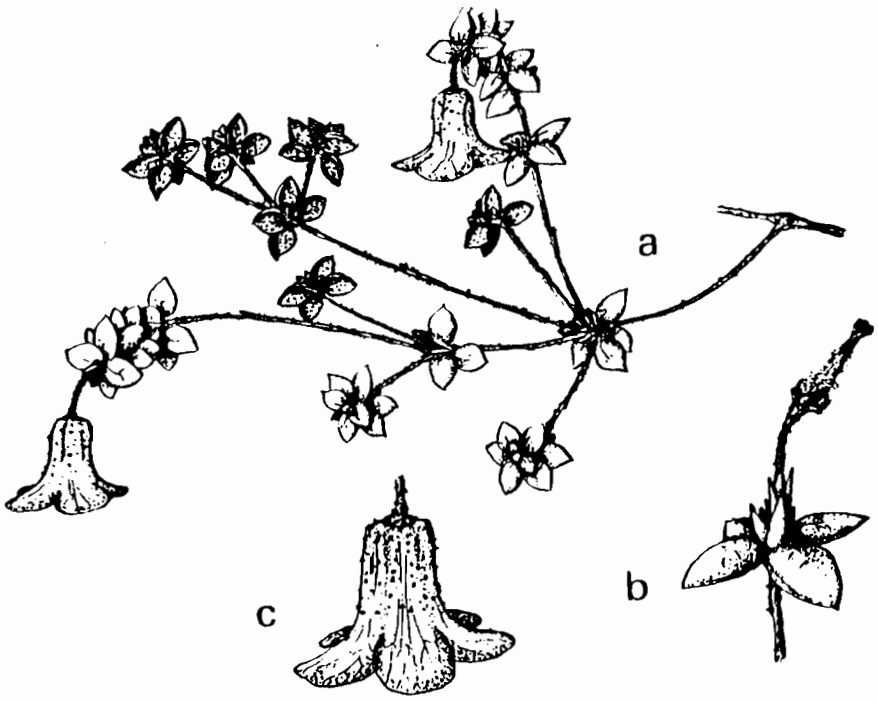

FIG. 1. a-c, *Rhododendron rubineiflorum*: a, habit × c.½; b, branchlet with very immature fruit × 1½; c, flower × 1. (from *Pullen* 227).

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.19 APRIL 1995

Since the last issue we have had good rains here, with very little run off. In our garden we registered 202mm in January, 91mm in February and 210mm in March. Now we are having a taste of winter with dry cold south westerly winds blowing. However the garden picked up in January, the Vireyas slowly came into flower and the weeds grew prodigiously.

The best displays came from some older plants, particularly Robert Withers, Sweet Seraphim, R.laetum, Penrose and R.jasminiflorum x Pink Delight, while the old Veitch hybrids, Clorinda, Pink Delight, and Red Prince were not far behind. They have been good examples of the toughness of the old timers that have survived now for well over a century.

The March Vireya meeting of the Victorian Branch at Nunawading was well attended by members and their show was again a very good one with the opportunity to meet some old friends and to catch up on the local scene. Some new hybrids were eye catching, in particular the small leaved multistemmed R.rubineiflorum hybrids. A patient audience listened to my talking with much help from slides and a summary of this appears later.

Your contributions, suggestions and criticisms are now needed urgently to continue the interchange of information that we have had previously, your experiences are always of interest to others. Send them to:

The Editor, P.O.Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W.2500.

J.Clyde Smith.

From Brian Clancy, Bentleigh, Victoria.

In the No.17 issue of the V.V. you corrected the parentage of R.'Chaya' to read R.'Pink Delight x R.intranervatum, a first generation cross. Without any doubt R.'Chayya' is a second generation hybrid of the original cross. The registration certificate, in my possession, reads R.'Pink Delight' x R.intranervatum F2. Perhaps it would be clearer if the parentage was given as (R.'Pink Delight X R.intranervatum) x (R.'Pink Delight x R.Intranervatum).

The original cross was made by Dr. John Rouse and small seedlings were distributed to members at a general meeting of the Victorian Branch at Camberwell. I was lucky enough to receive one small seedling 2.5cm high which I grew onto flowering size. At first flowering this truss had a truss of eight flowers similar to 'Pink Delight' but lighter in colour. I knew that 'Pink Delight' generally has up to 15 flowers in the truss and that the larger flowers of R.intranervatum had not appeared. The first generation flowers were selfed in Oct 1984 and the second generation seedlingsfirst flowered in Feb 1988 when the plant was only 25.4cm high. The initial flower on this small plant was an attractive, perfectly symmetrical truss of thirteen flowers 20.3cm across, the individual flowers measured 8.3cm across in an exquisite shade of pink. A coloured photo and full details are contained in "The Rhododendron' Vol.32 Spring 1992. Incidentally, Geraldine, proposes to release R.'Chayya', R.'Kiandra' (an outstanding irridescent orange) and R.'Veronica Maureen' in Spring 1995.

Vireyas were the centre of attraction at the Royal Melbourne Show during September 1994. The Vireyas were the most popular feature in the Hall of Horticulture and were staged by Geraldine in the exhibition by the Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda. Most people did not know Vireyas and they became a very focal talking point. Centre of attraction were the dwarf hybrids of (R.laetum x R.aurigeranum) x R.rubineiflorum and R.'Sunny'x R.rubineiflorum. People were fascinated how these dwarf hybrids were covered in flower and that they were growing in pure fern logs. A great number of people wanted to buy the fantastic exhibits and many settled for the smaller plants in bloom in 5 and 6 inch pots.
These rubineiflorum hybrids are setting a new standard for floriferous, compact dwarfs. Many nurserymen at Olinda have been eager to buy them and one in particular, just had to have them, regardless of cost.

Somewhat more disturbing was the exhibit of the R.rubineiflorum dwarf hybrids at the Rhododendron Gardens,Olinda during Oct 1994. Whilst they attracted much attention, some one after the very best removed the price tags from the cheapest plants and attached them to the best exhibits in fern logs and then passed them through the cash register where a new hand was on duty.

Bearing in mind that the pollen of R.rubineiflorum was rather fortuitously obtained in October 1987 when the photographer

threw away the small flower after a close up shot; that the resultant seed from the 'impossible' crosses was sown in April, 1988, it is somewhat surprising to learn that these rubineiflorum hybrids are already in England and are said to be thriving. In a letter dated December 1994, a Garden Centre in England wants to know if " the attractive Vireya Rhododendron with orange tubular flowers (Sunny x rubineiflorum) has been named."

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R.rubineiflorum hybrids have not yet flowered for me but at least they bush up magnificently and certainly will not need any pruning for shape. They look good in hanging pots, but Brian had large plants of them growing in tree fern logs, an uncommon practice here since the soft tree fern, Dicksonia antarctica is not common here and logs are expensive.

Editor.

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The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden at Burnie, Tas. has related that their Vireyas are flourishing in the open, despite fears that it may be too cold for them, in 'The Rhododendron' 1994. Initial trial plantings by the lake proving to be successful further extensive plantings have now been made.

Other comments in that journal on Vireyas are detailed in articles by John L. Rouse and Elizabeth G.Williams on 'Barriers to Grafting Section Vireya scions on to Elepidote Rhododendron Stock', by Brian Clancy on 'How to Shorten the Long Wait', (by striking cuttings of very small seedlings) and by Lyn Craven on "Virus in Rhododendron Section Vireya'.

'The Rhododendron' is a benefit of membership of the Australian Rhododendron Society. Membership subscription to the National Council is $10.00 per annum, due on July 1st. Each Branch has a local membership subscription which is in addition to the National Council subscriptions. The subscription for overseas members is $20.00 which includes membership with an affiliated Branch. The Treasurer/Membership Secretary is Mr.Ian Preston, 16 Plaister Court, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005.

This is the only publication that will keep you up to date with the latest Australian practices in growing rhododendrons.

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A visit to the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda prior to the Victorian Branch Vireya Rhodo. meeting was brief but we were impressed - after two years absence - by the magnificent growth of the trees and rhododendrons, all looking in very fine condition. Vireya plantings have been extended and the original glass house in which Vireyas were grown for many years is now used for the propagation of all types of rhodendrons and a few other species. An extensive shade house on the hill behind this has large stocks of plants which have been propagated , largely by volunteer labour, for future planting or for sale to the public from the office at the entrance to the garden.

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VIREYA RHODODENDRONS

This is a precis of the talk that I gave to the Victorian Rhododendron Society on March 17th. It was based on the 78 slides that were shown but which cannot be reproduced here, so some sections have been omitted and some explanations have been added.
" We grow Vireyas for their flowers but other aspects should also be considered. Their flowers last well indoors and were used for bridal bouquets many years ago as demonstrated at Stanwell Tops. Also many flower shows have a section for floral art, but I have never seen Vireyas used for that purpose here. Have you had any experience with these applications?

Vireyas flower frequently but there are always times when they have no flower - the plant is always in view, can it be of more interest than just a sparse, leggy bush?
In brief, are we getting the best plants that we can and are we making full use of them?

Looking at how they grow naturally and how some people grow them may be of interest. Firstly there is often some doubt whether they are epiphytes or not, and a review of their habits in P.N.G. brings Canon Cruttwell's comment to mind. He wrote in the A.R.S. Journal 'The Rhododendron' of Dec.1971 that "....some species of rhododendrons are normally always terrestrial, like R.christianae while others are undecided and will adopt either habitat,like R.zoelleri and R.konori, and yet a third group appear to be always epiphytic, like R.wrightianum."

Certainly in the wild they may be seen as seedlings in some very unlikely places where they will be short lived, initially needing no more than a little lichen and moss to hold some moisture - and frequent showers to maintain it. They will grow on the rock faces of roadside cuttings, on fallen branches and on tall trees or on the ground in grassy areas where they must grow tall to reach the light in competition with the native grasses,sugar cane etc. Once established on a tall tree they can develop into a very large plant, too big to remain erect and becoming pendant, with roots that can be thick and swollen extending down the tree.

The above habitats are the norm but R.commonae also grows on low tussocks in Kain swamp, mixing with orchids, carnivorous plants and other herbs. When transplanted they grow happily in clayey ground (at the Highland Orchid Collection, Laiagam), and their growth in the bog would seem no way to grow them in a garden - but while giving this talk I saw behind me a Vireya growing in what could be thought a similar fahion. To be specific it was growing in a piece of treefern trunk sitting in a dish of water, an uncommon sight around here, but not in Victoria.

Looking through old slides of many interesting Vireyas in P.N.G. brought to light some species that might well be used to extend our range of hybrids. Some have been used already, sparsely,

but not all of them have been registered as yet. Further hybrids of such species as christi, maius, blackii, pleianthum, superbum, phaeochitum, rhodoleucum, intranervatum, and scabridibracteum, for example, might all add some variety in leaf as well as in flower. R.saxafragoides has a spectacular flower, standing singly above a carpet of leaves, but it would be very optimistic to hope that this form could be reproduced in a hybrid with a great deal more heat tolerance. This Vireya incidently is one that has a tap root.

Heat tolerance is not necessarily the same as the tolerance of full sun. In P.N.G. they all will grow in full sun but do not have the same tolerance of a warmer climate, and here it is essential that they should be acclimatised. As an illustration, in P.N.G.in 1986 with a N.Z. party, Peter Schick and I noticed that plants of R.aurigeranum that were growing in heavy shade in the shrubbery on the steep bank of a creek had broad leaves while those at the edge of the trees in partial shade had leaves of medium width. One solitary plant in full sun some three metres out from the shade had narrower leaves. This was obviously a reaction to the amount of light that these plants were getting. A similar reaction has been described by Dr. Sleumer in his book, in regard to R.beyerinckianum.

Exposure to full sun may certainly result in burnt leaves on a very hot day, but the two large Vireya plantings in full sun in the Rhododendron Park of the Illawarra Branch at Mt.Pleasant are fully acclimatised and do not burn. The first of these plantings had been raised under shade and took several years before they looked certain to survive. They are fully grown now and in good condition. The second bed of much younger plants, mentioned in in the Branch news in 'The Rhododendron' last year, is being developed as a Vireya hill, a research project that will be detailed in the journal later on. These plants have not suffered any sun burn. However they were raised by local grower Ray Brown from cuttings that were struck singly in 75mm pots in an igloo under sprinklers and when fully rooted were placed out in the open under full sun,without damage. Possibly their parentage was a help but the fact that the stock plants were growing in full sun was probably the main aid to success.

Looking at two other gardens north of here last year with a warmer climate was stimulating. It was a novelty to see Vireyas growing behind Elkhorns at Lou Searle's garden near Wauchope - see issue #17 - and to see them flourishing in a bed of aged sawdust(from a local sawmill) about 24cm deep in an area surrounded by Pine trees and their roots. His cuttings were being struck successfully in straight coarse sand, without mist, rooting hormones or bottom heat, just in a box under a sheet of glass. On trying that myself, my record was a cutting of 'Sunny' with roots appearing above the sand (and plenty below the surface) in just four weeks.

This sand is a special from Frisco Quarry Sands of Skinners Shoot, near Byron Bay and I was fortunate to be given some by the Sapersteins of Mullimbimby. Mrs Saperstein also uses this sand with a little peat and perlite to lighten it, for cuttings. She had two interesting practices to demonstrate: one was to

follow the old practice of pinching out any single new shoots, to encourage multiple branching. Well, some times this does not work for me, but now I know to feed at the same time, to add a little extra vigour that is necessary for multiple branching. In the warmer climate of Mullumbimby 9-month Osmocote is preferred for the summer and two other applications of the shorter period mixes are used during the cooler months. The results were a very fine looking lot of bushy plants.

The other less usual practice was demonstrated by a batch of very long legged plants being trained as standards - and this practice is detailed later by Mrs Saperstein,who had another new way of identifying heat tolerant Vireyas. This is simple - plants with smooth leaves are the more heat resistant, but where high altitude plants have been crossed with low altitude ones and diffused enough to produce smooth leaves, these were also heat resistant in her experience.

For the remainder of the talk slides were shown of some local instances of hazards: e.g. local flooding which needs much better drainage than usual since it has killed established trees and shrubs here in the past; and high winds which are common and require plants to be staked initially in the ground, or to be secured when in pots if exposed. Tying down the pot may only result in the plant being blown out of it.

Other slides illustrated the Rhododendron Park Vireyas and the Botanic Garden of Wollongong, which is building up a fair collection of Vireyas. Promoting Vireyas requires that they should be visible and these two areas will be significant in that respect in this district.

Editor.

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Mrs Sylvia Saperstein of Main Arm, Mullumbimby, N.S.W. has kindly provided some more details about:

STANDARDS The most suitable varieties for standards are those that activate the most buds when tip-pruned. So that Lady Di, R.loranthiflorum, Coral Flare, and even Penrice would lend themselves to shaping. Coral Flare would make a sort of weeping open standard whereas Lady Di would have a more formal shape. It is very important to keep the pots free of worms because the plants that are wobbly don't thrive. A drenching with any insecticide will do the trick. I have found that standards are equally successful in pots as in the open ground.
HEAT RESISTANCE Konori, Gardenia, Buttermilk, R.phaeopeplum and to a lesser extent Calavar, are very susceptible to high temperatures as well as ultra-violet light exposure. Crosses with R.zoelleri and most R.javanicum crosses are heat resistant, which stands to reason since they are both low altitude species in their own environment. I have found so far with my own hybrids that I have been able to make selections where the high altitude species have been diffused enough to produce smooth leaves, but still retain the flower size, colour, and some perfume.I'm feeling fairly confident about this because we have had some savage heat with considerable losses of Gardenia in all sizes but none of my hybrids.

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