

University Finnerty Garden Friends

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NEWSLETTER • JULY 2005



Dear Friends,

When I started to write this letter and put the date on the top of it, I suddenly realized that the year is almost half over. As I get older, time seems to go so much faster!

It has been an incredible spring at Galiano. The rain has kept the grass growing, so that I have spent hours using my electric weed whacker, and the grass I haven't cut is now over four feet tall—talk about a grass forest. The garden has been absolutely spectacular—the growth on the shrubs and the bloom have exceeded all previous years. And, of course, the weeds have flourished very well also. Such is the joy of having a garden!

The American Rhododendron Society had its annual meeting in Victoria, and the Victoria branch celebrated its twenty-fifth birthday. Part of the celebrations were garden tours, and Finnerty was one of the featured gardens. The day was perfect and some 300 rhodo enthusiasts toured Finnerty. Tony James and his crew had done a superb job on the Gardens, and they were beautiful. As a result of the peculiar spring weather, the blooming periods of many plants overlapped, and the display was impressive. Carmen and the members of the Advisory Committee, working with the University staff, had brought the Gardens

to perfection. I hope that many of you visited them in the same period—I don't think I have ever seen them looking so splendid.

The ARS convention came at the end of April and first of May, so this year our Garden sale was held a week later and was on Mothers' Day. In spite, or perhaps because, of the change, the sales total was up about \$400 from last year and totalled \$51,528.65. The expenses were approximately \$31,500, leaving a net of about \$20,000. Truly a wonderful result, and all of the hundreds of volunteers deserve a vote of thanks. Judy Terry and Bill Cross did their usual fabulous job and everything ran smoothly.

Since I last wrote to you, Elizabeth Wilson passed away. She was a long term supporter of the gardens, and for many years was the chair of the Advisory Committee. In the past few years, she has concentrated largely on the Memorial Garden. Her ashes will be placed there. She and her husband Dick, who was mayor of Victoria and then Chancellor of UVic, were part of a group that helped secure the property at Gordon Head and encouraged the university to move from the old campus (which is now Camosun College). She helped facilitate the move of the Buchanan Simpson rhodos from Cowichan Lake to the newly designated area of the campus—the part inside the Ring Road. We shall all miss her. The Advisory Committee is selecting a number of her

favourite plants for placing in the Gardens

The group at the University who have worked so hard on the production and distribution of the Finnerty Calendar, have decided to skip this year. We hope that by next year we can have a sales system in place so that the distribution will be well managed and not have to rely on volunteers—it has taken a lot of energy to develop the sales to their present stage.

I wish all of you a good summer, happy gardening and good health!

Betty Kennedy



Calypso bulbosa—Woodland Treasures

Margaret deWeese

About the first week in April each year the upper woods brings forth tiny pink orchids, commonly known as Ladyslippers. The flowers, look as though they could slip on to the elegant feet of fairies. As more woodland on Vancouver Island is disturbed, many of the wildflowers are disappearing; so, for me, happily, to live in a spot where they grow naturally is a blessing. We leave this part of the property totally alone, except for carefully picking up winter storm blowdowns, just so we can witness these heralders of spring. Should we have no other plants in the garden, knowing the *Calypso bulbosa* will be peeping through the forest floor in April, brings with it the happiness of realizing that these are natural wonders, untouched by man. In fact, I stopped after a couple of unsuccessful attempts to move the bulbs, or wait for the flower to set seed—so narrow a seed head it is hard to imagine. It relies on certain mycorrhizal fungi and should only be looked at or photographed.

From .Lewis J. Clark's *Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest*, edited by our own John Trelawney of Deep Cove, we learn that: "The goddess daughter of Atlas was Calypso, whose name means concealment, with reference to this lovely flower's habit of hiding among the mosses of the forest floor,

in her memory.

in the shade—essential to its existence—of high forest trees. 'Bulbosa', of course, refers to the oval, white pseudo bulb (corm) from which grow the single, strikingly parallel veined ovate leaf, and the six inch delicate scape carrying its solitary nodding and lovely blossom. The blossom, in the windless air of the forest, delights the wanderer with its heavenly fragrance—fresh, spicy and utterly distinctive. Especially on southern Vancouver Island, one occasionally finds the form ALBA, ethereally lovely and glistening white, When shape and proportion, colour and perfume are all considered, this must rank as one of the most enchantingly lovely of all our native plants."

I have never seen the "alba" form, but I can only imagine what it would look like with a silvery moon lighting the forest and a white Ladyslipper catching its light. I would know then that the fairies were bewitching their dancing slippers and I should be inside, away from things magical.



Calypso bulbosa



Ramblings in a Garden

Tony James

Curator, Finnerty Gardens

The late Winter and early Spring has been a busy time for the maintenance staff in the Gardens with the preparations for a garden tour as part of the Rhododendron Convention tour.

The season was already 2/3 weeks ahead of normal and still remains that way. The bed mulching, which normally takes the full season to accomplish, was completed in a month. At times we had 6 personnel working in the area to get everything done. Most of the maintenance budget must have been spent in this time frame.

We believe the effort was well worth it. The Gardens looked in very good shape for the tour, the weather was excellent and, judging by the comments from visitors, they were well received.

The actual tours themselves presented us with quite a logistical headache: how does one arrange for an expected 400 people in 8 buses to be guided around in a very short time? As this stop was also the designated nutrition break, it would be an added distraction to supplement the mix. After various scenarios had been considered, we decided to station 6 people at various places of interest around the garden, prepare a map and a list of what to look at and give this to each person or group. People could then make their own pace, meander off the paths, or chat with the guides. It appeared to work quite well with the visitors pleased that we had guides to answer questions. As seems usual with these arranged tours, the buses were late and people had little time to take a good look at plants before being chased back to the buses.

The main observations that came through from the tour and were mentioned by the other guides, concerned comments on plants other than rhododendrons that we tend to take for granted. This probably resulted from the diverse nature of the visitors, including many from the eastern side of Canada and the States as well as

Apart from the above, other items that may catch a first visitor's eye are the stately timber bamboo by the pool; the serenity and clearness of the woodland pond; the entrance rock and *Rhododendron pseudochrysanthum* especially when in flower with the adjacent shady rock area and its ferns; the grass bed at the Cedar Hill X Rd entrance anytime from July through to December; the climbers on trees, pergolas and stumps especially the roses in bloom; the *Sorbus* varieties in the fall together with

abroad. At my station, most comments concerned two cherries in bloom, namely a *Kwanzan* and a *Shiroguguen*. I always regarded these as nuisance trees that were often scruffy looking when out of bloom and with a tendency to decline rapidly after about 10 years, but in this case it was the first thing looked at and commented on. Another eyecatcher at this area turned out to be a nicely shaped Japanese maple framed by two *Rhododendron Purple Splendour* with a blue *augustinii* in the background. The sun caught the maple just perfectly and the whole looked like a painting. It was noticeable that anyone with a camera, took a picture of this grouping. Though it typified a perfect garden arrangement, that had not been intentional.

These events and comments started me thinking about just what different people see or want to see in a garden. As someone who has been around this garden since its inception in July 1975 (yes we are close to our 30th anniversary), I have probably taken a lot for granted. I am sure there must be a number of plants, groupings, places, or form or texture that catch the eye. A general comment that I often hear concerns the "design" of the garden and they want to know who designed it. They are surprised to hear that we have really just evolved on an "as needed" basis. Some like the many meanderings and secret places, never knowing what you might stumble on. It is certainly easy to become disoriented and not know where you are or even which direction you are facing. We have had visitors lost in there. Of course, others bemoan the fact that there is no logic or direction and prefer a little guidance. Hopefully this will come soon with a directory board, map and perhaps naming of beds or identification of nodes.

all the other resplendent foliage and berry colours; the floriferous display from the triflorum rhododendrons such as the *augustiniis*; the scent of the *loderis* in May and of wintersweet and *Sarcococca* in Winter when nothing appears to be in bloom; the occasional exotic looking plant such as the *Cardoons* and the ginger; the purple *Sambucus*, white bark of the *Betula jacquemontii*, bluish *Pyrus salicifolia pendula* with *Clematis jackmani* rambling through the cut leaf alders and the dove trees; the *Gunnera*

as well as many other large leaved perennials; the variety of *Rhododendron* leaf and the indumentum beneath as well as the size of the larger leaved ones plus the stately calophytum; the many forms of *Magnolias* especially in June with the dark glossy leaves of *grandiflora* *Victoria*, the blossom wreathed branches of *Cornus kousa* and the delicate *Styrax*; and, finally, *Mahonia x media* in Winter with the hummingbirds and the profusion of hellebores for seasonal interest.

There is so much to see and enjoy in this Garden even for those with little horticultural knowledge. The staff working in there will be only too pleased to answer your questions, show you around and explain the Garden's history and construction.



The Trelawny Garden

Margaret deWeese

What does a garden say? Is it an interpretation of what the gardener holds dear and interesting ? Does it then reflect the gardener's lifetime of experiences?



John and Ruth Trelawny

In the case of the Trelawny garden—a property bordering on Deep Cove on the Saanich peninsula, north of Victoria, and lovingly developed since 1953—John and Ruth have created 1.3 acres of woodland

enchantment After the logging of the nineteen thirties, the *Arbutus* and second growth Douglas fir formed the basis for the garden. When they began, there was a spring fed well, but now that they are connected to city water this well has become a small pond surrounded by moisture-tolerant plants. The striking trunk of the *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, Giant Redwood, planted fifty two years ago, gives the upper bank a sense of longevity as it dwarfs the local giants! There are other huge specimen trees such as *Cedrus libani*, Cedar of Lebanon, and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the deciduous Dawn Redwood, glorious in its soft new pale green needles in spring, right through into the autumn when its needles change to reddish-orange. Vigorous clematis and *Hydrangea petiolaris* climb the Douglas Firs which softens the fissured trunks. Narrow paths meander, delineated by flat upright stones that hold the amended soil and watering system. A stunning *Crinodendron hookerianum* catches the eye with its bright red lanterns of blossom!



Sequoiadendron giganteum

Also above the driveway by the house is gravel scree for three species of alpine *Rhodohypoxis*, from South Africa, deep blue gentian and three of the orange species of *Zauschneria of California*. John—who has travelled extensively in the mountains of India and Iraq and in the Taurus Mountains in

Turkey—has incorporated treasures from these far away countries. His love of native wild flowers shows in the garden: Trillium, Erythronium and Camas, including the white Death Camas. John said his aim is to have the soil under the two hundred and fifty plus rhododendrons blanketed with ground cover such as *Trientalis latifolia*, Star Flower, with their pale pink to white stars twinkling above their delicate green leaves, *Achlys triphylla*, Vanilla Leaf, Ferns, Wood Anemones, *Trillium ovatum*, and *Cornus canadensis*, the Creeping Dogwood. Evident is the care to show a contrast of textures, leaf colour and height so that the mind is kept keenly observing this botanical wonder. There is no falseness of alternating colours and patterns, which to me is gardening wallpaper. What is used instead, are colour combinations such as *Cornus florida*, a showy mass of pink and white bracts blending with the green, white and pink leaves of *Actinidia kolomika* with the pink and white azaleas. The garden is true to the natural world while bringing to the viewer's gaze unusual specimens from around the globe.

On approaching the house, one observes such fine species of magnolia as M. "Yellow bird", the blooms are like yellow finches fluttering their wings in amongst the leaves. Vines cover the walls of the house which sits overlooking the sea. When asked for the name of the yellow mallow-like flower climber, John replied: "The front of the house facing the sea is a riot of pure gold of the *Fremontodendron californicum*." A small area of emerald grass, flat and pleasant for morning coffee, lunches and teas invites the visitor to stop awhile and visit with this charming and clever couple, interested in wildflowers and other plants of the world. Brilliant deciduous azaleas: Exbury "Gibraltar" and Knapp Hill "Daybreak" flame their colours so that no matter how gray the morning mists from the sea in the spring, this splash of colour rivals the sun. A glass-enclosed sunroom wall is filled with Mandevilla flowers, the outside seems

invited in for lunch all the year round. The book for gardening gurus, *The Hillier Manual of Trees and Shrubs*—lying on the desk in John's study, alongside a pile of his own published books—shows a commitment to gardening quite suited to a botanist. John says he is never happier than when discussing plants!



Azara serrata

John is very fond of the *Azara serrata* and *Azara macrophylla* from Chile. The first is covered with masses of small bright orange spheres among dark green leaves that enhance the blue/mauve of *Rhododendron augustinii* "Royston" nearby, the other's tiny flowers give off the enchanting aroma of vanilla, which again is complemented by the *Cornus omeiense*, a non-deciduous tree of red/pink/white/green and bronze leaves, which in turn picks up the new growth of the *Pieris japonica*. Large-leaved species rhododendron stand sentinel to a bevy of parti-coloured hybrids in their pinks, white, cream, yellow and blue/mauve. *Cornus capitata*—another evergreen dogwood, with its large red fruits—was brought by seed in John's pockets and now happily graces a number of Vancouver Island gardens.

There are so many interlocking links in the Trelawny garden. The *Hoheria sexstylosa* and *Hoheria Glory of Amich* from New Zealand which Alec McCarter wrote about in an earlier Finnerty Newsletter came from John. The rhododendron 'John Trelawny' registered by Evelyn Weesjes, sits behind a Douglas Fir slab bench, created by his helper Mike, who with Patti helps to construct and maintain this extensive garden. John and Ruth have spent a large period of their life in planning and plant collecting, as well as in clearing the bush and a variety of labour, study and dedication that have been rewarded by this result. John has just retired from the Advisory Board to the Finnerty Gardens, a place he has helped foster to its present beauty at the edge of the University of Victoria.

A visit to John and Ruth's labour of love is an unforgettable experience. At the American Rhododendron Convention in the Spring of 2005 so many visitors from other parts of the world were entranced by what they saw, and they were observed recording on bits of paper, combinations of the unusual shrubs and trees. And many went home with digital images to refresh their memory of this seaside and woodland garden of beauty. Just as I hope you will remember the written descriptions, but neither digital images nor the written word can do justice to the Trelawny garden. It is a garden to inspire all other gardeners to create their own labour of love.



American Rhododendron Society Annual Meeting – Victoria, B.C., April 27-May 1, 2005

The ARS was founded in Portland in 1945, followed by a rapid expansion on the West Coast. The East Coast came next with Massachusetts in 1970. Victoria arrived rather late, in 1980, but there are now five chapters on Vancouver Island. There are some European chapters, and our guest

M.J. Harvey

It is a complicated task for a local chapter to put on a convention for a worldwide, but predominantly USA-based society. Let me explain a little about how it was done and how it turned out.

The Victoria Chapter volunteered to hold the convention on the occasion of their 25th anniversary. Hence the title: Victoria's Silver Salute.

The Victoria Convention Centre was booked well ahead of time in 1991 (I suspect to the amusement of the Centre staff), and a bond taken out to accumulate interest so that we would have the basic booking deposit when the time came.

The number of attendees, at 600, was higher than have been attending ARS conventions for the past number of years. This is presumably due to the attractiveness of Victoria, our reputation for gardens, the program with speakers from Scotland, New Zealand and Sikkim, as well as the increasing confidence of Americans towards travel following the terrorist attacks of 2001.

So what is the American Rhododendron Society and how big is it? In worldwide terms, the RHS beats everyone with perhaps a quarter of a million members. At the convention, one of our speakers, Quentin Cronk (recently appointed Director of the UBC Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research) approached the size question from a different point of view—web pages, which measures activity, not just membership. By this measure, the Orchid Society with 97K web pages is the overall giant, next is the Alpine Garden Society with 16K, followed closely by the Cacti and Succulent Society at 15K and then the ARS at 13K. So, we are up there with the most active groups.

speaker, Keshab Pradhan of Sikkim, is a member of the J.D. Hooker Chapter, named for the Director of Kew, who was the first westerner to explore parts of the Himalayas systematically for Rhododendrons. His 1851 book, *Rhododendrons of the Sikkim Himalaya*, was written in a florid descriptive prose and

illustrated with whole-page lithographs by Walter Fitch. This luxurious publication was responsible for drawing attention to the wealth of species in Asia, encouraging further exploration, the subsequent hybridizing craze, and in brief, led to where we are today.

There is, however, another earlier Rhododendron Society founded in 1915 by J.C. Williams (cf *Rhododendron williamsianum*), E.J. Magor and other members of the landed gentry of southern England. These people were important because they were financing, by subscribing to seed shares, the expeditions of the plant explorers to the Himalayas and China. As a result they possessed the first western living specimens of many species.

One of our speakers, Judith Walker, has been researching the connections of Vancouver Island with the members of the earlier Rhododendron Society, and gave a fascinating historical account of how material, particularly from Magor, came to Vancouver Island. George Fraser, who helped with the layout of the gardens in Beacon Hill Park, the Simpsons of Cowichan Lake, the Barkleys of Nanaimo, and the Greigs of Royston, who bought the Simpson's nursery in 1934 for \$1500, were all in correspondence with and receiving material from various UK sources. It turns out that we Vancouver Islanders, far from being on one of the more remote and obscure nether regions of the British Empire, were in fact very important in the early cultivation and distribution of Rhododendrons in North America.

Most members of Finnerty Gardens will know it was the Simpson collection of Rhododendrons that was moved to the UVic campus and was the foundation of the gardens, setting it in the direction of becoming a Rhododendron collection. Incidentally, would anyone like to publish Judith Walker's book?

At Finnerty Gardens, we had a recommended route marked out among the many circuitous pathways, and each visitor

Judith also told the story that George Fraser, in his Ucluelet nursery, wrote to the Rhododendron Society (which is now the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group of the RHS) requesting membership. He was told that "tradesmen" were not eligible. Mary Greig had almost the same experience some years later when she made the mistake of writing on business notepaper. She was initially refused because she was "in trade", but I think was admitted later when she wrote on plain notepaper and received support from other members because of her enthusiasm.

There were eleven lectures in all—but enough of them—because the conference was arranged to have talks in the morning and garden visits in the afternoon. The gardens had been publicized over the previous couple of years by members writing articles, taking photographs and having these published in the Journal of the ARS, which is a glossy magazine with colour photographs.

This ploy worked almost too well, since on the registration forms, the gardens which had been written up were over-subscribed for visits and others were less often requested. As the number of registrants edged towards 600, however, all visits were over-subscribed and it became almost a weekly event to request Wilson's Coaches to add another bus. On some days, we had eight buses running a busy schedule. This created handling problems in loading.

The weather cooperated wonderfully. The season was just right for a magnificent flower display and the gardens were spic and span. The participants were so full of praise that it was almost embarrassing. The complaint was that it was not possible to visit all of the five public and the perhaps 16 private gardens, though some of the latter were open for self-guided tours on the opening day of registration. Each bus visiting three gardens every afternoon only allowed 45-50 minutes at a garden. "But we wanted to stay!" was a common complaint. Not possible. Come back. was given a map of the gardens. The pathways had been refreshed with gravel by Tony James's crew, and Rhonda had removed

some dead and near-dead azaleas, and mulched. We were all a little nervous as to how it would work. Staff and volunteers were stationed around the route to answer questions. Some were fearful of such technical questions from Rhodoholics as : “Do you have the Exbury form of *Rhododendron augustinii* subspecies *chasmanthum*?” Nothing of the sort happened! People were out to enjoy themselves on a lovely sunny day. Guides reported that there were more questions about the non-Rhododendrons. For instance, *Cercis canadensis* “Avondale” happened to be at its purple perfection. And even “What’s that?” “It’s a Japanese flowering cherry.” (The strange greenish white “Ukon”).

One lady, from a commercially advanced country, marveled that this was an *open* public garden—implying that where she came from, the upkeep would not be so good or there would be a fence and an admission fee. In a similar contrast, but on a different day, a lady remarked about Government House gardens, that she was surprised not to have to go through a metal detector, which proves that we are either soft on terrorists, or less paranoid—take your pick.

Incidentally, the Rhododendron convention was opened by a keen gardener—the Lieutenant Governor, the Right Honourable Iona Campagnola—who gave an eloquent welcoming address and, of course, made the Government House gardens available, as they always are. A new Rhododendron cultivar had been selected and named for Her Honour and she was utterly delighted at this. A specimen was presented to her after her speech.

Finnerty Gardens had been designated a refreshment stop on that day’s tour. So a number of volunteers baked hundreds of cookies which were put out on tables in front of the chapel, along with tea, coffee and water. People were meant to take a cookie, i.e., one, and a drink. Unfortunately, some people saw a meal and took several cookies, leading Betty Kennedy to hide platefuls in the chapel. It got worse

because with eight buses arriving at intervals, the already-fed departing visitors would pick up the new cookies laid out for the next arrivals. It was amusing to hear Betty complaining about the “Oliver syndrome”. She should have had a nice whippy ruler to rap the knuckles of the greedy ones. It is amazing how much people can eat. But that is behind-the-scenes grumbling; from the visitors’ point of view, they said how wonderful the gardens were, and how much they enjoyed themselves.

To sum up, it was the most successful conference in which I have been involved. The steering committee was a troika of three ladies (Carmen, Judy and Norma) who hammered out problems (and each other) as they arose. They are to be congratulated, but it was the many, many volunteers who each did a little to help that made our meeting the success that it was. Involved were not only members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society, but the people who contributed in Finnerty Gardens and the up-Island chapters who manned the registration desk and undertook sundry other duties.

Finally, a little promo. The Victoria Rhododendron Society meets on the first Thursday in the month, 7:30 p.m. at the Garth Homer Centre. We run an eclectic program of talks, not all deal with Rhododendrons. Visitors are very welcome, you don’t have to be a member. Next meeting, September 1st. After the talk are tea and cookies, and you may have more than one! See you...



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