

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



January 2006
January 2006



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year to all of you. Thanks to all of you who participated at the Christmas Auction and Pot Luck dinner. It was a lot of fun and we raised a lot of money to help support our society. Some of you probably already have some of your rhodos coming into bloom. I notice in driving along Hammond Bay Road that Dick's Lee's Scarlet (?) is in full bloom and Rosamundi is following close behind. This is a fun time of year as we watch the flower buds swell and anticipate their opening. Our next meeting on January 12th will feature one of our own members, Mike Miller, talking to us about his recent trip to Bhutan, and showing us slides of rhododendrons growing in their native habitat. Hope that you can all make it to the meeting. Allen



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NEXT MEETING

JANUARY 12, 2006

BEBAN PARK

7:30 PM

MICHAEL MILLER

TREKKING THROUGH RHODODENDRONS IN BHUTAN

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TWIGS AND STEMS



**Goodies for January meeting:
Helene Sullivan
Brenda Lewis
Reinhold Gorgosilich**

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NORTHWEST FLOWER & GARDEN SHOW

February 8 – 12, 2006
Convention Center, 7th & Pike
Seattle
gardenshow.com

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THANK YOU!

To all who brought donations for the Christmas Auction. It was a resounding success, once again. The food was great and we donated \$95.00 to the Salvation Army. Good Work, all.

SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2006

The SSD will be held again in 2006 for the 5th consecutive year at the Rhododendron Species and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington on Saturdays: February 25, March 25, April 29, May 13.

The programme is personally directed by Steve Hootman, Co Director at the garden and plant explorer, extraordinaire. The format will follow that of previous years but will introduce new material for the benefit of past participants. No prior knowledge of the subject is necessary as the course begins with the fundamentals and progresses in detail at each session.

The sessions begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. and end at approximately 4:00 p.m. The mornings are generally spent reviewing various topics of general botanical interest relative to the study of

rhododendron species, followed by keying of plant material currently in bloom in the garden at that time. A short break is taken for lunch between 12:00-12:30 and the afternoon spent touring the RSBG garden and identifying and discussing the wonderful collection of rare and exotic plants.

The course fee is \$35.00 for each session (x 4) and the entire proceeds are used to provide a stipend for instruction and a donation to the garden. A nominal sum of \$5.00 is charged for lunch for those wishing to participate.

In past years, participants from Vancouver Island have traveled to the mainland on Friday prior to the session and stayed with a host overnight, returning Saturday evening. In previous years we have found that it is desirable to cross the border before 7:00 a.m. on the route to Federal Way in order to avoid a delay at the border and the early a.m. Seattle traffic. This has permitted a leisurely drive to Federal Way with arrival about 9:15 and time for breakfast at the location of choice but for most of us at the Country Buffet. Arrangements for car pooling will be made. The facilities at the RSBG are limited and a maximum of 28-30 people can be accommodated.

In order to avoid disappointment, please confirm your interest and forward payment to the undersigned:

Mike Bale
33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2
(604) 853-8839
email: lu_zhu @telus.net



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2009 Rhododendron of the Year

It is time to vote on the Rhododendron of the Year (ROY) for 2009.

The ROY program was set up to establish the best Rhododendron performer in each of the geographical regions. It has become obvious that rhododendrons do not perform equally well in different climates, soil conditions, even insect populations. The American Rhododendron Society invites us to vote on our candidate for each of the categories: Lepidote, Elepidote, Deciduous Azalea and Evergreen Azalea.

The purpose of establishing the ROY three years in advance is to allow growers and nurseries to propagate and have the candidates for sale during the year they are announced as Rhododendron of the Year.

To prepare for our nomination process, we need to generate a list of our club's "**Proven Performers**" – plants that do well in our gardens and that we like to grow. Once we have developed a list I will ask you to identify your nomination for the Rhododendron of the Year for 2009.

To make things simple, I (Kathryn) will ask you to give me your list of favourite plants and I will determine to which category they belong. You can give me your list at the December or January meeting, by phone (245-7879) or by email: kd.grant#shaw.ca. (replace the # with @). We will need to vote on our candidates for the 2009 ROY in February, as we must submit our nominations by mid-March.

The following criteria should be considered in making ROY recommendations, so you should keep this in mind as you make your list of favourites:

1. Foliage should have a good green colour and retain leaves for at least 2 years (except deciduous azaleas)
2. Plant should flower and perform well 4 out of 5 years
3. Full, compact plant
4. Must be cold hardy, bud hardy and heat tolerant in your area
5. Must be registered with the ARS
6. Easily propagated
7. Easily grown in the average garden requiring low maintenance
8. Resistant to local diseases
9. Propagation material must be available for mass production and availability in 2009
10. 2009 candidates cannot duplicate previous years' ROY selections

Year	Lepidote	Elipidote	Deciduous Azalea	Evergreen Azalea
2002	Ken Janeck	Ginny Gee	R. scheppenbachii	Hino Crimson
2003	Taurus	PJM	Homebush	Purple Splendour
2004	Percy Wiseman	Dora Amateis	Arnesons' Gem	Fascination
2005	Horizon Monarch	Ramapo	Nifty Fifty	Hilda Niblett
2006	Point Defiance	Wee Bee	Washington Centennial	Silver Sword
2007	Nancy Evans	Blaney's Blue	Cecile	Mitsuki
2008	Marie Starks	Vibrant Violet	Yukon	Girard's Fuschia

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Source: JARS V47:No.4:p202:y1993

Fertilizing Rhododendrons the Organic Way

Terry Richmond
Port Alberni, British Columbia

When fertilizing rhododendrons we should look to nature to show us the way. In nature mulching and fertilizing is a continuous process with the current year's mulch being gradually transformed in subsequent years to usable fertilizer. Nature's rhodo food begins with a leaf, needle, twig, petal and fruit fall - in short, any and all matter that falls to earth or flows into their area in ground water.

Rhododendrons, because of their environment and the shallow layer of organic matter in which they grow, have evolved a massive root system consisting of literally thousands of tiny, shallow running feeder roots. These roots are extremely efficient in extracting life sustaining plant nutrients from their immediate area. Root systems will be much smaller in a benign climate because a smaller amount of nutrients is required to maintain plant health. Conversely, rhododendrons in exposed and/or harsh conditions will have a vastly increased root system to extract every ounce of nourishment from their surroundings.

So how do we fertilize rhododendrons in our garden? First, any literature on fertilizing rhododendrons assumes that your plants are growing in the correct medium. Again, as in nature, this medium should be extremely high in organic matter, well drained, well aerated and moderately to slightly acidic. Fir and pine bark, composted oak leaves and evergreen needles, decayed wood, well rotted sawdust, coarse peat moss, reed sedge and topsoil high in organic matter are some of the materials that can be combined in endless combinations to provide excellent growing mediums. Growing medium acidity or pH value is not nearly as critical when growing plants in an organic medium using primarily organic fertilizers. One good quality compost for rhododendrons contains oak leaves, evergreen needles, alfalfa and washed seaweed. Between the various layers an organic nitrogen such as canola meal, fish meal or blood meal can be added.

A word of caution! Rhododendrons, because of their previously mentioned tiny feeder roots, can be easily damaged through over-fertilization, especially when using high analysis chemical fertilizers. Elements to be cautious using include nitrogen, iron, sulfur, boron, sodium and calcium. Contrary to popular belief, rhododendrons do not hate calcium. In actual fact the reverse is true. They will gorge themselves on available calcium until they make themselves sick. With respect

to iron, a few years back a respected rhodo grower suggested I supply more iron to help combat the effect of full sunlight in my exposed garden. He was undoubtedly right, but I supplied so much iron sulfate that severe leaf scorching occurred. A little fertilizer goes a long way, especially with small plants.

I fertilize in early spring around the end of March using all the organic fertilizer and soil amendments that I can obtain. When I combine ingredients I try to duplicate natural fertilizer analysis. For instance, in canola meal (6-2-1) and in fish meal (3-2-1) the nitrogen is two to three times that of phosphorus and three to six times that of potassium. Three advantages of organic fertilizers over their chemical counterparts is in their trace element and humic content and in their extended time release of nutrients. Some fertilizers in the following list contain up to 34 trace elements, while seaweed is reported to contain every element presently known.

Blood meal: nitrogen and trace.
Bone meal: phosphorus and calcium and trace.
Fish meal: complete N-P-K and calcium and trace.
Canola meal: complete N-P-K and trace.
Cottonseed meal: complete N-P-K and trace.
Powdered alfalfa: complete N-P-K and trace.
Worm castings: complete N-P-K and trace.
Powdered rock phosphate: phosphorus and 32 trace.
Green sand: potassium and 34 trace.
Kelp meal: potassium and all trace.
Dolomite: calcium and magnesium.

My base organic fertilizer and filler recipes in volume parts are as follows:

Fertilizer Recipe:

2 parts fish meal
2 parts canola meal
2 parts alfalfa
1 part worm castings
1 part dolomite lime
1/2 part rock phosphate
1/2 part bone meal
1/2 part kelp meal
1/2 part green sand

Filler Recipe:

5 parts sand
5 parts double screened fir bark or 5 parts composted fish waste.

The filler, equal in volume to the fertilizer total, is used to prevent clumping of the meal type fertilizers and to minimize the dust problem associated with mixing finely ground or powdered materials.

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Source: JARS V45:No.3:p140:y1991

Frank Kingdon-Ward: Plant Hunter and Romantic

Tony Schilling
United Kingdom

Reprinted from the winter 1991 issue of the Rhodiareview.

A fortunate few dedicated men have left an indelible mark on the map of East Himalayan botanical exploration in that remote corner of Asia, where the wilderness of southeast Tibet, southwest China, northeast India and Burma merge in an exciting confusion of river, gorge and mountain.

Some, like Bailey and Morshead, were military men who merely brushed against botany while engaged in geographical surveys, but others were intrepid plant collectors who totally committed themselves to the task of seeking new species for our gardens.

One such man was Frank Kingdon-Ward who, in view of the diversity of his achievement, is considered by many to be the doyen of more recent plant hunters. His passion for exploration (both botanical and geographical) knew no bounds and this, coupled with his patience, determination and stamina, his keen and perceptive eye, his modesty and his talent for romantic, but scientifically exact writings made him the envy of his contemporaries and a hero of many who follow after him.

He was born in Manchester on 6 November 1885, son of Harry Marshall Ward, a brilliant botanist who was later appointed Professor of Botany at Cambridge, where he founded the University's modern Botany School. After general education at St. Paul's School, Hammersmith, Frank Kingdon-Ward entered Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1904 and achieved his degree in Natural Sciences Tripos. In 1907 he departed for China to take up a post as schoolteacher at the Shanghai Public School.

From an early age he had been fired with a burning urge for botanical exploration. Before he went to the University he had already read Schlimpers' *Plant Geography* and, having been intrigued by pictures of tropical forest, he was naturally led to read other classics of biological exploration. Therefore, while en route to Shanghai, he impulsively went ashore in Singapore, fled the city, and obtained his first personal experience of tropical rain forest. To use his own words: "That was my night out: fireflies and bullfrogs...I just wanted to steep

myself in an atmosphere, to revel in the scents, and to see with my own eyes all the exuberance of life that the warmth, humidity, and equinoctial time-sequence of the tropics produces..."

By his own admission, the teaching job which he took in Shanghai was merely a means to an end. Thus he found his work uncongenial and disillusioning. Being already set on becoming a plant collector, but having little or no experience, he needed fortune to smile upon his enthusiasm. In 1909, thanks to an appropriate introduction, he joined an American zoological expedition to western China. His degree in natural sciences and family connections helped him to achieve this initial experience and, although it was in no way a botanical expedition, he managed to make a small collection of herbarium specimens which he gave to the Botany School at Cambridge. For a time, it was thought that three of these were new to science, but the laws of priority soon sank the trio into the disappointing depths of synonymy.

Meanwhile, he returned to his teaching job in Shanghai and then, out of the blue in 1911, Arthur K. Bulley, a rich Liverpool cotton broker and founder of the nursery firm Messrs Bees Ltd, asked him to collect plants in the Yunnan Province of southwest China, his previous collector George Forrest having moved to the employ of J. C. Williams of Caerhays Castle in Cornwall. This expedition proved to be the key which opened the door to the career which he had long felt he had been born to follow. In all, Kingdon-Ward made 22 expeditions for various sponsors spanning 45 years, and it is small wonder that he has left such a clear mark on history.

Exploring Begins

During 1913, he explored and collected in Yunnan and Tibet [described in *The Mystery Rivers of Tibet* (1923)], while in the following year he made the first of his many visits to north Burma [recorded in *In Furthest Burma* (1921)].

During WWI, he served in the Indian Army and attained the rank of Captain, but the year after Armistice, he was back in north Burma on the alpine slopes of Imaw Bum. In 1912, he returned once more to China (Yunnan and Sichuan) and in 1922, he travelled in these two provinces yet again before moving on through southwest Tibet to north Burma.

Then, in the period spanning 1924-25, he made what was probably his most famous and successful expedition, in the company of Lord Cawdor, to Bhutan and southeast Tibet. It was during this long and arduous experience that he solved "the riddle of the Tsangpo

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Gorge," and exhibited to the scientific world his powers, not only as a first class field botanist, but as a geographical explorer also.

The Tsangpo is that great river of Tibet which is the upper section of the Brahmaputra and, until Kingdon-Ward's survey, a great mystery hung over the geophysical character of the mountain section of the precipitous gorge. Close to Lhasa, the river lies at an altitude of 12,000 feet, but where it emerges from the Himalayas and escapes southward into the Assam Valley it is a mere 1,000 feet above sea level. The actual unsolved riddle of the Tsangpo Gorge was the presence, or otherwise, of the much rumored Falls of Brahmaputra, a story, which, over the years, had become known as "the great romance of geography." Bailey and Morshead's journey of 1913 had settled the last doubts regarding the actual course and identity of the river, but the gorge itself remained unexplored as neither they, nor the Sikkimese pundit Kinthup (who travelled there almost 35 years earlier at the request of the Survey of India), managed to penetrate its mysterious depths.

Honored by RHS

In the winter of 1924, Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor followed the river gorge down from Tibet past the great guardian peaks of Namche Barwa and Gyala Peri. Near to the base of these two mountains (the breasts of the goddess Dorje Phangmo), lie the settlements of Gyala and Pemakochung, both of which gave their names to two of Kingdon-Ward's discoveries and introductions: *Berberis gyalica* (KW5962) and *Rhododendron pemokoense* (KW6301). Beyond the adjacent pass named Nyima La in the Rong Chu Valley, he discovered and collected one of the best of all primulas for woodlands and bog gardens: *Primula florindae* (KW5781). Further west, on what he described as "the wooded hills east of sacred Lhasa," he first collected the plant which probably brought him the most fame, the much acclaimed "blue poppy," *Meconopsis betonicifolia* (KW5784).

This epic expedition down the major part of the difficult gorge finally succeeded in dispelling the myth of rainbow-ringed waterfalls 150 feet high, but Kingdon-Ward found compensatory romance in the form of many more plant species new to science, including *Berberis tsangpoensis* (KW6326), *Rhododendron leucaspis* (KW6273), *R. auritum* (KW6278), *R. venator* (KW6285), *R. montroseanum* (KW6261) and *R. scopulorum* (KW6354).

The Tsangpo still guards some of its deepest secrets and, until such time as someone completes an unbroken survey along the entire length of the Tsangpo-

Brahmaputra River from Assam to Tibet, the remaining mysteries will persist.

Expert on Burma

From 1926 until 1956, almost all Kingdon-Ward's collecting efforts were focused on the mountains and gorges of Burma and Assam, an area which, over the years, was to become considered as "his country." He was in Burma early in WWII, when the Japanese invaded the country, but thanks to his intimate knowledge of the area, he had little trouble in escaping into India. There, he instructed the armed forces in jungle survival techniques, and after the war was over, he became employed by the United States government to search for wrecked planes and the graves of lost aircrew. To assist them in these field operations the Americans could not have wished for a more experienced guide and adviser.

It was during one of these searches that he found *Lilium mackliniae* on Mount Sirhoi in Manipur. He returned there again in 1948 with his wife Jean, for whom the lily is named, for the sole purpose of seeing the plants in flower. Its color in cultivation was said to be a muddy white, and he simply could not accept the fact that what he considered to be one of his "botanical swans," had actually been dubbed "an ugly duckling"! The story of that energetic pilgrimage back to Mount Sirhoi makes compelling reading in his book *Pilgrimage for Plants*, for he relocated the lily in large numbers and laughed with delight when he discovered it to be "...a delicate shell pink outside like dawn in June, with the sheen of watered silk; inside it was like faintly flushed alabaster."

Near Disaster

Two years later, while on an expedition in the Lohit Valley on the borders of Assam and Tibet, he and his wife were lucky to escape with their lives when on 15 August 1950, they were caught at the epicenter of what proved to be one of the most severe earthquakes ever recorded.

The story of that epic adventure was modestly documented by Kingdon-Ward in *Nature* and also in the *RHS Journal* (June 1952). His wife gave the story graphic and compelling coverage in her book *My Hill So Strong* (1952), a book which also gives an insight into her husband's unique style of existence in the wilderness he constantly sought after. It reveals much of interest, not least of which is quiet bravery as he fought daily against his great fear of heights. What misery he must have experienced at times during his long years of endeavor, as he trod carefully, and white-faced with tension, across unstable bridges in quest of his goals.

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

He also suffered recurring bouts of malarial fever, contracted in the harsh climate of north Burma, a region which had claimed the life of Reginald Farrer in 1920 when only 40 years old.

Kingdon-Ward was a man of great patience, immense energy, resolution and endurance, and with a sharp and critical eye for detail. This keen power of observation backed by his scientific training put him in a class of his own. He was in every sense of the word, the complete natural scientist with a wide and catholic interest in all aspects of his hunting ground.

Man of Many Talents

No one has traveled more widely in the eastern Himalayas, nor written in such detail about it. No one has collected more selectively and with such individualism, nor summarized his observations so clearly. Not only was he a brilliant field botanist, he also involved himself in the natural distribution of plants and their ecology, as well as the various factors which interrelate with them such as climate, aspect, even zoology and ethnology. In consequence, one is just as likely to find his writing in the *Geographic Magazine*, *Nature*, *The Gardeners Chronical*, or the *RHS Journal*.

On top of all this talent, he was a man of great modesty, and with a quiet yet sharp sense of humor and a concern for animals. When in Monyul in 1938, he impulsively purchased a "black long-haired dish-faced bow-legged Bhutanese dog with large appealing eyes and well covered in fleas." It cost him one rupee, he called it Beetle, and from that date on they traveled the Himalayas together.

His earlier travels were often his loneliest, but following his second marriage in 1947, his wife, Jean, constantly accompanied him and helped him immensely with his work. Their only other companions were their porters and guides, often cheerful and friendly, but sometimes sullen and hostile. Those eastern gorges of the Himalayas harbor many little known tribes of variable temperament, the Naga, Abor and Mishmi, being a few of those with which he spent so many of his years.

Kingdon-Ward's success realized him many honors. In 1932, the Royal Horticultural Society awarded him the Victoria Medal of Honor and in 1934, the Veitch Memorial Medal. In 1930, the Royal Geographical Society awarded him their Founders Medal. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society awarded him the George Robert White Medal in 1934, and in 1936, he was given the Livingstone Medal by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. In 1952, he received the OBE for his services to horticulture, and in 1957, he was installed

as an Honorary Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners.

Kingdon-Ward died suddenly in London on 8 April 1958. Scarcely a week before he had been discussing possibilities for his twenty-third expedition to north Iran or perhaps the Caucasus. He also had his shrewd green eyes set on a trip to Vietnam.

In all, he wrote some 25 books and an amazing number of articles for a large number of journals. It could be said that he wrote out of necessity in order to fund his next expedition, but he also wrote because he felt compelled to share his love of nature and his zest for the unknown.

He was by his own confession an unashamed romantic, a fact which showed in the very titles of his books. Just three examples are: *The Land of the Blue Poppy*, *Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World*, and *Plant Hunter's Paradise*. It could be argued that his writings are as much his memorial as his plant introductions and his geographical observations were.

So superbly did he write that the "armchair explorer" can almost feel the breeze upon the cheek, almost smell the blossoms, see the distant blue hills, or hear the pounding of the mighty rivers. What one really does sense is the great spirit of adventure which he enjoyed so deeply, and it is easy to feel that one has actually shared his experiences, trod the same paths and observed that same beauty.

There has never been, nor is there likely to be, another man quite like him. Botanists, gardeners, geographers, lovers of literature and others, owe him more than can easily be measured. His was the country of river gorges, ours are the treasures which outlived him.



Rhododendron montroseanum

Photo by Kenneth Cox