



University
of Victoria

External Relations

University Finnerty Garden Friends

Summer 2009

DEAR FRIENDS,

I am sure it can't be three months since our editor Sam Macey phoned to say it was time I got my letter done—but it is—and now I am writing for the July newsletter.

First, as many of you know, the sale was very successful with over \$59,000 worth of plants sold. I visited on Saturday at noon, and as always the Gym looked lovely. And smelled lovely too. I was particularly impressed with the plants Rhonda and her team have produced from plants in Finnerty Gardens. I know that they hope to expand this section next year.

I hope that most of you have been to Finnerty Gardens to see the new area with the rhododendrons from the Kreiss collection. This makes a wonderful addition to the Gardens, and I was pleased to see what good condition the new plants are in. Apart from those in the newly developed area, others are scattered throughout the Gardens. All of the beds were looking great—the best I have ever seen them. We all owe a tremendous thank you to Rhonda and her team. And a special thanks to Carmen for securing the Kreiss collection. She is doing a superb job, adding new plants, replacing some that have outlived their lives and redesigning areas as the Gardens evolve.

I have been asked to provide a special note about the ashes from cremations. Our gardeners have reported that they frequently find ashes deposited in the main Gardens, and often these are placed at the foot of a shrub. If that shrub is a rhododendron or camellia, the action can cause problems for the plant because both of these species like acid soil. The Memorial Garden which is near the chapel was created as the place for ashes. We hope that you will use this lovely area, for your loved ones. There they will join the ashes of many who loved the Gardens.

Things are progressing in my garden on Galiano. I lost very few plants to the cold, although some were badly broken by the weight of the snow—we had much more here than Oak Bay.



The rhododendrons seem to be covered with bloom, so I guess that they got water—rain or from the irrigation system—at the appropriate time last year when they were setting blossoms.

The rufous hummingbirds are back. They were very delayed in their arrival, so the first banding session had to be canceled. Since then a good number have arrived and established their nests close to the house and the feeding stations. We have had a couple of late

waves of migratory birds, but that appears to have ended for this year. So far, I have mixed 100 litres of syrup—more than last year at this time, but still slightly behind the two previous years. The banders trapped 41 birds on April 6, of whom 16 had been banded here in previous years. On April 20, they captured 43 birds, a number which included 35 females, all of which were gravid. This means that they are nesting in the immediate vicinity. 16 birds had been banded here previously, including one in 2006, one in 2005, and one in 2004. On May 4, they captured 51 birds. Now of course, they have many more captures since many of the birds are caught more than once. In fact, at this session one bird established a new record—she was caught 13 times! In fact, 13 different birds were captured more than once. I would guess that they do not find being caught a very traumatic experience. The banders start within one-half hour of sunrise, and band for five hours. The first hour is the busiest, when the captured birds in their little overcoats of flannelette are lined up in a row on the hot water bottle waiting to have their measurements taken and their band numbers recorded.

Feeding the hummingbirds is interesting, but lasts only until the end of June. Regular feeders at my tables include a pair of red squirrels and a pair of ravens in addition to the dozens of birds at the regular feeder. I find watching them fascinating.

I will not be writing again for three months, so I would like to wish you all a good summer.

Betty Kennedy

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UVic Plant Sale 2009

Judith Terry

What happens to Plant Sales when the financial world collapses? Do they collapse too? We know people stop buying extras, put their money under the mattress and hope times will improve. How would our annual event be affected? We took the optimistic view. A garden is a refuge from the world, and buying plants to beautify it many times repaid with delight. The Sale might just be what everyone needed.

We were right, it seemed, because by 8:30 am on Sunday morning the usual queue was beginning to form, enjoying the sun which shone down just long enough to see us through the day.

The McKinnon Gym looked pleasantly green as usual. We had heard sad stories of growers losing thousands of dollars worth of plants because of the unseasonably cold spring, and there were fewer plants overall, notably the hardy fuchsias, but then we're not unacquainted with the problems of inclement weather: in 2008, it had been the coldest April for seventy-five years. Global warming only *sounds* as if it might be good for gardeners! But perhaps low temperatures are the result of sunspots being in short supply. Anyway, people had obviously decided it was better to take their eyes off the heavens and scientific theories—as well as financial woes—and cultivate their gardens. No place better for keeping a finger on the pulse of life.

How many plants do you sell? How many people come? Asked by the CHEK-TV interviewer, I was nonplussed. Whoever has time to keep a count? I did know one figure: about 20,000 price tags were re-cycled from last year. I relayed this fact triumphantly, but it didn't make the news. However, there is now evidence that we sell about 20,000 plants, and a rough estimate of the number of plants per buggy going through the checkouts indicates that around 1,000 people attend the Sale.

The green effort of re-cycling the plant price tags, one of our recent innovations, is worth celebrating. These little pot markers must be cleaned and sorted before re-use, of course, and they have sharp points which dig in like thorns if they are handled without care. I wait for a hot summer day, put them into used onion nets, dunk them in soapy water, and then rinse them off with a hose on the drive, though the friend who cleans the other half puts her batch through the washing machine. (I have never quite understood how.) Amazingly, the tags do not



stick together, and with several shakes and turns of the onion nets, are dry and ready for the Label Bee early in the New Year. Ten of us managed the sort in a morning. It is tedious work but not incompatible with chat, coffee and cookies.

The end product is three large boxes of labels, bundled according to price, from 50 cents (not in much use these days!) to \$199. It is a satisfying achievement, not just because we save plastic and money: on Plant Sale weekend, the volunteers now have to spend much less time marking up tags. And as the cashiers have got into the routine of extracting the tags, numbers have risen. Re-cycling has proved a huge time-saver.

There were a couple of innovations this year. The Victoria Riding for the Disabled Association (VRDA) was selling manure for the first time. At \$1.00 a bag, this lowly but indispensable item was not likely to make a fortune for the charity, but as the butt of any number of time-honoured jokes, it added to the general jollity, publicized the Association's good work, and sold out rapidly. We hope to twist arms and get it back next year with even more manure and merriment.

Also new was a table dedicated to plants from Finnerty Gardens. In previous years these plants have been spread among the stalls according to species, but since many people take pleasure in having a little piece of Finnerty Gardens in their own backyards, this minor re-organization proved very welcome. It is a unique and appropriate feature, of course,

since profits from the Sale are dedicated solely to the Gardens.

As for what individual plants are most popular, that's hard to answer. Like fluctuations in the stock market sometimes it seems quite random. Ferns have lost, grasses have gained, bamboos are going up, hanging baskets are coming down. Vegetables, herbs and anything for eating are top of the pops. What is in bloom *always* sells. Several yellow-flowered magnolias were highly visible as they were wheeled around the room. Whispers of "Hey! I'd like one of those," were followed by the noise of several buggies at a fast rumble back over to shrubs, where purple foliage like Sambucus, Weigela, Physocarpus, and Cotinus were also in demand. This year roses received by mistake resulted in more plants than ordered. That was a lucky error, since every one sold. Pelargoniums and rhododendrons did such a roaring trade that by 11:30 am none was left.

The Sale was a sell-out, and proceeds comparably high: the gross total was \$6,453 more than last year, and at a little over \$59,000 our third highest total ever. As always, the 200 or so people who contributed to the Sale's success worked long and hard but were rewarded with a high degree of pleasure and satisfaction.



An Invitation

Submit articles for the Finnerty Gardens Newsletter

All Friends of Finnerty Gardens—including present and past Members of the Advisory Board—are invited to submit articles of interest to horticulturists for publication in the Newsletter. The purpose is to maintain the eclectic range of horticultural interests that the Newsletter has espoused in recent years.

Ideally, articles should be of 500-1,000 words in length, and should be emailed to the editor as soon as they are ready. When articles are accepted, they will be published as quickly as space becomes available. Since the editor is an English professor rather than a horticulturist, authors must hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the horticultural content.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Sam Macey

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Scotland the Brave—In the Rain

Margaret deWeese
(October 2002)

This article with slight alterations was first published by Margaret deWeese with the Victoria Rhododendron Society in 2002 but the note which she adds in conclusion brings the story right up to date.

In May of this year (2002) I found myself on a bus headed toward the soft rainy shores of Western Scotland. Seated in front of my cousin, Judy, and me was a gentleman sensibly attired in a raincoat, umbrella and hat across his lap. I introduced myself and in the comical way that one narrows the distance between introductions: Canada, B.C., Vancouver Island, Victoria Rhododendron Society I met Dave Ballantyne! We were headed for the gardens of Benmore, Ardkinglas, Eckmore, and Stonefield Castle.

When we reached Benmore, the skies poured. Sandals were traded for sensible walking shoes, but my light wool coat was drenched within two minutes. Benmore, in the rain, is marvellous so what must it be like in the sunshine? If it ever shines, it must be Nirvana. Actually we did see slides taken by Clint Smith of Benmore in the sun so it must shine sometimes. However, the rainfall on the West Coast of Scotland is similar to Tofino's rain—perfect for the large-leaved rhododendrons which are trees. When we were there the *Matteucia* shuttlecock ferns set off the deep blues of the various varieties of *Meconopsis*, the new soft greens of the ubiquitous bracken were emerging and everywhere we saw bluebells that looked like flooded fields.

At Eckmore we were taken round the steep slippery hillside by Lord Eckmore himself. He was very proud of his 25-foot Douglas Fir and I rather unwisely said that in British Columbia we pulled them out like weeds. He responded: "Then damn British Columbia!" which I didn't think sounded lordly at all!

Our guides were part of the Scottish Rhododendron Society and so we were well informed about which species we were inspecting—almost to the point of lengthy discussions that became tedious—again in the pouring rain. By the time we reached the hotel, we were all headed for a hot bath followed by a hot toddy!



The next day, Judy and I played hooky from Crarae, Barvala, probably the most famous gardens in the rhododendron world. Judy went to visit a famous archaeological site of the early Celtic people while I took two ferries plus an hour's taxi ride to the misty Isle of Bute to see a restored sunken Victorian fernery. It was magical if you love ferns and I was treated like a visiting VIP from Canada. Again it poured and while waiting for the one taxi to arrive (I was earlier than the appointed meeting time), I availed myself of the opportunity in the ladies washroom to push the hot air drier button and attempt to get warm by blowing hot air into my coat sleeves!

The following day we visited the loveliest garden I have ever seen in Arduaine. The sun shone through the rain-laden clouds and we all loved the time spent there. There were many people from the ARS on the tour and we would cross paths, each smiling hugely and saying "Can you smell the *R. lindleyi*?" or pointing out which path one must see. It was all too much for one short visit. Then on through spectacular Clan Campbell's controlled glens and frighteningly narrow roads in our huge

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bus. Occasionally we would come to a sign which indicated the road narrowing and we thought it impossible it could do so. Glen Arn on the Clyde was our last garden visit, and for species and hospitality it was an incredible end to our tour. The sun shone brightly and we all felt the delights of rhododendrons could not be matched.

The Edinburgh Rhodo '02 Conference was first rate. The highlights to me were: the quality of the presentations in the lecture theatre, beginning with Kenneth Cox's Riddle of Tsang Po Gorge to the finish with Steve Hootman, the formal dinner in the glorious Signet Library and the presentation of the ARS Gold Medal to our host Dr. David Argent for his work with *Vireyas*, the working greenhouses filled with *Vireyas* and the opportunity to work in the laboratory with the microscopes under Dr. Argent and Dr. Chamberlain.

The next few days I rented a car and explored by myself the south west coast of Scotland, staying near Stranraer. There I saw Logan Botanical Gardens, Castle Kennedy and a private garden belonging to the Dalrymple-Kennedys which had a large lake and the perimeter of scented yellow *luteum* reflected in the lake, tall beech trees, Japanese Maples, an old moss covered boat shed with a punt waiting for company and I was the only one in this enchanted garden.

Finally, on to Kew Gardens where I was to spend two days before boarding my plane home. At Kew in the Temperate House filled with the soft greens of giant tree ferns, filigree lilies, and *Vireyas*, I was guided by two long-term friends I had only previously corresponded with through the internet, but had never met in person: Chris Callard of <http://www.vireya.net/> and Stephen Pope from Brighton who is a tree fern expert.

I hope this report will convey to you the gist of the excitement and the enjoyment I experienced in Scotland in 2002.

On an additional note, the fourteen VRS members who attended the Scottish Rhododendron Conference in April/May of 2008 were warned by me to take warm wet weather gear as it had been so cold and wet when Dave and I last attended. But that group sweltered in warm sunshine in their wool clothing and with nary a cloud in the sky on their trips through Western Scotland and into Northern Scotland—clearly my advice will forever be in question!



On Growing Gifts

Roger Wiles

In early spring, visitors to the magnificently tended Finnerty Gardens at the University of Victoria have the pleasure of viewing at least two flowering specimens of a rhododendron that bears the name “Buchanan Simpson.” How fitting that these annual blooms grace this garden, whose very inspiration and inception can be attributed to Buchanan’s wife, Suzanne Simpson. Rhododendron “Buchanan Simpson” was registered by Mary and Ted Greig of Royston and is a tribute to enduring friendship as much as a professional salute. This was a gesture of appreciation to the Simpson name, so important in the history of botanical culture and nursery innovation on Vancouver Island.

Buchanan and Suzanne Simpson were formidable plant pioneers. For close to 60 years, they dwelled on the edge of a 25-acre forested peninsula beneath Bald Mountain on the south arm of Cowichan Lake. Here the couple established an international reputation for growing both native Cowichan plants and exotic introductions—especially the Sino-Himalayan rhododendron species for which discerning collectors clamoured.

The breadth and depth of the Simpson legacy was not confined to plants. Living as close to the land as they did, and fired by their own questing intellects, they became passionate naturalists and advocates for animals as well as plants. In 1925, Buchanan was publishing field observations of “Oregon Jays” in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*. As late as the 1960s, Mrs. Simpson was writing provincial cabinet ministers seeking to protect certain threatened deer populations at Cowichan Lake. The Simpsons’ early years were financially tenuous. Their only predictable income was a paltry disability pension that Buchanan received from the Colonial Service following discharge for severe malaria contracted in Nigeria. Beyond this small certainty, it was necessary for Buchanan to busy himself in numerous and resourceful ways. At various times, he laboured in a shingle mill, as a farmhand, and was reported to have even worked his own trapline.

Buchanan served as both a provincial game warden and a fire warden in the Cowichan Valley through the 1920s. During fire season, he occupied the Forest Service lookout tower atop Bald Mountain. At these times, Suzanne would supervise the “*tender young things*” (as they described their nursery stock) and ferry supplies on her back as needed up the 837-metre mountain. Of their character, there can be no doubt about how hard-working and determined they were to forge a life in Cowichan. One admires their grit.

Then, in the mid-1930s, Suzanne received a significant family inheritance that would henceforth assure the couple’s security.



Now with means, their first priority was the purchase of freehold title to their land at Marble Bay. After years of austerity and privation, not for them were the luxuries of electric light and indoor plumbing. Most important was their sanctuary, where, in a glade among the trees, they lovingly restored and expanded a botanical garden first begun on this property by their late friends, Richard and Susan Stoker. This was their life and their pleasure.

Mrs. Simpson’s decision in 1966 to gift her land and precious plants on Cowichan Lake to the University of Victoria was a deep expression of conscience; it was an ultimate affirmation and the fulfillment of her faith in a better future. President Malcolm Taylor’s acceptance of this gift on behalf of the University assured continued protection for the land and made it forever available to students and teachers.

The story of this gift did not end with Mrs. Simpson’s deed. Many esteemed plant collections of distinguished provenance have since accrued to the Finnerty Gardens. Among them was another Cowichan contribution—a selection of azalea hybrids developed by logger and plantsman Cedric Myers of Honeymoon Bay and quietly gifted in his memory by wife Gertrude Myers. Gifts can and do go around. The descendants of some plants have even found their way back to Cowichan. In support of a community heritage project, the University assisted the Town of Lake Cowichan with gifts of plant material for the establishment of a new Memorial Rhododendron Park in 2008.

In recent years, propagation aficionado Dave MacKas thoughtfully repatriated rhododendron specimens to the Simpson homestead. Still other garden friends have kindly gifted plants of special significance, including a copy of the earlier-mentioned Rhododendron “Buchanan Simpson” that came home in 1997.

Not all gifts are so tangible or easily enumerated. Entomology Professor Emeritus Richard Ring nostalgically looks back on guiding 30 years of undergraduate classes to the Cowichan Field Station: “*I have scads of class and individual photographs to remind me of my many wonderful times there, as well as scores of letters from students who regarded those field trips as being among their favorite memories of going to UVic.*”

As Mrs. Simpson will have known, the spirit of giving grows on without end.

Two Remarkable Women Botanists

Margaret deWeese

We admire the great plant explorers of the past. These intrepid men ventured to such distant places on the globe, their families trusting in God that they would return one year but never being quite sure when. Amongst such famous names as Sir Joseph Hooker and Charles Darwin there are few women mentioned. Friend to both of the above was a remarkable person, Marianne North, a remarkable botanist and talented artist.

Explorers generally had to have backers to fund these expensive trips to faraway places. Marianne North, however, was an independently wealthy woman and so she could finance her own extensive travels, porters and art supplies. I was amazed to see her work still exhibited intact at Kew Gardens one hundred and ten years later.

Marianne North, a well known botanical painter in her own time, traveled around the world twice in search of rare flowers and plants. Her paintings of flowers in their natural habitat gave a glimpse of plants inaccessible to most people. In 1882, a gallery of her works opened at England's Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. The gallery, still open to the public, houses 832 paintings produced by North over 13 years.

Through this truly marvelous feat, Marianne North was able to achieve what few people in the world have ever dreamed of doing. Think how many more paintings she could have produced in our age of fast jet travel to the remote places where she experienced extremely primitive conditions travelling by dugouts, and along and up and down precipitous mountains, not to mention the risk of diseases. This intrepid white woman with her canvas and her oil paintings brought back to her country sights of unknown botanical wonders. She had

three previously undiscovered plants named after her, rare for any botanist in our world. I think her experience is akin to David Attenborough's wonderful "Earth Series" but without the benefit of camera technology. Think of the time involved in producing such colourful oil paintings with their precise botanical accuracy.

Another inspired plants woman to whom the gardening world is greatly indebted was the Empress Josephine of Napoleon's France. Her achievements came not so much by personal exploration as by garnering other people's findings, particularly regarding roses. Josephine has passed to the world many wonderful rose hybrids. She and her staff produced the sweet scented hybrid tea rose for our olfactory pleasure! We have shown here by courtesy of the Victoria Peninsular Rose Club the beautiful hybrid tea rose, which was originally called the "Empress Rose" and was renamed "Josephine" by Napoleon.

Upon becoming Empress of France in 1804, Josephine found herself with unlimited means to acquire the most exciting horticultural novelties for her gardens. Not even the French-English wars would prevent new plants—especially roses—from reaching Malmaison. English gardeners were issued passports and even granted safe passage through military blockades if they were transporting acquisitions for Her Imperial Majesty. Josephine was the patron of many scientific expeditions. In North America, her favor extended to the French National Gardens, established under Louis XVI in 1786 and extending from what is now Jersey City to Hackensack, filled with plants collected by French explorers. In return for her patronage, Josephine received many New World specimens for Malmaison.



Her principal source for roses was the Lee & Kennedy Vineyard Nursery in London. Josephine wanted every rose known in the world, and in 1804, by way of Lewis Kennedy, she was in proud possession of the new Chinese roses: Slater's Crimson China, Parson's Pink and Hume's Blush Tea Scented China. These everblooming roses were recent imports to England from China, and it was a coup for the Empress (and for France) to have them growing at Malmaison. They became known as stud roses, potent parents of the modern everblooming rose cultivars.

André du Pont, Josephine's head horticulturist, began breeding new roses for the Empress. His 1813 catalogue of roses at Malmaison listed nearly 200 different varieties, including many new introductions. Josephine's enthusiasm for her roses was infectious, and France soon became the cradle of roses. By 1830, some Parisian nurseries listed over 2,500 different rose varieties, attributable to the inspiration of the Empress and Malmaison.

Most of all, Josephine broke away from the rigid view of the rose as a medicinal and aromatic plant. She created interest in growing roses simply for their beauty. Propagation techniques were explored and expanded. Hybridizing and grafting became popular activities in the gardens of amateurs and professionals alike. The practice of grafting was perfected with the tough wild rose, *Rosa canina*, as the preferred rootstock for budding the delicate new beauties.

The Empress created something unprecedented: a garden devoted solely to one type of plant—in this case, roses. She commissioned the botanical artist Pierre-Joseph Redoute to illustrate each specimen she collected at Malmaison. Sadly she died before seeing the book published.

Recently I had a prolonged stint in the hospital. Several of the bonuses were the many roses my family brought me. At my bedside nurses, doctors, and visitors all commented on the size, the baby soft petals, and the scent (especially fragrant were the yellow roses with orange fluting.) I remember at one point holding that particular rose under my nose, which gave me such succor and peace. Not only roses for weddings, but for wellness. Atop the Richmond Pavilion in the Royal Jubilee Hospital the Rooftop Gardens provide patients with a connection to the natural world. There are a host of thick-stalked, healthy red rose bushes soon to burst forth with many blooms that will give joy to the patients seated nearby.

It is little wonder that I am so grateful to these two highly successful spirited women botanists for their valuable contributions to our enjoyment and well being.

I am indebted to the following internet sites for much of the material used in this article: <http://www.answers.com/topic/marianne-north> and

<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/31/style/cuttings-when-malmaison-celebrated-the-rose-s-beauty.html>



Membership

Membership in the Friends of Finnerty Gardens is \$10 per year (single or couple). Membership includes an informative newsletter published four times a year. Funds raised through membership support enhancements within the Gardens which would not be possible otherwise.

This newsletter is also available on the University of Victoria's website at: <http://www.external.uvic.ca/gardens/>. If you would prefer to view it electronically rather than in hard copy, please let us know and we'll update our mailing list accordingly.

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