

Acknowledgements

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Glen Jamieson, a retired biologist, is the editor of both the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society and Rhododendrons International, and the current president of the Mount Arrowsmith Chapter of the ARS.

Nick Yarmoshuk, a former professional engineer and now a retired professor of management, is a charter member of the Niagara Chapter, a past-president of both the Niagara Region Chapter and the Rhododendron Society of Canada, was Co-Chair of the 1998 ARS Convention in Niagara Falls, and is currently secretary of the Niagara Region Chapter and chair of the ARS Test and Display Garden Committee.

Danish Rhododendron Society

Jens Holger Hansen
Jyllinge, Denmark

A Danish Rhododendron Society was founded by twelve people in the late 1960s, named Rhododendronforeningen, which translates to the "rhododendron society" in English. It was initially founded to focus on Danish rhododendron interests and over the years, has had up to 500-600 members.

Map of the pre-tour Scandinavian garden locations in Denmark and Sweden.

Svend Hansen with 'Silver Viking' 2006 (http://www.rhododendron.dk/SHHansen.html)

The Danish ARS Chapter was formed in 1974 by Rhododendronforeningen members that understood English, with Palle Kristersen as president, and it has since had a strong interest in species rhododendrons. Denmark is a lovely country in which to grow rhododendrons. Areas have USDA Hardiness Zones 8a to 9a, which means that the more tender rhododendron species cannot be grown unless they are held over the winter in a cold greenhouse. However, many of their members are successful in growing high altitude rhododendron species in their gardens.

The current president of both the Danish Rhododendron Society and the Danish ARS chapter is myself. The society presently has about 300 members, with currently 80 members in the ARS. The society has an outstanding web site (http://www.rhododendron.dk), mostly in Danish, with Hans Eiberg as webmaster. The chapter publishes an excellent newsletter four time a year called the "RhodoNyt", and the chapter maintains a large garden at Gammel Kjoegegaard near Copenhagen and the Geographic Garden in Kolding. Both these gardens, or rather parks, are open to the public as show gardens. The Geographic Garden originated from the plant nursery of Axel Olsen, one of the rhododendron pioneers in Denmark.

The chapter is divided into two activity zones, the East Zone consisting of the island of Zeeland and all the islands east of Storebaelt, and the West Zone consisting of the island of Fuen and the Jutland Peninsula. Both activity areas have three to four members meetings per year, with speakers from both abroad and from within their own rhododendron society or Chapter, with approximately 50 persons present at each meeting.

The chapter offers:

- Interesting meetings with lectures, socializing and plants lotteries,
- The member magazine "RhodoNyt" four times a year.
- Dissemination of rhododendron and accompanying plants, Grafting Courses, Garden visits and tours,
- Activity Days in both rhododendron gardens, at Gammel Kjoegegaard near Copenhagen and the Geographic Garden in Kolding.
- Membership in the ARS, which includes receipt of the ARS Journal, and
- The option of borrowing books and newsletters from other rhododendron societies and articles from its library, which has more than 200 titles.

The chapter also holds every year an open garden tour in the evening at member's homes in May and June, and in 2017 in the East, nearly all the open

Hans Eiberg's garden. (http://www.rhododendron.dk/HEiberg.html)

garden schedule days in May were filled. In the West, the open gardens are more concentrated to a specific different part of Jutland each year, and visits only occur over a single weekend in May due to its larger geographic area.

In 2014, a rhododendron garden tour organised by Bill Heller and Clint Smith had two Danish chapter members, Carl Adam Lehman and Svend Askjaer, plan and organize a tour of Danish member's gardens and parks. The tour included four gardens and nurseries on Jutland, one on Funen, and six on Zeeland.

A tour of Danish gardens has been organised as a pre-tour for the Bremen ARS Convention that will be held in May 2018. An article (Hansen and Salomonsson 2017) describes the tour, which will also extend into southern Sweden, and a map of tour stops from that article is attached here, along with garden images that showcase the diversity and nature of rhododendron culture in Denmark.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Glen Jamieson; Paul Andersen, ARS Director at Large; and Carl Lehmann for helping with this note.

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Mogens B. Hansen's garden. (http://www.rhododendron.dk/MBHansen.html)

Rhododendron Culture in Finland

Kristian Theqvist
Turku, Finland

The Finnish Rhododendron Society was established in 1995 as a section of the Dendrological Society, which had been founded in 1969. It presently has close to 300 members growing rhododendrons in the relatively harsh Finnish climate.

The aim of the Finnish Rhododendron Society is to distribute knowledge about the genus *Rhododendron* and to bring together enthusiasts in meetings, excursions and through a internet discussion forum. In addition to annual excursions to Finnish parks and member's gardens, the society has arranged group tours to gardens, parks, arboretums and nature in other countries, notably to date to Sweden, Norway, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, England and Sikkim.

The Seed Exchange has been a popular service for members. Several breeders have donated seeds and there have usually been 50 to 100 seed batches to choose from. Another important activity has been the yearly group purchases of plants by members. The society has arranged for the import of rhododendrons and other woody plants from nurseries in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Germany and Latvia. Plants are transported by a Finnish company according to the society's instructions directly from a nursery to a designated place where the hundreds plants are distributed to members. The Society does not charge any commission but benefits from having pleased members waiting to join in next years group plant order.

The Finnish Rhododendron Society publishes a 20-page publication called "Rhododendronlehti." This has to date been published every four months, but starting in 2017, it will be published every three months. All issues of the publication produceded since 1996 are available on the internet

to society members, and three sample issues can be seen at http://www.dendrologianseura.fi/rhodokerho/lehdet.html.

The Finnish Chapter of ARS

A number of active members of the Finnish Rhododendron Society were for many years also members of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), usually through either the Swedish, Danish or Scottish ARS Chapters. After discussions with Laura Grant, then ARS Executive Director, and Paul Anderson, the District-at-Large Director, it was decided to establish a Finnish ARS Chapter, which was finalised on July 10, 2012. There were 15 founding members, but by 2017, 26 people had become members. The Finnish ARS Chapter is a separate organization from the Finnish Rhododendron Society, and both have their own officers. Almost all Chapter members also belong to the FRS and co-operation between the two organisations is close. All meetings, excursions and tours of the FRS are open to Finnish Chapter members, and news about the Finnish Chapter is published in the "Rhododendronlehti."

Rhododendron Culture in Finland

'Cunningham's White' and 'Catawbiense Grandiflorum' have been the most common rhododendron cultivars in Finland since the early 20th century, as these cultivars have been easily available from European nurseries and have been found to be moderately hardy in the Finnish climate. 'Cunningham's White' is the less hardy of the two and it has been said that you can estimate the average snow depth from the height of this plant, as branches growing above the snow level are often killed or damaged. 'Catawbiense Grandiflorum' is still commonly sold today in garden centers and this cultivar is commonly found in Finnish gardens and parks.

The Finnish Climate

Finland is one of the northernmost countries in Europe, situated between latitudes 60° and 70° N, corresponding to latitude in Alaska from Anchorage to Prudhoe Bay. However, in contrast to Alaska's climate, the Finnish climate is reasonably favourable for growing rhododendrons. Finland's climate is semi-maritime with large temperature fluctuations, combining characteristics of both a maritime and a continental climate.

Seasonal milder temperatures are affected by the Baltic Sea, but more so, by the influence of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean, which results in relatively warm summers and mild winters. On the other hand, very cold winter weather results when east or north winds blow from Russia and the Arctic region, when temperatures can drop to -35° C (-31° F) or even lower. Day length variation over a year is also significant due to the country's northern location. Summer daylight is long, 15 to 24 hours, but in the winter, is from

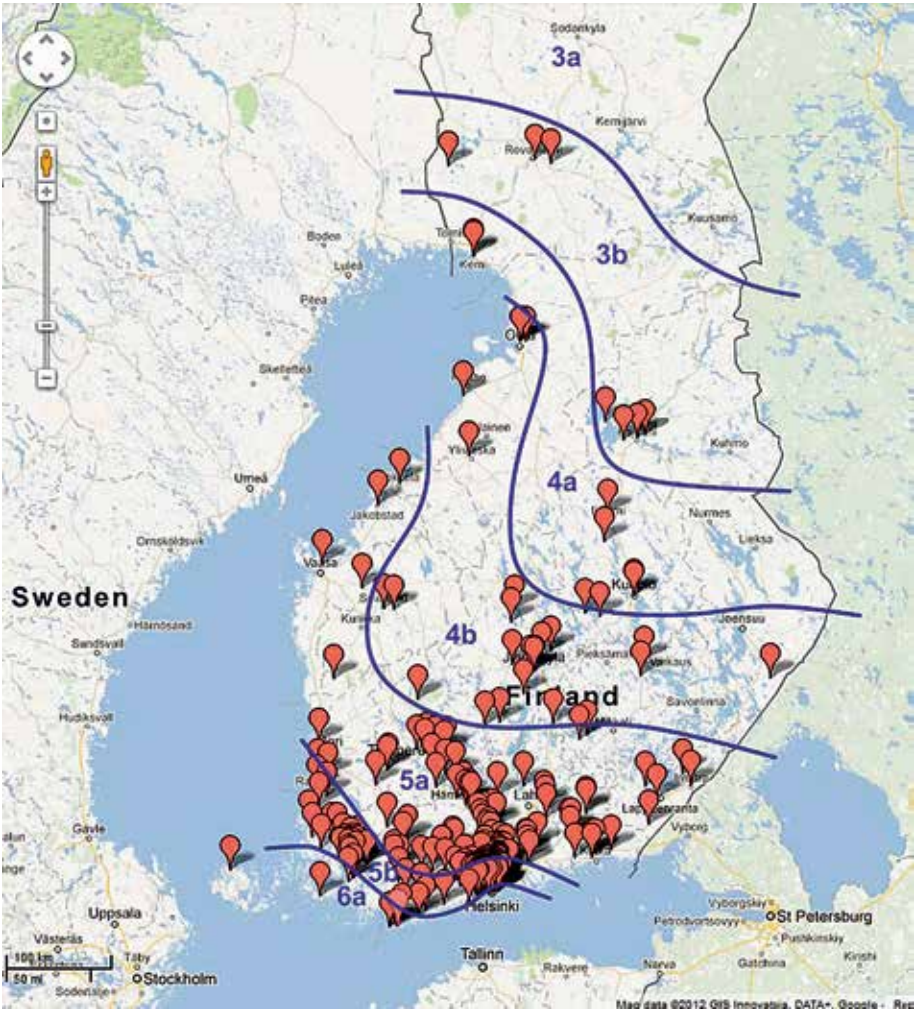

Fig. 1. Finnish Rhododendron Society members in 2013. USDA Zones estimated by the author.

nil to only a few hours. Precipitation as rain or snow can occur throughout the year, and averages about 600 mm (24 in) per year. However, it is common to have several weeks of drought during the summer. Snow cover is deepest in March, and averages about 60 to 90 cm (24-36 in) of snow in eastern and northern Finland and 20 to 30 cm (eight to twelve in) in southwestern Finland, but there are occasionally winters on the southwestern coastline with almost no snow at all.

The equivalent USDA Zones in Finland range from 6a in the south to 3a in the north (Fig. 1). USDA Zones based on average minimum temperatures

Fig. 2. *R. lapponicum* at Saana. Photo by Olli Wuokko.

Fig. 3. *R. tomentosum*. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

do not fit well into the Finnish climate and Finland uses ist own Finnish zone system. The length and the effective cumulative temperature sum of the growing season and the semi-maritime climate necessitates a more complex plant hardiness zone mapping system.

Native *Rhododendron* species in Finland

There are two naturally growing *Rhododendron* species in Finland. *R. lapponicum,* Lapland azalea, (Fig. 2) grows in Northern Finland in only the remotest corners of Lapland, on three fells in Enontekiö and rarely in Utsjoki. This low growing *species* does not thrive well in Southern Finland.

R. tomentosum, Northern Labrado tea, (previously *Ledum palustre*) is very common everywhere in Finland, growing around bog margins, forming wide stands that are covered with white flowers in the summer (Fig. 3). The strong fragrance of its leaves is well known to all Finns, and the weakly poisonous leaves have been used traditionally as a herbal medicine, such as against flu.

Historical Finnish Rhododendron Culture

There are only few records of growing temperate rhododendrons in the 1800s in Finland. Rhododendrons were regarded then as tender in the Finnish climate and advice was primarily given on how to grow them in greenhouses or to shelter the plants well during winters. A small selection of rhododendrons was imported to Finland in the early 1900s and you could then find some rhododendrons advertised for sale in newspapers. Some of the older rhododendrons can still be found growing in gardens, arboretums and even in forests, with for example, a large over-100-year-old 'Catawbiense Grandiflorum' still flourishing in a reforested, old garden of Nobel Prize

winner Ragnar Granit (Fig. 4). I came upon the plant by luck 30 years ago when I was walking with my wife along coastal forests when we were seeking a place for our summer home. Seeing that magnificent plant in the woods was an inspiration for me to start growing rhododendrons on another property that we later bought on the same island.

Arboretum Mustila, located in Elimäki, has in many ways had a noteworthy role in the history of *Rhododendron* in Finland. The Arboretum was founded by Axel Fredrik Tigerstedt and the first plantings were made in 1902, with the emphasis first on conifers, and today various conifer species still form the backbone of the Arboretum. Axel Tigerstedt's son Carl Gustaf Tigerstedt helped in the 1910s and 1920s in getting a broader selection of woody plants that were better known for their decorative impact.

Around 1915, a selection of hardy rhododendrons was bought from the nursery Regel and Kesselring in St. Petersburg (Russia) and planted in the Arboretum. Among the plants were temperate evergreen species such as *R. brachycarpum*, *smirnowii*, *aureum*, *caucasicum*, *dauricum*, *mucronulatum*, *ferrugineum*,

Fig. 4. 100-year-old 'Catawbiense Grandiflorum'. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

Fig. 5. Arboretum Mustila. *R. smirnowii, Actinidia kolomikta* and *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*. Photo by Leena Härkönen.

hirsutum and *lapponicum*, as well as the azaleas *R. canadense*, *arborescens*, *calendulaceum*, *viscosum* and *vaseyi*. The Mustila Nursery was then founded, with its first catalog released in 1931. The nursery had in their rhododendron selection besides species many cultivars, such as 'Boule de Neige', 'Cunningham's White', 'Laetevirens', 'Myrtifolium' and the azalea 'Coccinea Speciosa'.

In the 1930s, Rudolf Seidel in Germany sent to the Arboretum Mustila a large selection of relatively hardy *R. smirnowii* hybrids (Fig. 7), and many of these hybrid plants are still thriving well in the Arboretum, after having experienced a number of extremely cold "bottleneck" winters, including 1940 (-43.5° C, -46.3° F), 1985 (-36.0° C, -32.8° F) and 1987 (-37.0° C, -34.6° F). In 1931, Mustila Arboretum received seeds initially thought to be *R. chrysanthum* (now called *R. aureum*) that had been collected the previous autumn in Hozan (now Pungsan, North Korea). The seedlings, however, turned out to be something quite different, namely a previous poorly-known Korean form of *R. brachycarpum* that was in all aspects larger than the Japanese *brachycarpum*, and which was extremely cold tolerant. In 1970, it was formally described as *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *tigerstedtii* by the Swedish botanist Tor Nitzelius (Fig. 6), but this subspecies status was discarded by Chamberlain (1982), who included it in *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *brachycarpum*. Regardless, it was this accession from Korea

Fig. 6. *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *tigerstedtii.* Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

that became the cornerstone in the hybridizing of cold hardy rhododendrons in Finland. Rhododendrons were also cultivated and promoted by other early Finnish pioneers such as Bengt Schalin (1889-1982) and Bo Knape (1913-2006).

Hybridizing Programs

Carl Gustaf Tigerstedt's son Peter M.A. Tigerstedt, a professor at the University of Helsinki, continued the work on rhododendrons by introducing three hybridizing programs in collaboration with Arboretum Mustila. The first one, "Breeding of Winter Hardy Rhododendrons," started in 1973. Marjatta Uosukainen made many of the hand pollinations and later worked as a researcher in micropropagation at the MTT Agrifood Research, Finland. This hybridizing resulted in 14,000 plants that were planted in five locations in Finland for field testing. Micropropagation was started on a selection of the most promising cultivars, with 14 cultivars named and released into production, starting in the early 1990s. The first ones were 'Elviira', 'Kullervo', 'Pohjola's Daughter', 'Haaga', 'Hellikki', 'Helsinki University' and 'St. Michel' (syn. 'Mikkeli'). The introduction of hardy Finnish cultivars boosted the increasing popularity of rhododendrons in Finland, as they provided a good,

Fig. 7. Seidel hybrid no. 10 at Mustila. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

Fig. 8. Rhododendron hybrids at Haaga. Photo by Satu Tegel.

hardy assortment of rhododendrons in comparison to the less tender imported cultivars (Figs. 8, 9).

The second hybridizing program, the "Breeding of Winter Hardy Deciduous Azaleas," started in 1988. Anu Väinölä, the main researcher in this program, investigated cold hardiness at the University of Helsinki in the late 1900s. A total of 21,000 plants have been planted for testing in various parks in Finland,

Fig. 9. Finnish hybrids in Rhodogarden garden. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

including Arboretum Mustila (Fig. 12), and since 2009, four hardy azalea cultivars have been named ('Adalmina', 'Illusia', 'Onnimanni' and 'Tarleena') and released for production, with more are on the way.

The third hybridizing program, the "Breeding of Winter Hardy Yellow Flowered Rhododendrons," started in 1995. The Korean *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *tigerstedtii* (now referred to as *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *brachycarpum*) was used as the mother plant and various species and hybrids with yellow flowers were used as pollen donors; the pollen was provided by Briggs Nurseries from the West Coast of the United States. This hybridizing resulted in the testing of 8000 plants at various test sites in Finland (Fig. 10), and the first yellow cultivars are now being micropropagated and should be available shortly.

A more detailed summary of these hybridizing programs was recently published by Tigerstedt (2018).

The hobby hybridizing of rhododendrons or azaleas has also developed during the last 30 years, with more than ten active private hybridizers. The main goal has generally been to provide beauty combined with good cold hardiness, and hybridizers have shown photos of their best hybrids in social

Fig. 10. Yellow hybrid at Mustila. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

media garden forums, at society meetings and in publications from the Finnish Rhododendron Society.

It has been a challenge to get the cultivars of private breeders widely propagated. Usually only small-scale propagation with cuttings has been possible because of cost. However, Reijo Hahkala named his low growing, lightly yellow flowered *R. brachycarpum* × *R. aureum* hybrid 'Alli', and it is now available in plant stores. I now have my first cultivars named, registered and micropropagated, and hopefully some will find their way into commercial production. It is hoped that more and more hardy cultivars bred by Finnish hybridizers will become commercially available in the future.

Rhododendrons in Public Parks, Arboretums and Gardens

The increase of popularity of rhododendrons is illustrated in several public parks, arboretums and private gardens, all of which now have a noteworthy selection of rhododendrons and azaleas. The most famous is of course the Arboretum Mustila (Fig. 5) but other great places to enjoy rhododendrons or azaleas are the Haaga Rhododendron Park in Helsinki, the Sapokka Water Garden and Fuksinpuisto Park in Kotka, Arboretum Yltöinen in Piikkiö and

Fig. 11. Finnish hybirds at Raisio Rhododendron Park. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

Fig. 12. Azalea hybrids at Mustila. Photo by Jukka Reinikainen.

the Raisio Rhododendron Park in Raisio (Fig. 11). A full list and map of public rhododendron collections in Finland is available in Finnish on page http://www.dendrologianseura.fi/rhodokerho/kokoelmat.html. Descriptions of some of the more well-known locations are listed in an article by Theqvist and Saarinen (2017). There are also many great private gardens and arboretums belonging to members of the Finnish Rhododendron Society.

The Future for Rhododendron Culture in Finland

The climate in Finland has increasingly warmed during the past 25 years. We periodically have occasional very cold winters but the 15 year running average of the minimum winter temperature has increased by about 5° C (9° F). This means that more tender rhododendron species and cultivars can increasingly be grown in Finland. However, the warming climate has unfortunately also resulted in less dependable snow in southern Finland. Many low growing rhododendrons that had thrived well under a thick snow cover now suffer when the freezing winds from Siberia blow on unprotected, exposed plants, and this has become a real problem. The only solution for keen gardeners seems to be to buy more rhododendrons to cover losses. Generally though, the future for rhododendron culture looks good as more and more people become introduced to rhododendrons, when gardening in Finland in general gains increasing popularity.

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Theqvist, K., and Saarinen, J. 2017. The ARS 2018 Convention Post-tour of Gardens in Finland. *J. American Rhodo. Soc.* 71: 85-94.

Tigerstedt, P. 2018. 100 Years in the Breeding of Ornamental Rhododendrons in Finland. *J. American Rhodo. Soc.* 72: 41-47.

Web sites for more information

Finnish Climate: http://en.ilmatieteenlaitos.fi/climate

Finnish Rhododendron Society: www.dendrologianseura.fi/rhodokerho/club.html

Arboretum Mustila: www.mustila.fi/en

Finnish *Rhododendron* cultivars:

www.mustila.fi/en/plants/rhododendron_finnish

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Part 1. Rhododendron Organisations in Countries with American Rhododendron Society Chapters

Rhododendrons in the Sikkimese Himalayas, and the J.D. Hooker Chapter

Keshab Pradhan
Gangtok, Sikkim, India

The State of Sikkim is tucked in the eastern Himalayas between Nepal, Bhutan and the Chinese Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in north-eastern India, and is the native habitat of around 40 species of rhododendrons. The rhododendrons vary from magnificinent *R. arboreum* trees of over 25 m (82 ft) in height in its temperate forests to the tiny alpine *R. niveum*, which barely rises above the ground. Geographically, the 7200 km^2 (2780 mi^2) area of Sikkim is 49% forested and 34% alpine, which is often devoid of any vegetation, thus leaving just 11% of its area for sub-

Fig. 1. Sikkim's Protected Area Network.

sistence agriculture and urban areas. It has a population of 600,000 which represent three mixed ethnic communities, the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese, which collectively are now termed Sikkimese as per the Tripartite Agreement of May 1973 between the then Ruler of the Kingdom of Sikkim and the two political parties that represented the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese. Sikkimese are now technically called Indians of Sikkimese-origin from a citizenship stand point, with some distinct privileges which are denied to other Indian citizens.

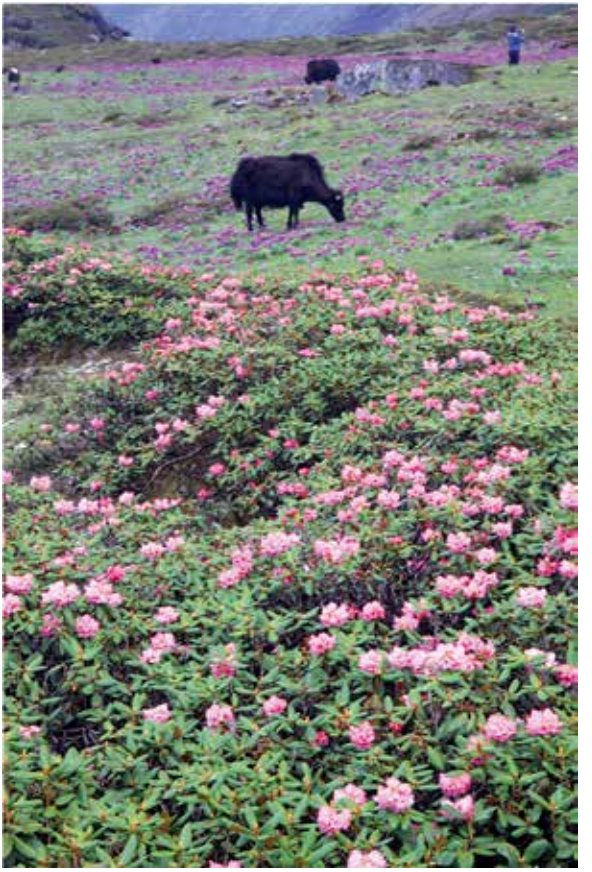

Fig. 2. *R. campanulatum* subsp. *aeruginosum* and 0rimulas, Yumesamdong.

Like China and Japan, Sikkim has many indigenous rhododendrons, and while these plants were no doubt known to the native peoples, they only became familiar to the world outside Asia as a result of the explorations of the first European plant hunters in the 1800s. To fully appreciate the contributions of these explorers, and the significance of their endeavours, I will now describe their activities and relate them to how rhododendron awareness has since evolved in Sikkim.

Rhododendrons are found in 20% of the State's temperate and coniferous-temperate forests, and in large parts of the alpine areas, which are often fully covered by impenetrable thickets of rhododendrons. Sikkim was rather unknown to the outside world till the mid nineteenth century, although it was strategically an important trade-route between Central and Southern Asia. Geopolitically, although small in area, it was thus always considered of great

importance, so it was no wonder when one of its first foreigners, J.D. Hooker, wanted to visit it in 1848 for botanizing, but permission was denied, and the Maharani (Queen) Yeshi Doma wrote in her *History of Sikkim* (unpublished):

> When Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling, wrote to Sikkim Maharaja for permission to let Hooker in botanizing, the Durbar consulted its Lamas, as is the tradition. The reply was: "The Gods and Divinities of my country are numerous and very watchful. I have consulted the Lamas as to whether it is good and proper that the British gentlemen should examine the trees and plants of my country. The result is that it will not be proper". This was what the Maharaja replied to Campbell on 7 Oct, 1848, yet the two British men, Campbell and Hooker, forcibly entered the Kingdom much to the annoyance of the Chinese.

However, although Campbell accompanied by Hooker successfully entered the Kingdom, Hooker in his excitement also wanted to cross the border at Chola (Pass) and enter into Tibet. Fearing a reprimand by the Tibetan Government to Sikkim, Hooker and Campbell were then forcibly restrained and imprisoned in a hut in the Palace compound, although they were ultimately released.

Hooker was mesmerized with the myriad of rhododendrons that he saw in Sikkim, to the extent that he started sending on a regular basis sketches of them back to England. By the time he actually returned home, his father, W. Hooker, along with his illustrator Finch, had already brought out the monumental volume of *Rhododendrons of Sikkim* (Hooker *et. al.* 1849). This publication instantly brought little known Sikkim into the limelight, and its rhododendrons did so well in the southern climes of England that they became prized garden plants. As a result, there was a spurt in activity to look for more rhododendron species in other region of the Himalayas, leading to explorations by other plant hunters such as Ernst Henry Wilson, George Forest, and Reginald Farrer, who was accompanied by Euan Cox. These men also explored for more species in the wild jungles of north-east India, Burma and so on, and this searching for new species is still underway and new discoveries are still being made. The nearby Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh in India has now almost 104 indigenous rhododendron species identified and more are likely to be found.

Back in Sikkim, there was a lull in the further appreciation of rhododendrons for about 55 years. However, this changed with the advent of Crown Prince Sidkeong Tulku (1879–1914), who studied forestry in Oxford and on returning home, engaged himself in the demarcation of forest reserves. By 1911, the task was completed, and a Department of Forestry with management authority was created in 1909. He also met J.D. Hooker at his residence in England before returning home, and while the specifics as to what transpired between them are unknown, the Crown Prince returned home as an environmentalist and many laws were later promulgated for the protection of Sikkim's rich natural

renewable resources. For example, an Orchid Ordnance banning the collection of wild orchids was established, at a time when the importance of orchids was not recognised anywhere else in Southeast Asia. An interest in rhododendrons was continued by successive British Political Officers based in Gangtok for Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. Col. F.M. Bailey and later Sir Basil Gould assigned the Forest Manager Rai Saheb Bhim Bahadur Pradhan (the author's father) for the collection of rhododendron seeds and herbariums for leading botanical gardens and herbaria such as Kew, the Sibpore Botanical Garden in Calcutta (India) and the Indian Forest Reserarch and Education Institute at Dehradun (India). Sikkim's population until 1950 was less than 200,000, so there was still not much pressure on the region's plant resources. This suddenly changed, though, with an attack on Sikkim by the Chinese in 1962 in the Nathu-la sector, after they had taken control in Tibet. The Sikkimese Forest Department was ordered to supply thousands of ballis (poles) to shelter the Indian armies that came in to defend Sikkim as India by virtue of a 1950 treaty was the protecting power, and in the process, thousands of rhododendrons were put to axe and once well-wooded forests of rhododendrons from Kyangnosola to Sherathang were almost denuded. Over 50 years have now passed but all our efforts to rehabilitate these impacted areas are still works in progress. The climax forests created by nature over centuries will again take centuries to re-establish!

While I was in the USA studying forestry at Yale, H. Larsen from Tacoma contacted me and asked me to return home to Sikkim in 1968 via Seattle, as he wanted to discuss the rhododendron situation in Sikkim with me. Since there were still six months to go, I suggested he write to my friend Tse Ten Tashi (TTT), an ardent rhododendron enthusiast. Larsen passed on my message to Britt Smith, who contacted TTT. In 1971, Britt and his wife Jean visited Sikkim where they met the Sikkimese King and Queen Hope. With the patronage of the Palace, the specific conservation of rhododendrons in Sikkim was considered, resulting in the later demarcation of rhododendron sanctuaries for their conservation. They were given Class I tree designation, making them as valuable as walnut and mulberry, with punishment for harming so severe that people opted to avoid them. Shortly after, Britt, Jean, Clive Justice and others, termed the 1974 ARS Group, made the first group rhododendron tour, visiting both West Bengal and Sikkim. They blazed the trail as the first nature group to visit Sikkim's wilderness, in what today is known as ecotourism.

Incidentally, while the Group was camping at Sandakphu near Darjeeling, the thought came to open an ARS Chapter. Clive Justice, who edited my book *Sikkim and the World of Rhododendrons* (Pradhan 2010b), reminisced:

> We were left, a dozen of us with no food, furniture or candles, huddling together sitting on the floor with our backs against walls trying to keep warm. A fire of *Rhododendron grande* logs in the fireplace on one wall smokes, giving off little heat and less light. We sang songs and told stories, and tried to keep warm while passing around a bottle of Jack Daniels whisky, brought by Dr. Simons, an urologist in the group. That was the night when after several rounds of the bottle, we conceived of the J.D. Hooker Chapter of the ARS and made Jack Daniels our first member. The rhodo we adopted [to represent the Chaper] was a favourite of the giver of the bourbon, and was the red flowering *R. barbatum*. Ironically it was one of the rhodos that had been named by Dr. Wallich for its bearded stem, petiole and leaf hairs. It had been introduced into England previous to 1847, but had not then yet flowered.

The Chapter was actually formed during Clive's 1991 visit. It was very active for the first 15 years but after the Government adopted a policy of the conservation of natural resources as its main political agenda, the chapter's membership dwindled. However, it's still carrying on as the main advocate for rhododendrons in Sikkim. It has also incorporated members from Bhutan and the Indian State of Meghalaya in the northeast, making it a broader-based organization, but there are still presently only ten members. Older members are gradually leaving and active youngsters today are more attuned to overall biodiversity conservation and the implications of climate change, and the the importance of a specific plant group such as rhododendron is harder for them to visualize. However, there is a small core group that I believe will continue the chapter and its advocacy role.

After the 1974 visit, Britt was again invited and sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to further develop a concept for rhododendron conservation, with a view to attract tourism. It was followed by a visit by Clive Justice, sponsored by Canadian Executive Volunteers Advisors (CESOVA's) as Advisor, with the objective of suggesting landscaping for the proposed tourist visitor centres. In 2000, another ARS visit firmly established the importance of rhododendrons to Sikkim. Sonam Lachungpa, then Head of Forestry, continued to take an active interest in the holding of an International Rhododendron Festival at Singba in 2010. During his tenure, he also made it a point that rhododendron saplings should be well grown in all forest nurseries for their wide distribution. In the present government, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has also given his full support and patronage to protect, conserve and develop rhododendrons to their fullest extent. He has visualized the landscaping of towns and highways where ever possible with rhododendrons. In many villages that are rich in rhododendrons, festivals are now held to attract tourism, along with the showcasing of local handicrafts, culture, etc. West Sikkim is rich in *R. arboreum,* and they attract a large number of visitors from the plains of India during March-April.

Fig. 3. Nuns of Lachung at Singba. Namrata Thapa, Director Handicraft and person behind all festival souvenirs (fifth from left). DFO Nombi Bhutia, forest officer in field organization at extreme right.

Ecotourism has been identified as a Sikkimese engine of economic growth. This has resulted in the establishment of home-stays all over the interior of Sikkim. Trekking routes and trails for bird watchers, butterfly connoisseurs, orchid enthusiasts, dendrology fanatics, ethno-botanists, etc. are also all being developed, traced and re-traced in a hurry and in numbers never earlier visualized. Understandably so, as the flow of visitors already exceeds a million annually and is growing at the rate of 20% per year. Visitors are presently mostly from the vast plains of India, but there is an increasing flow of visitors from outside the country. The latter is giving impetus for the improvement of infrastructure and young, enthusiastic, educated youths are now beginning to find it more lucrative to stay in local communities rather than going after centralised government jobs or even going out of the State. In the process, many Panchyat [the lowest administrative unit of self-governance] activities are being developed. Once sleepy villages with subsistence living are revitalising their culture, dance, music, and traditional costumes. Customs are being revamped and elderly folks are equally enthusiastic to pass on their knowledge to youngsters. Local cuisines are being refined, villages and home stays are being spruced up, and both cleanliness and hygiene are now taken seriously. In most areas, plastic bags are banned, and garbage generally is being cleaned

up. These changes are being led not by the cities and towns but are springing up from the lowest stratas of society. The people are friendly, and when a visitor is asked as to what you like most in Sikkim, the instant answer is often "It's people—so friendly, so helpful and smiling all the time." This could really be our strength, and when coupled with bright red rhodo blooms tucked on a pretty girl's head, it is powerful. There are still some challenges but the changes are well patronized and financed both by the State and Central Governments, and so are firmly on their way. This should further improve the local economy and by giving gainful livelihoods, is sustaining local culture. There are direct relationships between nature, people where they live, and visitors from diverse cultures and communities! Thus, in West Sikkim near the Sikkim-Nepal border, where *R. arboreum* and other large leaved rhodos like *R. hodgsonii and R. falconeri* dominate, people have started annual Rhododendron Festivals where culture, folklore, and handicrafts are all intertwined, creating a real show-case for a week to a fortnight once a year.

Nature conservation and Sikkim's natural heritage of rhododendrons and orchids have also been taken seriously in educational institutions. Essay competitions, art and painting, excursions, bird-watching (even for the blind, with instruction on how to recognise birds by their sound/songs), are just some of the various innovative ideas being practiced. As visualized by late Indian Prime Minister Ragjiv Gandhi, every village is now a self-governing body (called a Panchyat) with wide powers with conservation as one of the main agenda with direct funding. They have taken the challenges to trace the heritages of significant trees, and to establish a maximum number of rhododendrons in villages wherever they are suited basically to attract the visitors.

Importantly, the 850 km^2 (328 $mile^2$) area of Khangchendzonga National Park, promulgated in 1971 by the King basically to protect the rare animal called Shaepi, *Hemitragus jemlaicus* var. *schaferii*, discovered by a German Expedition led by Ernst Schafer in 1938, has been increased to 2700 km^2 (1042 $miles^2$) over the years to protect its exceedingly rich biodiversity. Happily, UNESCO thought it fit to give the park World Heritage Site status in 2016 in the Mixed category because of its rich biodiversity, which is literally worshipped by its peoples of diverse origins. Incidentally, all the rhododendron species known to occur in Sikkim can be found in this reserve.

With respect to azaleas, Sikkim is fortunate to have my son Sailesh Pradhan, who has been deeply interested in azaleas for over 20 years. He has amassed many cultivars from Belgium to Oregon and California to New Plymouth, New Zealand. He has mastered the art of vegetative propagation and is now providing plants to Bhutan and the north-eastern States of India, where they

are used both as container plants and in landscaping. He hybridizes them, with 'Kelly50' being the first registered azalea from India, named after his brother Kailash on his 50th birthday.

While I was in the Pukeiti Rhododendron Garden in New Zealand in the early 1990s, I was thrilled to see myriads of vireyas and was told some are relatively heat tolerant, with many being epiphytes from the jungles of Papua New Guinea and adjacent areas. I remembered this when I happened to be in Oregon in 2008 and had the good fortune to contact E. White Smith, who provided me with 20 cultivars and some species. They are still in pots and have become good sized plants that bloom year round. Cuttings and seeds are being liberally distributed.

With a view to make Sikkim synonymous with rhododendrons, I am now trying to develop hybrids that could better survive in our warmer climates where Sikkimese species do not grow. With a great deal of contacts and browsing of ARS Journal articles, I learnt about the species *R. hyperythrum*, which is native to Formosa (now Taiwan). Being amazed by the many beautiful hybrids already created with this species as a parent, I obtained seeds of crosses with the species from the ARS seed exchange. Around 100 plants in various stages are now growing luxuriantly at my garden at Tadong, where earlier nothing other than *R. formosum* seems to grow and flower. I am hoping that they will come into bloom within a few years and open a wide door in the development of warmth tolerant rhodos for India. However, I shudder when I reflect on Britt telling me "You should not pollute your wonderful [Sikkimese] species", and so once in the past I quietly tucked $300 back in my pocket, the amount I had paid to a vendor to purchase some rhodo hybrids to bring to Sikkim. But I do worry at times whether these *R. hyperythrum* hybrids might hybridize with indigenous Sikkimese species and pollute like Britt had warned!

I have roamed over the rhododendron habitats (Pradhan 2010a) in Sikkim many times during the last 60 years as a forester and I have a good understanding of species' habitats and their associations with other plant species, but even now many surprises occur. Just last year, the rhodo enthusiast Tenzing Lachungpa gave me a branch with trusses of pure white rhododendrons with glistening white indumentums on the leaves. My first impression was *R. arboretum* subsp. *cinnamomeum* var. *roseum* forma *album*, but the glistening white indumentum took my thoughts towards *R. niveum*. It was from a tree growing by itself on a cliff at the lower end of Lachung village at an elevation of 2484 m (8150 ft). Sailesh tried to collect seeds, but there was not a capsule on the plant's 120+ trusses. Identification remains a mystery! Similarly, Peter Jürgens from Germany came across a small bush covered with greenish yellow flowers and identified

Fig. 4. *R. trichocladum*

it as *R. trichocladum*, a new species to Sikkim. There are anomalies as some groups that visited Sikkim thought it to be *R. mekongense*, but Jürgens (2011) also pointed out that after long-term and intensive field observations of *R. trichocladum/mekongense* in its occurrences from eastern Nepal, Tibet, Myanmar (Burma) through to Yunnan, China, Cox and Cox (1997) documented that the specific diagnostic details of these two species change continuously from those of the first species to those of the second species, and so with no contradictory observations available, it must therefore be concluded that these "two species" are in fact only one species that has clinal variation over distance. It must thus be named according to the rules of botany *R. trichocladum* Franch. (1886) and not *R. mekongense* Franch. (1898).

Then there is a patch of a dozen straggly, two m (6.6 ft) high plants of *R. leptocarpum* (previously *R. micromeres*), hidden inside the groves of other rhododendron species at Phedang on the way to Dzongri in west Sikkim, which most travellers are apt to miss. Again this species is there and there only, as it has not been reported from any other places in Sikkim. Sailesh also sent me pictures he took at Sandakphu in Darjeeling, in which I saw an amazingly beautiful bush, only to be told that it is a variation of *R. baileyi*. I am now not as active as I once was but the rhododendrons of Sikkim still haunt me and I take comfort to know we still know too little of their world.

Sikkim is divided into four administrative districts. In the eastern one, rhododendrons are confined between Karponang to Nathu-la, where the elevation varies from 2400 to 4200 m (7855 to 13,780 ft) within a distance of just 30 km (18.6 miles). At the lower elevations, the species are mostly large leaved *R. arboreum, R. falconeri,* and *R. hodgsonii,* and with increasing elevation, *R. barbatum, R. setosum, R. anthopogan* and ultimately *R. nivale*. Untill 1950s, *R. niveum* was also found but none have been seen since 1962 when most of the old growth was cut to provide material to make bunkers for defence when fighting the Chinese. Sikkim receives a very high rainfall, as high as 6350 mm (250 inches) at Kyangnosola, the home of large leaved rhodos and the centre of the distribution of Asiatic primulas, with 30+ species of primulas within just ten km^2 (3.9 miles^2). Unlike habitats in the northern area, plant growth in this region is less and plants are rather shorter in height, but being accessible from Sikkim's capital city of Gangtok, the area is the most explored. The Alpine Plant Sanctuary, 31 km^2 (twelve miles^2) in area, is here, and it is also the area where the Britt and Clive Points (Fig. 1) are located.

Fig. 5. *R. lindleyi.*

In the northern area, rhodos begin to occur from Toong at an altitude of 1600 m (5250 ft), where *R. maddenii* drapes the hillsides untill Tsungthang at an elevaion of 1800 m (5905 ft). Rhodo species are abundant in the Lachen and Lachung River watersheds. At Lachen in the west, there is a small patch of *R.* on rocky hill-slopes, along with *R. dalhousiae* and *R. lindleyi* with occasional

Fig. 6. *R. pendulum.*

R. camelliaeflorum cascading down from large older trees like oaks. They are typically easily located by flower petals strewn on the road-side or trekking route. Large leaved rhododendrons start appearing from Chaten at 2100 m (6890 ft), with occasional patches of *R. triflorum* and *R. lepidotum* in varied colours on the steep hill-sides. The steep hill-sides around the principal village of Lachen (2500m) abound with large leaved rhodos as the undergrowth beneath towering silver fir (*Abies densa)* and spruce (*Picea spinulosa*, previously *P. morindoides*). Then abruptly at Thangu (3300 m, 10,830 ft), smaller species like *R. setosum* and *R. anthopogan* take-over and continue until Donkung, where the Tsho-lhamo Plain extends a good 20 km (12.4 miles) with its host of alpine plants and the ground hugging *R. nivale* being the principal rhododendron. The flowering season varies from late March to late August, and if a visit is not precisely coincided with one's plants of interest, one is likely to miss their floweiring. From late April to the first week of May is the best time to encounter the most flowering plants.

Travelling further west to the Zemu valley, there are large numbers of large leaved rhodo, including *R. hodgsonii* with flower coloration that varies from deep to pale magenta with trusses variable in size. However, this area is still not accessible by road, and penetrating this jungle with its masses of roots along a muddy path can be quite a nightmare. Further still, there is a vast open land and a range of mountains, including Mt. Siniolchu. This 6888 m (22,598 ft) mountain is considered to be particularly aesthetically attractive, having been described by Douglas Freshfield [a 19th century member of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club] as "the most superb triumph

Fig. 7. *R. cinnabarinum.*

of mountain architecture and the most beautiful snow mountain in the world."

Travelling towards the Lachung River, a tributary of the Teesta River, from Tsungthang, the first ten km (six miles) is rather devoid of rhodos, but then large leaved rhodos occur, interspersed with *Daphniphyllum himalayense*, a graceful evergreen Euphorbiaceous plant. *R. lepidotum* in various shades of flower coloration then begins to occasionally occur on hillsides and in some places becomes quite common. Lachung itself, the largest village in north Sikkim, is rather devoid of any large leaved rhodos because of their removal for fuel wood but as one proceeds upland and reaches Yakchey, the Mecca of rhododendrons begins! One of the first rhodo seen is *R.* on old tree logs. Other rhodos like *R. glaucophyllum* appear as rather large bushes and are abundant in open spaces. Yakchey was once considered as prime habitat for *R. niveum* (one of the bluest rhodos and the State tree) and the Rhododendron Niveum Sanctuary was established, only later to be washed away by an avalanche. As one reaches Phuni, *R. thomsonii* is abundant, with varied shades of deep red to pale red. In the bog below the road are many species, but mostly *R. setosum* and *R. lepidotum* grow on raised soil humps to keep themselves out of the water. Next is the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary of 43 km^2 (16.6 $miles^2$). It is a real rhodo paradise, with many species occurring on both sides of the road through it. *R. cinnabarinum* in shades of deep orange to pale yellows with drooping

Fig. 8. *R. decipiens.*

flowers stand out, with *R. campylocarpum* and its natural hybrids competing for space. Along the Lachung River, the path Hooker actually took in 1848, there is a patch of *R. wallichii* with its sticky leaf-buds. Nearby there are a trees of *R. x decipiens*, a natural hybrid of *R. hodgsonii* X *R. hodgsonii*, a real beauty. At far end there is a bush of *R.* × *sikkimese*, a natural hybrid of *R. thomsonii*, possibly with *R. arboreum*, though I still believe it is species in its own right, since Udai Pradhan claimed to have located it at Sandakphu near Darjeeling as well. As one leaves Shingba and enters the Yumthang Valley, there is a meadow carpeted with *Primula denticulata* with a solitary heritage, one-story, stone-walled building with a wide veranda. This is the last rest house (called a Dak Bungalow) where British officers rested for the night, and which served as staging posts for the "dak," the imperial mail service. It is considered a building of significance and was the last rest house before crossing over the Donkya-la (Pass) to Tibet. Now a road goes a futher 20 km (12 miles) up the valley to Memesamdong at 3630 m (11,900 ft) to an alpine meadow with flowers of all sorts and a series of sulphur hot springs. Rhodos there are mostly ground hugging species like *R. setosum* and *R. anthopogon* and *R. nivale*, and this is the highest altitude that rhodos occur in Sikkim.

In western Sikkim, Dzongri has become a much sought after destination for trekkers and rhodo enthusiasts. The large leaf rhodos start appearing near

Fig. 9. *R. lepidotum.*

Yuksam at 1800 m (5905 ft), the village where the road ends and the 30 km (18 mile) trail to Dzongri begins. The first rhodo to appear and flower as early as early April is *R. griffithianum*. It is much used as a parent plant in rhodo hybridization and considering its glistening white, widely opened corolla with a free flowering habit, this is rightly so. Large leaved rhodos do appear sporadically in a rather mixed, well-wooded virgin temperate forest of oaks, laurels, and maples, including the recently discovered stand of the ancient tree *Tetracentron*

R. edgewothii.

'Happy Days'.

'Ellamere'.

'John Herrens'.

'Mystique'.

Fig. 10. Four heat tolerant azaleas to be introduced to India.

sinense (syn. *T. sinense* var. *himalensis*) at Tsokha by Bleddyn and Sue Wynn Jones of the UK in 2013. The rhodos display their best from Tsokha upwards with the first interesting species being *R. leptocarpum* at Phedang, an elusive 4 m (13.1 ft) high plant with nodding bunches of yellow flowers with reflexed petals. Following a three km (1.8 mile) climb, the plateau at Dzongri appears with alpine plants. *R. baileyi* with its reddish-purple flowers occurs amidst low growing *R. setosum*. *R. anthopogon* and *R. lepidotum* dominate the plateau, although on the western side across the headwaters of the Prekchu (river) one can see

verdant forests ablaze with large leaved rhodos in the midst of tall trees. After descending from Dzongri on the way to Gochela, the last destination, one encounters again large leaved rhodos such as *R. hodgsonii* and *R. lanatum*, with its thick indumentum. *R. hodgsonii* and *R. grande* are the prominent vegetation, but here they are not as towering as those in north Sikkim. The trails then climbs up to the alpine at Gochela at 4200 m (13,780 ft), the highest mountain pass, before descending deep into the impenetrable gorge of the Tolung-chu in north Sikkim.

The Future

Pawan Chamling, current Chief Minister of Sikkim and an ardent nature lover, has envisioned a grand Biodiversity Park in Tendong in south Sikkim. We are urging him to set aside a space to accommodate all the rhododendron species native to Asia that could survive in that area's climatic environment. Establishment of another showcase Rhododendron Park in northern Sikkim for alpine species is also being encouraged, as this could catapult Sikkim to the top in the arena of endemic Rhododendron Species Gardens!

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Part 1. Rhododendron Organisations in Countries with American Rhododendron Society Chapters

Rhododendrons in The Netherlands and Belgium

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The Beginning

The Rhododendron Society for the Dutch and the Flemish (RSDB), the regional name for the Dutch Chapter of the ARS, was established in Boskoop, The Netherlands, on May 11, 1991. The society was founded by a few rhododendron enthusiasts following an initiative of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS). The ARS asked Tijs Huisman, a member of another chapter of the ARS for several years, to investigate the possibilities for establishing an European ARS chapter in The Netherlands. Soon, the Dutch Chapter had enough members to go ahead. Tijs Huisman was chair for the first nine years, and during this period the society grew to some 125 members. Tijs Huisman is a renowned rhododendron breeder and is now the honorary chairman of the society. His first successor was Prof. Lou Traas, a highly knowledgeable rhododendron collector, who owns an outstanding rhododendron garden. Subsequently, chairs of the society have been Prof. Arno de Schepper, Dr. Wilbert Hetterscheid and Henk Borsje. Henk Borsje had earlier been a president of the ARS's Massachusetts Chapter.

In its early days, the Dutch Chapter met for its annual conventions in Hotel Dreijeroord in Oosterbeek. This hotel is internationally known as it had been a stage of hostilities in the battle of Arnhem during World War II, and is a destination to many war veterans. The Dutch Chapter continued to use the hotel for most of its conventions, until it sadly closed its doors a few years ago. Mr. Van der Straaten, the owner of the hotel and a member of the society, had been an exceptional host to our conventions.

Fig. 1. Belmonte Arboretum (Wageningen, the Netherlands). *Rhododendron* 'Blue Tit Major'.

The National Rhododendron Collection at Belmonte Arboretum

In 2003 under Prof. Traas' chairmanship, the society got the opportunity to build a collection of species and hybrid rhododendrons within the Belmonte Arboretum. This arboretum is located near the Dutch city of Wageningen, centrally positioned in the Netherlands. It has a large collection of trees and shrubs, and is particular famous for its collection of Rosaceae. Its European climate zone is about 7 (-17.8° to -12.2° C; 0° to 10.4° F), similar to the American plant hardiness Zone 7. At that time, the arboretum was part of the botanical gardens of the University of Wageningen. Sadly, the botanical gardens were closed by the University in 2009, but the future of the arboretum in Wageningen was later secured in 2011, when Wageningen University, Geldersch Landschap (the Gelderland Foundation for Landscape and Castles), and the Wageningen Arboretum Foundation agreed to manage the gardens between them.

The rhododendron collection (Figs. 1,2) at Belmonte has expanded over the years, and there are now about 250 different species and more than 500 different hybrid rhododendrons there. Several of the society's members have been closely involved in the project and it is still managed by the society's collection committee in close collaboration with the arboretum's managers. The

Fig. 2. Belmonte Arboretum (Wageningen, the Netherlands).

collection is now so beautiful that it is almost justifiable to ask for an entrance fee. However, the baroness who owned the place in the 1930s stipulated in her will that an entrance fee to access the grounds would never be allowed. People were generous in those days! Further reading on the rhododendron collection at Belmonte can be found in an article written by the Dutch Chapter's past president Dr. Wilbert Hetterscheid (2014). The article is also available online on our website (see link below). Funding for the rhododendron collection has came entirely from private donations, and the Belmonte arboretum is now a place of beauty and tranquility for many.

The Dutch Chapter Today

Today, the Dutch Chapter has a little over 100 members, with most living in the Netherlands and in Belgium. Only a few members have a professional relationship with rhododendrons, including a number of Dutch and Belgian rhododendron nurseries and several public botanical gardens. As usual, there are some members who have a more than healthy affection for these plants. However, most of our members have only a general interest in plants and primarily like to admire beautiful gardens.

The Dutch Chapter is now facing a challenge that is being encountered by many gardening societies in modern times, i.e., aging members and not enough new members joining. This may be attributed to the fact that many people nowadays have both limited garden space and limited free time. A big challenge is thus how to rekindle public interest for rhododendrons. Can a rhododendron become a fashion plant again, or not? The "next generation" need to be made aware that because of the great variety of rhododendrons available, they can be a very easy and beautiful plant to grow in any garden, no matter its size or today's fashions. Many people may erroneously think of

Fig. 3. Hof ter Saksen (Beveren, Belgium).

rhododendrons as only relatively big, unbecoming, boring plants with purple flowers, which will take up all available space in one's garden. Well, some can be quite big, but if you choose the right plant for the right place, you will have something beautiful in your outdoor environment that is simply special.

Next to learning from each other, the main focus of the Dutch Chapter is to be a sociable (in Dutch: "gezellig") society for people who want to spend some time outside and experience healthy fresh air after often spending their working days in drab office buildings. The society issues a periodical with the society's agenda, tour reports and other articles, many submitted by members. The magazine is called *RhodoMania* and is issued three to four times per year. Acquiring sufficient articles continues to be an ongoing challenge for the editors, and printing costs are a heavy burden on the society's budget. Consequently, we also offer *RhodoMania* via email as an alternative to sending a printed copy through the post. Most members, however, still prefer to receive a hard copy deliver to their home!

The Dutch Chapter organizes a foreign tour once a year and has several one-day, more local excursions. These one-day excursions often take place in

the summer months in order to be responsive to our many members who have an interest in plants in general rather than strictly in rhododendrons. These one-day excursions are well attended by many members and most visits are made to gardens in the Netherlands and in Belgium. International tours to date have been made to Italy; Ireland; Germany; Switzerland; Poland and the Czech Republic and Scotland, Wales and England, and are highly regarded and fondly remembered by all who participate.

Each year, the Dutch Chapter organizes one members' "contact day" and one annual convention. These were usually held in the Hotel Dreijeroord but sometimes in other locations throughout the Netherlands and Belgium. Locations have been the Von Gimborn Arboretum in Doorn (2015); Arboretum Trompenburg in Rotterdam (2016); a rhododendron nursery in the Dutch

Fig. 4. Tour of the Rhododendron Society 2017.

Fig. 5. M. Koster & Sons, ca. 1910 (Boskoop, the Netherlands).

Fig. 6. Catalogue 1897-1898 M. Koster & Sons.

province of Drenthe (2015); and in Park Rivierenhof in Antwerp, Belgium (2014, Fig. 3). In 2017, the members' contact day was held for the first time in Arboretum Belmonte (Fig. 4), at hopefully the exact time when both the rhododendrons and the crab apples are in full bloom. At these events, we try to get a good speaker for an interesting and entertaining day. Ideally, this is followed by a guided tour through a local arboretum or nearby garden.

In 2015, the Dutch Chapter hosted an international tour from the German Rhododendron Society (DRG). In 2018 our society will host a pre-tour for the American Rhododendron Society's (ARS) annual convention in Bremen, Germany. The ARS pre-tour will show our many

international guests the top gardening attractions in The Netherlands, such as the famous flowering bulbs at Keukenhof, which will be at its prime at the time of visit; the historic windmills of De Zaansche Schans; the Belmonte Aboretum and the nearby Von Gimborn arboretum. The pre-tour will also pay a visit to Mr. Traas' excellent rhododendron garden and to the royal palace of Het Loo, once the home of William III, also know as William of Orange, Stadtholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel in the Dutch Republic from 1672, and King of England, Ireland, and Scotland from 1689, until his death in 1702. The gardens of Het Loo have been fully restored to its late 17th century grandeur.

Other Initiatives

A joint initiative of the Rhododendron Society and the Dutch Dendrology Society (NDV) at the Belmonte Arboretum is the organization of an annual plant market in the last weekend of April. The first plant market was held in April, 2009, for the promotion of primarily rhododendrons and other woody plants. Despite its success, the market was not held in 2016 but hopefully, a new market will be organized at the Belmonte Arboretum in the coming years, as Belmonte is a perfect spot for such an event.

Some of our members are enthusiastic cross-pollinator breeders of rhododendrons, and some of the resulting plants have won international awards. One of our late members also grew rhododendrons from seed in the back room of a small apartment, but with limited space, these plants, gratefully, soon found their way to the gardens of other members. Another member recently collected rhododendron seed during his expeditions to the Himalayas, but the plants grown from these seeds will only be identified when the first flowers appear. Finally, a couple of members regularly contribute to the rhododendron seed exchanges of both the ARS and the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK.

Some of our members have initiated other personal projects, such as the database website www.hirsutum.info. This database is widely used throughout the international rhododendron community, but unfortunately its owner has momentarily retired from this project and so it is currently not being updated. Nevertheless, it is still a great source of information about rhododendrons.

Some Historic Highlights by Dutch Botanists

Outside the scope of the Dutch Chapter, Dutch plant nurseries used to play a major part in rhododendron breeding, growing and above all their selling. The town of Boskoop has been renowned for its (fruit) tree nurseries since the Middle Ages, exporting their plants to countries such as England, France, Germany and the United States. In 2015, the Netherlands was the second

largest exporter of agricultural products in the world, with a value of 81.3 billion euros ($US 86.8 billion), of which 10% was floriculture.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hybridization of rhododendrons came into fashion in Boskoop, with nurseries such as M. Koster & Zonen (Figs. 5, 6), H. den Ouden, Vuyk & Van Nes, L.J. Entz and Felix & Dijkhuis all hybridizing rhododendrons. Their creations were highly regarded internationally, and include 'Marinus Koster' (Fig. 7, Koster, 1937); 'Earl of Athlone' (C.B. van Nes, 1933); 'Van Nes Sensation' (Fig. 8, C.B. van Nes, 1928); 'Mrs P. den Ouden' (den Ouden, 1912); 'Doctor H.C. Dresselhuys' (den Ouden, 1920) and the famous 'Britannia' (Fig. 9, C.B. van Nes, 1921). In 1902, J.H. van Straaten van Nes, the owner of the Nursery firm C.B. van Nes, acquired a large number of seedling *Rhododendron griffithianum* hybrids from the Royal Porcelain Factory in Berlin, where they were used as a decoration for the china pottery made there. Almost every plant obtained perished during the winter of 1910-1911, but twelve seedlings survived and these were used in the hybridization program of C.B. van Nes to achieve a hardier rhododendron. 'Britannia' struck gold at the Chelsea Flower Show in London in 1937, where three plants were sold for one pound each, a relatively large sum then (then the equivalent of five US dollars per plant, which would be equivalent to $US 84 today).

Fig. 7. 'Marinus Koster' (Leith Hill Gardens, United Kingdom).

Fig. 8. 'Van Nes Sensation' (C.B. van Nes, 1928).

Fig. 9. 'Britannia' (Van Nes, C.B., 1921).

During one of our tours to England, a retired Boskoop nurseryman was

Fig. 10. Domain Groenenberg (Vlezenbeek, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, Belgium) - collection Hardy Ghent Azaleas.

Fig. 11. Domain Groenenberg (Vlezenbeek, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, Belgium) - collection Hardy Ghent Azaleas.

Fig. 12. Domain Groenenberg (Vlezenbeek, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw) - collection Hardy Ghent Azaleas. *R.* 'Freya' (bred by Smet-Duvivier. L. de, St. Amandsberg, Belgium, 1888).

discussing a Boskoop cultivar seen growing in a garden, and stated that he had seen the woman, after whom the cultivar was named after, in a supermarket just the last weekend; the garden owner was very impressed! Today, however, there are no longer any commercial specialist rhododendron breeders left in Boskoop.

Despite the international reputation of Boskoop, the Belgians were the first to hybridize rhododendrons. Petrus Mortier, a baker from Ghent, produced deciduous, fragrant and highly colorful azaleas in the 1820s, the first Hardy Ghent Azaleas, ancestors of the Knap Hill/Exbury and Rothschild deciduous azaleas (Figs. 10-14. His crosses were made from the newly introduced American native azaleas and *Azalea pontica* (now *R. luteum*). Most of the original Hardy

Ghent Azaleas were believed lost to cultivation until a few Belgian members of our society personally began to hunt for them in old English, Belgian and German gardens. They were quite successful and have brought several "lost cultivars" back into cultivation. Imagine yourself going through hidden and derelict parts of grand English gardens to find an unloved and unknown cultivar that you know had been "lost" for ages, but were in fact highly prized plants, first shown at flower festivals but long forgotten. In the very area these plants originally came from, a nursery was recently growing these old time favourites, but alas, this nursery has now closed due to the owners retirement.

There always has been some rhododendron competition between Belgium and the Netherlands. To "beat" the Belgians, *R. indicum* (or *R. obtusum*) was described for the first time scientifically by the German botanist, Engelbert Kaempfer, who worked for the Dutch East Indian Company in Japan, where he found this species around 1692. Then, the Dutch were then the only foreigners allowed to trade, but were kept at a safe distance on a small island called Deshima. A few of today's hybrids of this species of either Dutch or Belgian origin are 'Mothers' Day' (Van Hecke, Belgium, 1932); 'Blue Danube' (Van Hecke, Belgium, 1965); 'Arabesk' (Vuyk van Nes, 1970, Boskoop) and 'White Lady' (L.J. Endtz, Boskoop). The Japanese evergreen azaleas have been undeservedly undervalued in our rhododendron collections, and I believe these

Fig. 13. Domain Groenenberg (Vlezenbeek, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw) - collection Hardy Ghent Azaleas. *R.* 'Raphael de Smet'.

Fig. 14. Azalea collection in a private garden, the Netherlands.

are truly great and beautiful plants that should be more widely grown.

More Dutch rhododendron fame, even earlier in history, was made by Carolus Clusius, a French born botanist working for Leiden University, the oldest university in the Netherlands. He described the first rhododendron scientifically, *R. hirsutum*, in the late 16th century. Other famous botanists working for Dutch companies have been Thunberg (Swedish) and Von Siebold (German), both working in Japan. Thunberg first described *Acer palmatum* and Von Siebold brought the first of these plants to Leiden. *A. palmatum* combines beautifully with the Hardy Ghent Azaleas and Japanese evergreen azaleas. The Dutch/German botanist Carl Blume, director of the botanical gardens of Buitenzorg in the former Dutch East Indies (today Bogor, Indonesia) during the 1820s, named the vireya rhododendrons after his friend Julien-Joseph Virey.

Back in America, President George Washington was an enthusiastic gardener who brought *R. periclymenoides* into his garden. It was commonly called by Dutch settlers 'Pinxterbloom'*, as it flowered around Pentecost, and Pinksteren

is Dutch for Pentecost [which refers to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1–31].

The Future

It is good to look backwards, but we also have to look forward too. In order to popularize rhododendrons for Dutch gardens, we may have to look specifically at the Hardy Ghent Azaleas or the Japanese evergreen azaleas, as these grow slowly and tend to stay fairly small for at least the first ten years. Deciduous azaleas can have a wonderful fall color and ware of a much more manageable size plants in modern gardens than are many of the larger rhododendron hybrids. One of our enthusiastic members happens to be a great supporter of dwarf rhododendron species for rock gardens and small town gardens, and a challenge will be to determine how our society can increase their popularity and availability.

Publicly accessible botanical gardens throughout Belgium and the Netherlands with extensive collections of rhododendrons are mentioned on our website. These gardens help to create greater public awareness of rhododendrons and can encourage them to take an interest in rhododendrons and in plants in general. These collections should be efficiently promoted in every available modern communications platform, and using social media is important to reach the public.

Our Recent Celebration

On September 24, 2016, the Dutch Chapter celebrated its 25th anniversary at its annual convention in Boskoop, the historic home of Dutch rhododendron breeding. The event was very successful and was enjoyed by all. We visited the tree nursery museum in Boskoop (Boomkwekerijmuseum) and had High Tea at the renowned Esveld nursery, where Mr. Cor van Gelderen, the nursery's owner, gave a very enjoyable tour through his famous Aceratum and proudly showed us the oldest *Acer shirasawanum* grown outside Japan, an original plant from Von Siebold's Japanese collections. He has recently begun again to grow rhododendrons on a small scale.

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The Dutch Chapter's website is www.rhodovereniging.nl and can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/rhododendronvereniging.

Part 1. Rhododendron Organisations in Countries with American Rhododendron Society Chapters

Rhododendron Species Conservation Group, United Kingdom

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All photos by the author

Introduction

For many years, some members of the Executive Board of the Scottish Rhododendron Society (SRS), the Scottish Chapter of the ARS, had expressed a desire for the chapter to take an active role in the conservation of rhododendron species. However, this proposal failed on more than one occasion to achieve the necessary support required, due to concerns that such activities carried a significant financial risk that might adversely impact on the chapter's long-term viability. There was also a view that such a venture would never get off the ground. By April, 2006, these same members had lost patience with the lack of support from the SRS and decided to establish an entirely separate organisation, the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group (RSCG), a registered charity, with a remit both to establish out-based rhododendron collections to conserve wild collected species that are becoming rare and are likely to be lost in British gardens and to support the conservation of in-situ collections that are endangered in the wild. This organisation has been very successful in meeting its original objectives, its membership continues to gradually expand, and a significant number of SRS members now support the RSCG.

The Work of the RSCG

In the city of Stirling in Scotland's Central Belt, the Trustees of the Gargunnock Estate offered the Group the use of a large part of their Walled Garden to enable the Group to propagate and grow-on rhododendron species to a robust size for planting in out-based collections. An area of the Walled Garden was then fenced, a large poly-tunnel was erected and large raised beds were created to grow-on plants from specific rhododendron subsections that

Fig. 1. There are many old rhododendron gardens in Scotland that the RSCG has yet to survey, and this example is the Auchendarroch Estate, sometimes referred to as Oakfield, a very old Campbell garden located close to Lochgilphead in Argyll, which has only become accessible in recent years. Members are seen carrying out a Preliminary Survey of the rhododendrons and specimen trees in the spring of 2016. The plantings are mainly original introductions dating from around 1850 onwards and there are many very large, old mature species that will require a more detailed survey in due course. Meanwhile, both the owner of the Estate and her Head Gardener have become members of the Group.

were identified as being most appropriate for placement in designated out-based collections. More recently, a second area of land on a croft at Glencoe in the West Highlands has been prepared for growing-on species. A poly-tunnel has been erected on the site there and some plants will be transferred to this facility later in 2017.

In 2010, Fife District Council requested assistance from the Group to identify the existing plantings, provide cultural advice, and make recommendations for clearance of large stands of very old *R. ponticum*, shrubs and self-seeded trees at Balbirnie Park in Markinch, a 416 acre (168 ha) designed landscape that originally belonged to the Balfour Family, whose planting of trees and rhododendrons date back to the original introductions of wild-collected seed sent back by the early-plant collectors. *R. ponticum* was planted to create shelter and to segregate various areas of the garden, whilst other rhododendron stands resulted from rootstock suckers overtaking the early hybrid plantings, probably resulting from the depletion of gardening staff during and after WWI and

WWII. In what became a three-year project, the Group gradually surveyed rhododendrons that were spread in the woodland areas over the whole of the estate, whilst the Parks Department of Fife Council carried out the RSCG's recommendations, including the provision of robust name plaques fixed to heavy wooden stumps and the production of an attractive set of large-scale coloured maps of the entire garden. This effort has demonstrated what can be achieved by two organisations working together in the public domain to restore a major garden for the benefit of a local community that took a keen interest in the progress of the work, and in doing so, has since attracted visitors from all over of Scotland.

In practice, the work at Balbirnie Park mirrors one of the key elements of the Group's "mission," namely to carry out an ongoing programme of surveying plant collections in old rhododendron gardens, of which a listing of 100 has been compiled in Scotland, and there are many more in Northern England. These surveys are undertaken at two "levels." Firstly, a preliminary survey is carried out to ascertain if the garden contains an important collection of species that are of wider interest, and secondly, if a more thorough survey

Fig. 2. One of the Group's main aims is to plant rhododendron species in a climatic and locational environment that replicates where they grow in the wild. Here at Baravalla, the West Coast Garden of 'The Two Peters', Mike Thornley and Peter Cox inspect plants of the Maddenia Sub-section, which are performing well after being planted in the crevices of a rocky outcrop.

Fig. 3. To support the establishment of 'Out-based Collections', it is essential to have a nursery area where a wide-range of species can be grown-on to a sufficient size, so they are able to survive when planted-out in a wild woodland garden. Here at Gargunnock Walled Garden, near Stirling, the nursery is under development in 2013 and has since provided almost 200 plants to create new collections.

is required, then the collection is studied in detail, with the plants identified, tagged, and recorded in terms of condition, size, form and GPS location. Subsequently, the information is entered onto an Excel database with a field-marker to indicate those that are important "finds," as these plants may be needed for future propagation by the Group. Later, the, Excel spreadsheets are downloaded on to a specially partitioned section of the BGBase database of the RBGE to become a permanent record.

Around ten miles (16 km) north of Benmore Botanic Garden is one of the out-based gardens of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). Located in Argyll, the Glenbranter Estate was an early acquisition by the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) in 1921. By 1924, the RBGE had come to an agreement with the FCS to utilise areas of the deep Branter Glen for a trial site to plant rhododendrons raised in the RBGE nurseries from wild collected seed from the early plant collectors prior to and after WW1. Hundreds of species were planted around the glen with a view to rating their performance in clean climatic conditions away from the smoke and soot then in the city of Edinburgh. Trial plantings of specimen conifers also took place in the same place and timeframe for similar reasons.

In 1928, the FCS was offered use of the Benmore Estate after it was donated to the government by the Younger family, and in turn, the FCS offered the RBGE use of the large areas of gardens surrounding Benmore House to use as a more convenient outstation than was Glenbranter. However, after WW1, the RBGE nurseries were overflowing with plants raised from wild collected seed, so it was decided to abandon the plantings at Glenbranter and make a fresh start at what became the Younger Botanic Garden, later renamed the Benmore Botanic Garden. The plantings at Glenbranter have thus been left abandoned now for over 80 years. Recently, a dedicated public walkway has been constructed by the FCS that encircles the deep, still stunningly-attractive glen and its many waterfalls. In 2012, the RSCG carried out a survey of the original Glenbranter trial plantings and came to the conclusion that many of the original plants were still extant and that the collection should be restored and enhanced as part of a conservation project. A joint project was established in 2013 under an MOU Partnership between the FCS and the RSCG, and permission was given for replanting where necessary in areas around the glen. Over the past four years, many rhododendrons from subsections Fortunea,

Fig. 4. The Group's first 'Out-based Collection' was established at Glenbranter, around ten miles north of Benmore Botanic Garden in Argyll, and the original outstation of the RBGE. A joint project is being taken forward with the Forestry Commission Scotland to restore and replant the original outstation, and here in 2013 the initial batch of 30 species are being planted in groups of three of the same species. Since 2013 a further three batches of large-leaved subsections have been planted and all are performing well alongside a walkway open to the public.

Fig. 5. Scotland's most remote major rhododendron collection is the high-elevation plantings on the Corrour Estate, which commenced in 1910 on a mountainside adjacent to Rannoch Moor. Here a wide selection of species, including large-leaved plants, thrives in an extremely cold and windy hostile environment. Looking out across Loch Ossian in 2013 at an elevation of 1650ft (502 m), prior to the commencement of a restoration project, are plantings that include *R.decorum, R.orbiculare* together with many tall self-seeded hybrids.

Grandia, Falconera and Auriculata have been planted, and these are growing fast and performing well. It is intended to plant a large batch of hardy subsection Maddenia on a location overhanging the main waterfall in the future when the ground has been prepared. This initiative is another win:win project in the public domain that is attracting many visitors each spring.

In 2013, the Group was asked if it would provide practical assistance in connection with the proposed restoration of a major rhododendron collection at Corrour, a particularly remote estate in the West Highlands, a few miles east of Ben Nevis, Scotland's highest mountain, and close to Fort William. Corrour is a 40,000 acre (16,187 ha) shooting estate, which is renowned for its pioneer high-elevation forest plantings on exposed moorlands in the early 1900s. It has a major species collection of 3000 rhododendrons, planted between 1910 and the onset of hostilities in WWII in 1939. These are planted

on the side of a mountain at an elevation of 1250-1650 ft (381-502 m) on boggy moorland, which endures a harsh winter every year. Nevertheless, and somewhat inexplicably to many rhododendron enthusiasts, large-leaved and other relatively temperate species perform well and flower there every year. For about the past 50 years, the rhododendron collection has not been maintained, resulting in a large numbers of self-sown rhododendron seedlings and tree saplings growing-up in the midst of the early rhododendron plantings. This was because of a lack of gardening staff in the aftermath of WW II, resulting from the high losses of manpower in the hostilities. All able-bodied men were directed by the then Government into employment that had an economic benefit to the Nation and no able-bodied men were permitted to return from the services and work to maintain gardens and forests on private property. This was the situation for many years, and it caused immense frustration at estates that had lost their staff to go to war. The RSCG is now four years into a major seven-year project to clear the self-sown seedlings and saplings, to arrange for over-mature birch trees to be taken down where necessary, and for drainage ditches to be cleared or re-dug to get as much rainfall as is practicable off the

Fig. 6. For over 50 years the Corrour collection of over 3000 species and a couple of hundred of Sir John Stirling Maxwell's own hybrids were left to their own devices. In 2013 the RSCG were asked for assistance to help save and restore the collection, which by any standards is a major project. Here in 2014 a team of four, including Dr. David Chamberlain, are evaluating a "compartment" of plants, comprised of both species and self-seeded hybrids, and these are being identified, catalogued, and classified for retention, remedial pruning, or removal.

Fig. 7. Over the past three years the RSCG has established a high-elevation "Out-based Collection" at Corrour of the Taliensia subsection, as this subsection does not perform well at low-elevation in Scotland. Here in 2015 a batch of 30 plants have been unloaded and are being readied into groups of three to be uplifted and carried up to an elevation of 1550ft (402 m) for planting in wet conditions on the mountainside. These planting are regularly monitored and are performing well to date.

mountainside. Before restoration work began, the collection was divided into compartments, with all the species and self-sown seedlings numerically tagged, recorded, and the records entered on the estate's database. This permitted traceability for all the subsequent activities taking place. Coloured tapes were used to identify the status of each plant, whether it was an original specimen to be retained, whether it required remedial pruning work, or if it was a self-sown seedling to be removed.

The Group is also now three years into the establishment of an "out-based" subsection Taliensia collection at Corrour. Experience over many years suggested that subsection Talensia does not perform well in Scotland, but it may be that this subsection will perform better at a higher elevation where there are clearly defined seasons. To date, the plantings have been located in several compartments at different elevations, and regular monitoring indicates that all are growing-on well.

More recently, the Group has identified several other private woodland gardens that are geographically diverse with differing climatic conditions in both Scotland and Cumbria, and we are making progress in seeking agreements to establish additional "out-based collections" at these locations. Unique rhododendron subsection plantings have been allocated to each garden that consider which species the Group expects to thrive at these locations, and we have now commenced to source plants.

Conferences, Garden Tours and Publications:

In 2013, the RSCG organised and managed the International Rhododendron Conservation Conference held in Edinburgh, with the support of the RBGE and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) It used *The Red List of Rhododendrons* (Gibbs *et al.* 2011) as a discussion document to set out an action plan for the future. Key players in the conservation field within the UK attended the Conference, together with speakers and delegates from all over the rhododendron world, to discuss issues relating to both in-situ and ex-situ conservation, with the aim of seeking commonality of approach in both aims and objectives for the future.

The RSCG organises a two-day Spring Conference each year, with keynote speakers, often at a venue with interesting and historical gardens that have connotations relating to plant conservation. The 2017 Spring Conference was centred at the Ardkinglas Estate on the upper reaches of Loch Fyne, and the lectures took place in the historic mansion house. A tour of the gardens, which date back to the 13th Century and encompass major rhododendron and tree collections, was included in the programme. Our 2018 Spring Conference is scheduled to take place on the historic Mount Stuart Estate on the Isle of Bute in Argyll, and the lectures will take place in the main house with the theme *The Introduction of Rhododendrons into Scottish Gardens*. There are extensive gardens, plants and trees on the estate, raised from early collections, and there will be a couple of conducted tours during the conference.

Every year in early-October, the RSCG and SRS host a Friday-to-Sunday Joint Autumn Conference with a wide range of lectures by keynote speakers, a plant auction, an evening dinner and garden tours. We often use a garden venue for the event, so that the surrounding landscape enhances the conference itself, and the arrangements are similar to an ARS Western Regional Convention, but with fewer delegates. These conferences are consistently well supported and registration charges are reasonable.

A twice-yearly newsletter is published by the Group, which provides details of up-coming activities, together with short articles relating to the Group's conservation work and topical items of interest. One issue each year contains in-depth articles by that year's keynote conference speakers.

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Part 1. Rhododendron Organisations in Countries with American Rhododendron Society Chapters

The Scottish Rhododendron Society

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All photos by the author

Introduction

At the outset it important to be aware there is a major difference between North America and Europe in regard to the establishment of rhododendron societies. The coming together of the Rhododendron Society of Canada (RSC) and the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) resulted in the ARS covering

Fig. 1. Each spring the SRS organises a five to seven-day tour of gardens in a specific region of the U.K., or occasionally to Ireland or Mainland Europe. In 2013 the Chapter visited a great selection of gardens in South East England, one of which was Exbury, seen here in a group photograph with our host, Lionel de Rothschild, on the extreme right.

the whole of the USA and Canada, except in Quebec (see Bélisle 2016) for some enthusiasts with a specific interest in azaleas, who are represented by the mainly east coast Azalea Society of America (ASA) (see Stump 2016). Each of the countries in Europe, where an interest in rhododendrons exists, has an entirely independent rhododendron society (see *Rhododendrons International*, Vol. 1 and this volume), although some members in most of these societies have formed associated ARS chapters. However, perhaps more relevant is that there are political differences between the rhododendron societies in Europe due to language, culture, and historical aspects related to the impact of past hostilities, which still tend to hamper relationships at a formal level, although informal relations at a personal level are typically fine. For these reasons, the rhododendron societies on the European mainland tend to be autonomous. The result has been that attempts over many years by ARS representatives, including the author, to encourage the establishment of effective working relationships between the European rhododendron societies have foundered, as the individual organisations have consistently maintained their independence to "do their own thing."

Fig. 2. Each of our tours encompasses many different types of garden, which provides members with ideas for what is practicable in the wider landscape, and forms a good basis for improving their own gardens. Sometimes gardens can be unique, as seen at Belsay Hall, near Newcastle-on-Tyne, during a visit to Northumbria in 2009. Here the rhododendron plantings were made in a large, deep quarry; used to extract the stone to construct the Hall and houses in the local village.

Back in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, enthusiasts with interests in rhododendrons and azaleas in Britain could pursue their interests by becoming a member of

Fig. 3. No matter which gardens the Chapter visits, we always find something of interest. Here in the woodland garden at Edlingham Hall, near Alnwick in Northumbria in 2009, two members are in deep discussion about the identity and form of a particular rhododendron species. It is unusual to find a species garden hidden away in a valley in the midst of the fields and countryside, many miles from a centre of population.

the London-based Royal Horticultural Society Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group (RCMG, see Hayward 2016), which was organised and run largely by members in the south of England. Accordingly, the Group meetings and competitive flower shows tended to be held in London, which presented a major challenge to members in the north of England and Scotland. To participate, they needed to cut their show entries early and to take meticulous care with packing and caring for rhododendron trusses and sprays in crates that were despatched south by overnight train, so enabling them to arrive in good condition for entry into the highly competitive, early or late-Spring, shows held at Vincent Square in Westminster.

This became further complicated with the passing years, as an underlying bias gradually developed to award classes to entries submitted by key major gardens in the south of England, a situation that caused frustration to members with high-quality competitive entries from northern England and Scotland. It also led to an ongoing debate as to why certain classes were regularly awarded to gardens in the south, a situation that underpinned many of the aspects relating

to what is traditionally referred to as the "North:South Divide." Consequently, by the 1960s, a separate Scottish Rhododendron Show was being held in mid-April at the McLennan Galleries in Glasgow, in association with the Scottish Rock Garden Club, and under the auspices of the National Trust for Scotland. By 1965, the London Show had 30 classes for hybrids and 54 classes for species, whereas the Glasgow Show tended to be species orientated, with 21 classes for species and only six classes for hybrids. In Northern England and Scotland, there was little interest in hybridisation programmes, other than at a handful of gardens on the West Coast. Perhaps more fundamental in regard to hybrids was that many of the well-known crosses made in the temperate gardens around the west and south coasts of England do not perform well, or struggle to survive, at locations on the west coast of Cumbria and Scotland, so there was a need for more robust strains of hybrids to be developed for these gardens. Another contributing factor was that the rhododendrons of northern England and Scotland flower two to three weeks later than those in the south,

Fig. 4. Many larger estates can be somewhat remotely located on the edge of the moors, and yet encompass a wide range of botanical interests that have been inherited from previous generations. Lilburn Towers, near Rothbury in Northumbria, is a typical example, which besides having an extensive woodland and bog garden, also has a large working walled garden, a large Edwardian-type greenhouse for growing fruit and flowers for the house, and a spectacular conservatory adjoining the main house.

Fig. 5. When the opportunity arises we invite overseas visitors to join our panel of Judges at Scotland's National Rhododendron Show. Here in 2010 Gordon Wylie got to present the awards, and is presenting a trophy to Peter Cox of Glendoick, after assisting Dr. David Chamberlain and Alan Clark with the judging at the Show, held at Gargunnock, near Stirling.

so a rhododendron show timed for late-April or early-May was too early for many of the hybrids, and some species, to be in flower in northern gardens, so this also curtailed the opportunity of northerners in placing entries in the London shows.

In the early 1980s, these on-going concerns eventually led to the founding of the Scottish Rhododendron Society (SRS), which occurred in February 1983, mainly by a group of owners of well-known gardens that had a wide expertise in rhododendron species and forestry. Following some discussions with the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), the SRS became the Scottish Chapter of the ARS in August 1983, initially with a membership of 20. Over the next few years, chapter membership grew quickly and charitable tax status with the IRS was obtained. Following the formation of the SRS, an uneasy relationship developed with the RCMG that has continued over the years and, despite several attempts by the SRS to establish a viable working relationship between the two organisations, no formal discussions have taken place. From

the SRS's perspective, the RCMG seem to be been interested in taking over the SRS and thereby ceasing a UK chapter linkage with the ARS.

The Challenges of a Scattered Membership

By 1995, SRS membership had increased to 257, inclusive of Associate members, and as the SRS was the only solely English speaking chapter outside of North America, the ARS sometimes allocated new English-speaking offshore members from other parts of the world to the chapter. Thus, by the mid-1990s, the chapter had members from as far away as Venezuela, South Africa, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, together with a scattering from, Iceland, Ireland, and the European mainland, while its UK membership was split equally across both sides of the Scottish Border.

With the SRS members having a wide geographical distribution, some members have to travel up to 500 miles (800 km) to attend a chapter meeting or the rhododendron show, so it has been important to make our events viable for members travelling long-distances and requiring hotel accommodation. Each spring the SRS organises the highly regarded "Scotland's National Rhododendron Show and Plant Sale," which has taken place in a variety of venues on Scotland's West Coast and in central Scotland. In more recent years, this event has moved from Stirling to Garelochhead, close to Glenarn Garden near Helensburgh. This competitive event, held in late-April with around 50 classes overall, tends to be species orientated. More recently it has been drawing-in non-members who arrive with baskets or boxes of trusses and sprays, who often need help with identification and staging of the entries. Interestingly, some are delighted with their entries, particularly when they win a class and return home with a cup or trophy, and in doing so become prospective new SRS members. When the flowering season is early, there is often an exceptional range of hybrids crowding the show benches, and these create a lot of interest with visitors, especially by visiting tour groups from rhododendron societies in mainland Europe. On the day after the show, we arrange a tour of local gardens, which usually includes a mix of members gardens, National Trust for Scotland gardens, and Royal Botanical Garden, Edinburgh, outstations.

For over 25 years, each May the SRS has organised a five to seven day garden tour to various regions of either the UK, Ireland and occasionally mainland Europe, and these continue to be well-received by participants, who have the opportunity to meet socially each evening and discuss matters of common interest. We visit a large range of beautiful and varied gardens on both public and private estates, including many that are not normally open to the public, and we aim to include twelve to 14 gardens on each tour. In 2018, the tour will commence and finish at a hotel close to Manchester Airport, and encompass the gardens of North, West and South Wales. This tour is being timed to

enable participants to travel to Germany on completion of the tour so they can attend, if they desire, the 2018 ARS Bremen Convention. Our 2019 Tour is scheduled to visit gardens in southern Ireland and will commence and finish close to Dublin Airport.

Every year in early October, the SRS and the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group (RSCG) host a Friday to Sunday Joint Conference with a wide range of lectures by keynote speakers, a plant auction, an evening dinner and garden tours. We often use a garden venue for the event, so that the surrounding landscape enhances the conference itself. The arrangements are similar to an ARS Western Regional Convention, but with fewer delegates. The 2018 Autumn Conference will be centred on the St. Andrews Botanic Gardens in Fife, and our conferences are consistently well-supported with reasonable registration charges.

The Chapter publishes an interesting and topical newsletter titled "The Review," which regularly carries a range of short articles, details of up-coming activities and pertinent news items. We also publish a "Year Book," of many years standing, containing in-depth articles by key authors that relate to all aspects of rhododendrons, ornamentals and companion plants.

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