

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



January 2011



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year! Hope you all enjoyed the holiday season!

Thanks to everyone's generous support, our Christmas Auction was one of our most successful ever. We raised nearly \$1500, ten percent of which went to the Salvation Army, and several boxes of food were delivered to Loaves and Fishes. Special thanks are due to David and Joyce Mitchell, our great auctioneers; Allen and Gayle McRae, our donation coordinators; and to Sandra Dorman for once again bringing it all together. Local businesses (listed in this newsletter) continue to contribute to our auction through their generous donations. Keep them in mind as you look for special gifts or garden items throughout the year, they deserve our support too!

It may be early January but our Witch Hazel is coming into bloom. As we walk through the garden, we can see signs that spring is really not that far away. You have to love this part of Canada!

You won't want to miss our January meeting - Steve Hootman's presentations are always inspiring. Hope to see you there!

John

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Social	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
Bargain Table	Reinhold Gorgosilich	758-6533

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society
Box 241, #1 - 5765 Turner Road
Nanaimo, BC V9T 6M4
Website: nanaimo.rhodos.ca
email: nanaimo@rhodos.ca

NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13

BEBAN PARK SOCIAL CENTRE

7:30 pm

STEVE HOOTMAN

"Exciting changes and new introductions at the RSBG"

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TWIGS and STEMS



GOODIES FOR JANUARY MEETING

Edith Higgens and Jan Moles

Barb and Burkhard Dressler

Bonnie Steele

Yvonne Harding

Vancouver Island Rock & Alpine Garden Society

Presents

Along the Silk Road

2011 Western Winter Study Weekend

February 25 - 27

Mary Winspear Centre

2243 Beacon Avenue, Sidney, BC

Speakers:

*Stephanie Ferguson: expert rock and crevice gardener from
Calgary, Alberta*

*Vojtěch Holubec: author of The Caucasus and its Flowers,
consummate grower of alpiners and seed collector John*

*Massey: owner of Ashwood Nurseries, UK ; renowned for
his expertise on Asian and European hepaticas*

*Hans Roemer: bulb collector and ecologist Yvonne Rorison:
avid photographer of flowers on all continents*

*Bill Terry: Meconopsis expert and author of Blue Heaven -
Encounters with the Blue Poppy*

*Dr. Bobby J. Ward: from Raleigh, North Carolina, author
of The Plant Hunter's Garden*

Registration: Early Bird (before Jan 28) \$135

After Jan 28 \$155

www.virags.ca/winterstudyweekend.htm

OUR JANUARY SPEAKER STEVE HOOTMAN

The Nanaimo Rhododendron Society presents an extra special speaker on Thursday Jan 13th. Steve Hootman, plant explorer and curator of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) in Federal Way, Washington will be presenting "Exciting changes and new introductions at the RSBG". He will show pictures of the conservatory, new plantings and new introductions among other things. There will be lots of great photos of flowers and unusual companion plants.

For those of you who are not familiar with Steve, he is one of the leading experts in the rhododendron world, and his presentations have always been fascinating and entertaining.

Members may be interested in the other programs Steve will present on the island (with Steve's notes on content) :

North Island (Comox Valley) Tuesday Jan 11th Rhododendrons in their natural habitat

I will show images and discuss rhododendrons in their native habitats and how this translates to our cultivation of the various species. I will include tips on cultivation. Lots of great photos of scenery and plants in the wild.

Mount Arrowsmith (Qualicum Beach) Wednesday Jan 12th Plant exploration in China and Vietnam

I have undertaken three expeditions to this region. I will show images and discuss the plants, people and geography, etc. of this amazing and beautiful region, focusing on new species of rhododendrons of course.



NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

An excerpt from Steve Hootman's article "Plant Hunting Expeditions: Part Five - Along the Bhutan Border"

Our guides made a small fire on the side of the road, and we all enjoyed a lunch of ramen noodles mixed with wild mushrooms. At this point it was time for a round of goodbyes with Garratt, Cody, Sue, and Kelly all beginning the long journey home. It had been fun during the couple of days we had together, that none of us had expected, and we had made the most of our limited time. Ken and I, with our guides, all piled into the one remaining truck and continued up the mountain to Nagagg. As we climbed in elevation, the *kesangiae* forest morphed right into *hodgsonii*, the only way to distinguish between them as we drove through in the truck was by watching the bark, rough in *kesangiae* and smooth in *hodgsonii*, and the buds, rounded in *kesangiae* and pointed in *hodgsonii*. Although the big-leaf rhododendron forest was virtually seamless as we continued to gain elevation, there was a definite small overlap at about 11,000 feet between *kesangiae* at its upper altitudinal limit and then *hodgsonii* at its lowest altitude.



Strangely enough, we observed no hybrids between the two species, even in the narrow altitudinal belt where they occurred together. As we continued toward the border with Bhutan we slowly gained altitude. The rough road ended, as described by our friends, at the makeshift logging camp of Nagagg. The village consisted of a group of small wooden huts surrounding the end of the road, which then faded into a large subalpine meadow. We were at 11,600 feet and surrounded by a forest of *Abies densa*, much of it recently cut for timber. Under the fir trees was a solid shrubby layer of rhododendrons including the species *campylocarpum* ssp. *campylocarpum*, *wallichii*, *fulgens*, *wightii*, *cinnabarinum*, *flinckii* and *bhutanense*, with the dwarf species *anthopogon* ssp. *anthopogon*, *lepidotum* and *fragariiflorum* in the most exposed sunny positions. *Rhododendron hodgsonii* was dominant in many areas, forming a dense understory layer beneath the firs, often to the exclusion of other rhododendrons. It was discouraging but understandable to see the great masses of *Rhododendron hodgsonii* logs piled around the village. *Rhododendron* wood is often the first wood cut for fuel in the mountains of the Sino-Himalayan region because it burns well, even when unseasoned, and is often the only, or at least the most abundant source of fuel-wood.

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We quickly set up camp in the open meadow, pitching our tents in the fading light along the bank of a brisk little stream. Little did we realize that we had set up camp in a meadow full of the rare and choice *Primula dickieana* mixed with the even rarer *Primula kingii*. Masses of both of these were observed by Peter Cox in this very same meadow during his subsequent visit to this area the following spring. It was a fantastic setting, the surrounding forested hills rising from our meadow campground to unknown mountains beyond. In the fading light, the already surreal fir forest, each close-packed tree with a mere tuft of stiff branches on the top of a tall thin trunk, took on an even stranger appearance, like something out of a Dr. Seuss story. Masses of rhododendrons coated the hills around the meadow, and we looked forward to the dawn with great anticipation.

That night, Ken and I both slept poorly, the temperature dropping well below freezing, and even the last of our scotch doing little to alleviate the shivering as we lay in our tents. Late in the evening, I stepped out of my tent to attend to the call of nature and stood shivering in the crystal clear air. The light from the gibbous moon was bright enough to cast my shadow, and I marvelled at the stunning scenery, the frosted ground glowing vividly in the deep stillness of our remote setting. In the morning, our tents and the surrounding rhododendrons were coated with a thick layer of frost that melted away like butter as the sun rose in the clear blue sky.

We left camp and began our hike up to the pass, enjoying the fine weather and tremendous diversity of rhododendrons and other plants. For a long time we hiked through a forest of *Rhododendron hodgsonii*, admiring their great size and abundance. Their smooth and peeling tan and brown bark was beautifully displayed, especially on the larger trunks, and we took many photos. Deciduous shrubs and small trees grew amongst the rhododendrons, the genera *Sorbus* (mountain ash), *Salix* (willow) and *Lindera* (spicebush) being particularly colorful in their fall finery. As we gained altitude, the rhododendron forest thinned out and we entered subalpine meadows dotted with clumps and single specimens of various rhododendrons including *fulgens*, *wightii*, *bhutanense* and, at the highest point, around 12,800 feet, a large grove of amazingly massive *flinckii*, some up to 25 feet high and reported to have pale yellow flowers. Many of these impressive old specimens were lying on their sides, their great size and weight a disadvantage in the strong winds and heavy snows so common at this altitude. Another great find was the rare *Gentiana gilvostrata*, a prostrate species with large, bright blue trumpets settled snugly into the deep green matted foliage. We could see large splashes of blue on the surrounding hillsides, the huge mats of this species in glorious full display beneath the brilliant sunshine.

<http://www.rhodygarden.org/travels.html>

These businesses donated items for our Christmas Auction – please support them

Canadian Tire

Shar-Kare Feeds and Pet Supplies

The Backyard Wild Bird and Nature Store

Vancouver Island University - Horticultural Department

Sharecost Rentals & Sales

Diana's Garden Centre

Green Thumb Nurseries

Turley's Florist and Potting Shed

Mackay Concrete Forming

Buckerfield's

Art Knapp

The Quilted Duck

Karma Coffee Ltd. (Coombs, BC)

Sea Cider Farm and Ciderhouse (Saanichton)

Barton and Leier Gallery

Ro's Gallery

International Composting Corporation