

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



May 2005
May 2005



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

May is Rhododendron Month in Nanaimo. Our Plant Sale and Truss Show is on Saturday, May 7th. Please bring your trusses and please volunteer to help if you can. The speaker at our next meeting on May 12th is Carmen Varcoe from Victoria. Her topic is "Woody Companion Plants For Rhododendrons". I hope to see all of you at the Truss Show and at the regular meeting on the 12th.

NRS Plant Sale and Truss Show

Saturday May 7

The truss show will be set up on Friday evening. Please bring your trusses for display between 7 – 9 pm Friday May 6 or before 7:30 am on Saturday. Volunteers are needed for set-up on Friday evening 7 – 9 pm, Saturday morning at 7:30 to unload growers, and after the sale for cleanup.

EXECUTIVE

President	Allen McRae	758-7589
Past President	Richard White	752-6519
Vice President	Paul Lawry	390-2370
Secretary	Kathryn Grant	245-7879
Treasurer	Barb Coy	758-8497
Directors	Anne Williamson	390-2604
	Craig Clarke	390-4090
	Debbie Gaboury	758-1204
	Glenda Barr	390-2822
	Mary Taylor	951-0671
	Mike Miller	758-2879

COMMITTEES

Advertising	Mike Miller	758-2879
Library	Chris/Brenda	758-0993
Newsletter	Kathryn Grant	245-7879
Program	Richard White	752-6519
Raffle	June & John	390-3605
Social	Anne Williamson	390-2604
Dollar Table	Yvonne Harding	756-3574

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society
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Website: nanaimo.rhodos.ca
email: nanaimo@rhodos.ca

NEXT MEETING

MAY 12, 2005

BEBAN PARK

7:30 pm

CARMEN VARCOE
"RHODODENDRON COMPANION PLANTS"

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society's

5th Annual Garden Tour

When: Saturday May 14th, 2005

Cost: \$33 (includes admission to Milner Gardens and Woodland)

Departure: 7:30 am from Woodgrove (near Chapters)

Don't forget to bring a picnic lunch!

Where Are We Going?

This year, we're off to Nanoose, Parksville, Qualicum and the Comox Valley where we'll visit a number of beautiful gardens as well as a couple of local nurseries. Included will be visits to the Milner Gardens and Woodland and the Filberg Estate. We'll visit several private gardens which can only be seen on tours such as this. Included in this year's tour are the gardens of both our February and March speakers: Roy Taylor and Bernie Guyader.

We'll also explore a little local rhododendron history through the Greig family and the site of the original Royston Nursery. We'll visit several gardens with strong links to the Greigs and the nursery, including Jim and Jean Greig's garden in Nanoose. Not only have they opened their garden to us, but Jim and Jean will accompany us throughout the day adding their own commentary and anecdotes.

We plan on returning to Nanaimo by 6 to 7 pm

If you'd like to go, contact John/June or Chris

Bring a friend!

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NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY GENERAL MEETING April 14, 2005

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by President Allen McRae. There were 40 members and guests present.

President's report: Reminder of the ARS convention April 27 – May 1. Our show and sale will be Saturday May 7; please bring trusses in on Friday evening between 7 – 9 pm.

Liisa Rullo and Darlene Budd volunteered to act as nominating committee for the AGM, to be held at the May meeting.

Secretary's report: M/S/C to adopt the minutes of the March meeting. Correspondence: Research and Scholarly Activity at Malaspina University-College report.

Treasurer's report: general account - \$3105.33; Bowen Park Legacy account \$156.30; library fund - <53.58>.

Guest Leslie announced there will be a Pumpkin Festival at Shady Mile Farm Market October 15 & 16. Giant pumpkins, activities for kids, all welcome.

Program: May – Carmen Varcoe – Rhododendron Companion Plants.

Bus Tour: 5 seats left on the bus tour May 14. See John or June to register.

NRS is purchasing 50 copies of a new pamphlet Rhododendron Fundamentals, produced by North Island Rhododendron Society. These will be available for purchase at \$3.

Doorprizes were won by Jean Rhodes, Barb Coy. Raffle prizes won by Charles Hardy, Reinhold Gorogosilich, Guest, Chris Southwick.

Bob and Jean Rhodes gave a slide presentation on growing the tender rhododendrons.



Hidden Acres Rhododendrons

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growers of specialty rhododendrons

DETAILS OF OUR YEAR-END POTLUCK
WILL BE ANNOUNCED AT THE MAY MEETING



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Rhodo Notes - by Liisa Rullo
April 14, 2005: Bob and Jean Rhodes

- Dr. Bob and Jean Rhodes originally gardened in Maple Ridge where it rains 80 inches a year – ideal for rhododendrons. Now they have a 200' x 400' foot site sloping to the water on Gabriola Island.
- Gabriola is a real 'Mediterranean' environment – damp in the winter but very dry in the summer. The Rhodes' site faces north east and has both sun and wind. Despite this, their garden is full of lovely plants, especially species rhodos.
- They winter their tender rhodos in a greenhouse. The plants come out in the spring in large tubs which are buried in bark mulch for the summer. Many of these special rhodos are very fragrant.
- We toured the garden in a slide show featuring many interesting plants, with a running commentary of personal anecdotes, plant histories and species pedigrees. Some highlights follow:
- For that very early first breath of spring, try *R. dauricum* – it is very cold hardy and a lovely pink. Bric-a-Brac is another very early one – pretty, low, with round leaves, in pink/white.
- Rose Elf, a deep pink rock garden rhodo, was totally smothered in blooms. In fact, Bob said his plant bloomed itself to death!
- *R. pentaphyllum*, an azalea, has 5 leaves at each branch tip and pink, funnel shaped flowers. A bit like a magnolia. Bob saw one in Japan that was 300 years old. He also noted another 5 leaved azalea, *R. quinquefolium*, with white flowers. Both have great fall colour.
- *R. bodinieri* has stunning pink blooms with a dark blotch and long wispy stamens. Bob thinks it should be in the *R. yunnanense* group. Greyish leaves, fragrant. Obviously a special one and probably a natural hybrid.
- Gabriola Glory is Bob's own cross – very deep pink, somewhat like Noyo Brave, he says. (Can we get it somewhere?)
- *R. morii* grows in the mountains of Taiwan and becomes more dwarf as it progresses up the mountain (clearly a useful thing for plant selectors -just climb the mountain to the size you want and take cuttings there, no?). White, with blush buds - very nice in flower.
- Grace Seabrook, Taurus and Malahat – are very similar bright reds. Grace Seabrook & Taurus are essentially the same cross, except Taurus gets big red buds. All 3 bloom at the same time and Bob says they get too large for a small garden. He feels Taurus makes the finest truss.
- Like Bernie last month, Bob likes Cox's 'birds' – Curlew is the best yellow in his opinion.
- His favorite fragrant rhodo is Lady Alice Fitzwilliam. Close behind are Fragrantissium and *R. edgeworthii* – all are tender, white and gorgeous.
- Bob's most famous cross is Bob's Blue – Ilam Violet x Blue Diamond (1979). He says it bloomed the first year and roots easily. It is a beautiful plant and easy to grow – if you kill it, you really are a bad gardener! Harold Greer evidently liked it so much that he got a cutting and put it on the market, where it has been ever since.

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Twigs AND STEMS



Goodies for May meeting:
Paul and Linda Lawry
Mary Hardy
Donna Porter

NRS Annual General Meeting
will take place at the May meeting. Two to four Directors are needed, including Vice-President and Treasurer. Please consider taking one of these positions. Liisa and Darlene will be calling! Executive meetings take place monthly on Thursday evenings, one or two weeks following the general meeting.

After looking after the raffle table for several years, June and John will no longer be available next year. We need one or two volunteers to look after this enjoyable position. Please let Allen know if you are interested.

MARS Annual Garden Tour
Parksville - Qualicum
May 7 & 8, 10 am to 4 pm
250-248-5593

North Island Rhododendron Society
Truss Show and Plant Sale
May 8, 10 am to 2pm
Comox Band Hall, 3320 Comox Road

North Island Rhododendron Society
Garden Tour
Comox Valley
May 15 10 am to 4 pm



R. 'Bob's Blue'
Photo by Eleanor Philp



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George Forrest, Mr Bulley and
Professor Balfour
by Norman Todd

*'And flowers azure, black and streaked with gold,
Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.'* Shelley.

No doubt flowers figured larger in the psyches of **Isaac Bayley Balfour** and **George Forrest** than did gold but that sometimes-noble element was instrumental in bringing these two disparate men together. George Forrest, (*R. forrestii*) who was probably the greatest plant collector of all time, had spent ten of his oat-sowing, formative years roughing it in Australia. He had grown up in Scotland. He was the youngest of thirteen children, only eight of whom made it to adulthood. In 1903, George, at age 30, was back in Scotland living with his widowed mother and fairly desperate for work. The gold connection followed from a previous one concerning bones.

George had a huge curiosity about the natural world and spent most of his time outdoors. He was keen on fishing and shooting and knew all the plants and birds of his neighbourhood. On one outing he noticed an unusual stone protruding from an eroded bank. His careful scraping uncovered more of the stone, which proved to be a lid for a coffin. There were bones inside.

George took some of the bones to the Keeper of the Museum of National Antiquities in Edinburgh. They proved to be about 1500 years old. The Curator of the museum was impressed by this stocky, intelligent, independent and ambitious young man and took it upon himself to write to the Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Isaac Bayley Balfour (*R. balfourianum*), asking if he knew of anyone looking for a botanical collector. In his short letter he noted the Forrest had “some experience roughing it as a gold digger”. Balfour, who was twenty years older than Forrest, had also done some plant exploring but perhaps, more importantly, had a trace of gold fever in his system. He had been induced by a friend’s “flakes of gold as big as a man’s hand...slicing it off with cold chisels. By jingo it’s more like Arabian nights than modern gold mining” and had invested £100 in a mining venture in Queensland. He felt disposed to offer Forrest a job in the RBG’s herbarium at 10/- a week. In those days there was no Minimum Wage. Balfour’s offer was probably about the very least that could be offered. Nevertheless, Forrest jumped at it. So began a relationship that was deep, sincere and enriching — not in terms of gold — but in their shared knowledge of the natural world. Most of the gold went into the pockets of others. One who so profited was **Arthur Kilpin Bulley**.

A.K.Bulley was a complex man. He was a wealthy cotton broker whose legacy now lives on in the Ness Gardens at Liverpool, England. His mother had 14 children all of whom survived. He had a wonderful nose for business and a competitive but sincere love for plants. He was an atheist, and an evangelical socialist. Among his other political endeavours, he tried, unsuccessfully, as a Women’s Suffrage candidate for a seat the British House of Commons. In the days part of the uniform of the business tycoon was a bowler hat; he wore a fedora. From his reading and business contacts he knew there were undiscovered treasures— aesthetic and financial — in southwest China. He was loath to compromise his socialist principles by exploiting his love of plants and his skill at growing them for monetary gain. So at first his collecting strategy was to write everyone and anyone who was in these foreign parts (including the “Papist missionaries”) soliciting seed. This did not produce many tangible results — only more mouth-watering descriptive enticements of what might be found there. **Dr. Augustine Henry**, when stationed in Szechwan, did send some seed to Bulley who wisely sent some of these to Isaac Bayley Balfour. Balfour had the facilities to grow plants but had no mandate or funds to sponsor a professional collector. Bulley was still merely a private gardener. Meanwhile, in the south of England, the

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multi-generation **Veitch** nursery had sponsored **Henry Wilson** to go to China. Wilson was instructed to bring back, among other things, seeds of Henry's discovery — the handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*).

The Veitch name was on the tips of the tongues of the loftiest and wealthiest of British horticulturists. Bulley was prominent in this group but regarded by it with distancing reservation. Slowly, he came to realize that to have the newest and rarest plants he had to engage his own collector. Swallowing some of his socialist doctrine he decided to send a collector to Yunnan. Augustine Henry had told him, "don't waste money on postage — send a man." He also decided to set up his own nursery, in direct competition with Veitch. He established **A.K. Bees & Co.** (*R. beesiana*) but to assuage his scruples he called it a cooperative with the motto, 'All to Gather — all Together'.

A. Henry had picked up on Yunnan's great plant wealth from **Abbé Delavay's** pioneering discoveries. Delavay, a French missionary, had been sending herbarium specimens and a few seeds back to Europe. This was country on a grand scale. Three of the world's deepest gorges, the Salween, the Mekong and the Yangtze coursed through Yunnan and the variety of material was breath taking; the climatic range being so wide that conservatory gardeners and alpine plant enthusiasts were all salivating at the thought of savouring its flora. Henry proffered the menu and the Veitches and Bulley ordered the seven-course meal.

Bulley bought space for a small advertisement in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*. It read, "Wanted, a Young Man well up on Hardy Plants, to go out to the East and Collect, — Box 15, G.P.O., Liverpool" Balfour responded with a short letter which concluded with, "He is a strongly built fellow and seems to me to be of the right grit for a collector." Bulley wasted no time in hiring Forrest; after all Veitch had a five-year start by having sent out **E. H. Wilson** (later known as Chinese Wilson).

Forrest left Edinburgh on the 14th May 1904 and was soon on board the SS *Australia* bound for Bombay. He traveled by train to Madras. The voyage from there to Rangoon was ghastly on a filthy, mechanically unsound, storm tossed steamer that had to be towed into Rangoon by a rescue boat. Forrest wrote that a baby died on the ship and "was thrown overboard like a bundle of brown paper." His route through Burma to Yunnan was largely unknown to westerners. The rigours he faced were a mere foretaste of how he was to spend the next three years. Forrest thought his stay was to be for two years.

The agreement between Forrest, Bulley and Balfour seems to have been a loose, verbal one. It seems Forrest received about £600 a year to cover everything. Agreements for subsequent expeditions spelled out a salary and detailed support costs. Balfour's understanding was that he was to get all the herbarium collection; Bulley thought he was to get all the seed and photographs; Forrest thought he could keep some of the seed and duplicates of the herbarium sheets.

The disagreements arose in earnest after Forrest's return to Edinburgh. The saga of this first (there were seven) Forrest expedition is one of horrendous hardship, success, elation and the deepest of despair. (In July 1906 Balfour wrote to Bulley, "there is little doubt that Forrest has been murdered."). This stranger than fiction tale is told in many books but the best account is in **Brenda McLean's**, *George Forrest Plant Hunter*. Here, it is only the relationships between these three forceful personalities that are being discussed so readers are encouraged to read McLean's book: it is in our library. . Each of these men was highly principled, highly intelligent and highly motivated. Each was egotistical and tenacious.

Balfour found a spot for Forrest in his old job at the herbarium of the RBG. The pay was now £2 a week. Before leaving for China, Forrest had become engaged to another herbarium worker, **Clementina Traill** (*R. clementinae*, *R. traillianum*). On his return they were married much against her mother's wishes: she was not

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much impressed with George's occupation. Of course, Clementina had to give up her job. George was not in good health as a consequence of his three gruelling years in China and often missed work. Working hours were inflexible and the newly married Forrests lived six miles distant from the RBG. George had always walked to work but when ill was unable to do so and the only train did not get him to work in time. Balfour was an understanding man but had to administer a large staff and couldn't make exceptions. Forrest's immediate supervisor was not at all sympathetic.

Forrest thought he owned one set of the herbarium specimens. Balfour thought otherwise and sent a truck to collect them. Bulley thought he had complete ownership of all seed and Forrest had kept some, which he was selling. Forrest felt compelled to offer his resignation and Balfour accepted it. Would a modern high priced contract lawyer have prevented this outcome by having the three signatures duly witnessed on a 20-page document?

Forrest did keep in touch with Balfour and was still sending him plant identification lists — the result of long hours of work — but their relationship was icily strained. Forrest wrote to Balfour, "Any indebtedness which may have been due to the Garden by me I consider to be more than repaid by the collections I have already presented." At heart, Balfour still considered Forrest his protégé and was a man of reasoned compassion. He invited Forrest to come and have a free and open discussion of the difficulties. They ended up shaking hands. Forrest never forgot how understanding and avuncularly supportive Balfour had been. His respect for Balfour never wavered again. Simultaneously, Bulley and Balfour became the closest of friends and remained so. Balfour always seemed to be able to build friendships on an individual's strengths, ignoring their weaknesses.

Forrest could not do that and his respect for Bulley had changed to wariness. Forrest had not forgotten that Bulley had insisted that Forrest take a camera with him as an essential item in his kit. In the early 1900s, photographs were taken on plates in a large box mounted on a tripod. Imagine trying to scale the precipitous chasms lugging a camera to photograph a two-inch primula. The first set of plates that Forrest took with him was ruined. The precautions needed to protect the plates in such an inhospitable climate had to be learned the hard way. Bulley demurred at the cost of replacing them, refused to provide paper and developing material. Forrest wrote, "Mr. Bulley ...said there was no necessity to take photos. This after telling me to take a camera with me. He is a rather peculiar individual."

Forrest seems to have been constantly fretful of not being able to meet Bulley's expectations. He wrote, "I might as well be scuppered as go home a failure." Bulley seems to have been unable to give his collector the encouragement and reassurance that he needed although he was loudly praising Forrest's discoveries to others. It was a feudal master-servant relationship and the collector's free spirit was compromised.

Forrest, following his resignation from RBG Edinburgh, was in limbo. He wanted to go back to his old hunting grounds; he had learned the local language; he had trained some of the local people to collect and had gained their respect and loyalty. Bulley, however, was lukewarm despite having promised never to let Forrest "sink into the ranks of the out of works." A little later, he wrote, "But the simple facts are that I can't see it costing less than £600 a year, and ...I am a comparatively poor man."

Twelve days after Forrest quit the RBG, his mentor, Balfour, wrote him to tell him that **Professor Sargent** from America had visited him and was looking for someone to go to China. Sargent was Director of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Forrest and Sargent met at the Veitch nursery. The American wanted plants for New England; he wanted hardier stuff than Forrest had collected in Yunnan. Forrest was loath to go further north; he was sure there were still great riches in the Mekong-Salween divide. Balfour encouraged Forrest to

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accept Sargent's offer of £300 a year plus expenses. Forrest asked for time to consider and stalled, mainly because **Clementina** was pregnant with their first child. He missed his opportunity.

In the meantime, some of Forrest's seeds were germinating for Bulley. *Primula malacoides*, (an "arable weed" to some observers; however, **J.C. Williams**, one of Forrest later sponsors, did call it "an unfailing delight") was selling at 7s 6d a plant. Bulley was advertising, somewhat untruthfully, "During the past five years or so we have spent large sums of money in sending out collectors to China. We now have an enormous stock of new plants on trial in our nursery. These we shall exhibit and offer for sale, as they prove of merit..." *Primula bulleyana* had been named and it too was fetching high prices. (Bulley preferred the name *beesiana*. But he wrote, "However I am indifferent. Beesi, Beesorum, Beesensis, Beesium, Beesica, Beesiana, anything which brings the name in...") There were 22 species named after Bulley from Forrest's first expedition. He did think that *Gentiana veitchiorum* sounded hideous. Bulley's 'beastly money' became less beastly and, knowing Forrest had not agreed to Sargent's demand that he leave before the birth of his child, offered him £200 plus expenses to go back to Yunnan. Forrest, having been present for the birth of his son, was now in no position to refuse and left for China in January 1910.

As soon as he arrived in Rangoon, he was within a hair's breadth of returning home. Bulley had failed to send the money for equipping the expedition. Forrest had to beg the ship's captain to let him stay on board until Bulley had cabled £150. Bulley's unapologetic explanation was that there had been a mix-up in Bee's office. Forrest was now sorely angered and disillusioned. Further delays in payment followed; it seems inexplicable that a man of Bulley's business acumen would let his collector go without resources. Forrest decided in Rangoon that he could not work again for such an employer but he would honour his contract and see it out. He let it be known that Bulley was a "cad of the first order." He had a hate on for nurserymen, particularly English nurserymen. "There is a lot said about the meanness of the Scotch but in my time I have met more stingy English than Scotch, and Bulley and Veitch, the great Sir Harry, are types, extreme types." Bulley called Forrest's bluff and wrote him, "I shall not want any formal notice of your desire to go." Forrest did finish his term, introducing many of our most treasured garden plants. Bulley's one-inch thick catalogue listed 67 species of Asiatic primula. His business was prospering and he offered Forrest a two-year extension to his contract. This was immediately turned down.

This story is, of course, incomplete. It is just a glimpse into the lives and affairs of three men who played immensely important roles in British horticulture. Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour was the scientist and the statesman. His classification system for rhododendron was used for the best part of a century. He, himself, knew it was only an expedient but I, like most older gardeners, still use it.

Forrest undertook another five successful expeditions. He died of a heart attack, suddenly, in January 1932 while out collecting bird specimens with three of his Chinese employees. During his first two expeditions he had developed a great love for rhododendrons. We, who grow them, should toast his memory.

K.C. Bulley had little time for rhododendrons and had in fact sold all the rhododendron seed from the second expedition to **J.C. Williams** of Cornwall. Fortunately, Forrest developed the same kind of rewarding relationship with Williams as he had with Balfour. Bulley continued to sponsor plant hunters in the Sino-Himalaya. He was hugely instrumental, not only in introducing new plant material, but also in making it available to everyone. His one-penny seed packages were designed for those with only a windowsill of space. Although he was an uncommon man, his second great love was for the common man and woman. Bulley died in 1942 after 44 years at Ness. His widow wanted his epitaph to read "Bulley, his fortunes and misfortunes." His daughter, **Lois**, presented the whole Ness estate, along with a large endowment, to Liverpool University.

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