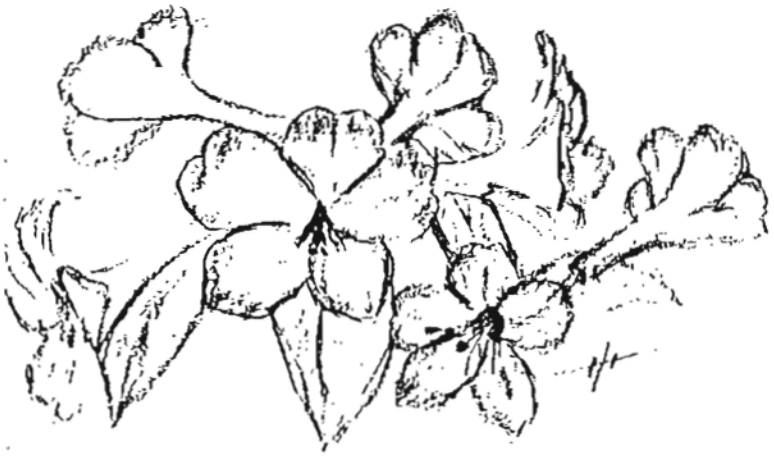


R Zelleri. Island Sunset.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.11 MARCH 1993

The reason this issue is a little late is a visit we made to the Victorian Branch of the Aust.Rhodo.Scty's Vireya display. It was held at a most impressive venue, which describes itself thus:-"One of Nunawading's most unique and innovative assets is its Horticultural Centre which fulfills both the normal role of a municipal nursery, by producing a variety of trees and shrubs for planting throughout the City, whilst at the same time allowing for the public to enter, inspect and use a facility which has traditionally been 'off limits' to residents.

Incorporated in the Centre are staff amenities, three glass houses, two bush houses, a potting shed and car parking for the Centre and adjoining community gardens. The whole site, including the native garden, has been landscaped allowing visitors to see in a small area an extensive range of exotic and native plants.

Within the main building there is a comfortable meeting room able to seat approx.90 people, which, along with the adjoining kitchen facilities is available for hire and use by the community. The potting shed is also available for hire (depending on normal nursery operations), and is especially suited for the running of more practical activities such as gardening classes, demonstrations and displays."

The Centre is used by a number of horticultural societys,and is open to the public on weekdays without charge. It is located at 82 Jolimont Street, Forest Hill.

Your comments, question, suggestions and criticism are needed if the news letter is to continue, so please send them to:-

The Editor,
P.O.Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500

MELBOURNE 1993

The monthly meeting of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society, held on Friday March 19th, had, amongst other attractions like the flower competition, two very informative speakers.
First Ron Moodycliffe gave, as an example of an innovation that others might take turns to present at future meetings, brief descriptions of two species, R.trichostomum and R.campylogynum (non-Vireyas). This procedure could well be applied to Vireyas and might cover their history, their habitat and their cultural requirements. It would be useful too when taking slides for such definitive purpose, to indicate by some means the size of the leaf and flower. A matchbox has been included in the past to do this but other means could no doubt be found to show the scale of the plant.

The main Speaker for the evening was Dr Ross MacDonald of Foothills Nursery who showed a series of slides to stress his theme that Vireyas were all quite new as garden plants go and needed to be tended with regard for form, shape and vigour. Some are not suited and indeed may be quite hopeless in some climates, there is still much to sort out in this regard, but certainly careful shaping by regular attention - pinching or pruning - is essential.

Some of the many slides that were then shown were :-
R.konori : flowers irregularly and is hard to shape. There are many forms especially if raised from seed. Leaving it out in the sun and neglecting it seemed to let it do its best.
R.phaeopeplum : is a first cousin of R.konori but is not so good in Melbourne if kept outside in the winter.
R.laetum : is very vigorous and upright, flowering frequently but it must be pruned.
R.jasminiflorum var,jasminiflorum : a long flowering, open plant pure white or flushed pink, and fragrant. Var. punctatum is similar but has conspicuous bright pink spots in the throat.
R.goodenoughii grows tall and flowers well. Should be propagated as soon as material is firm and will flower in its second year.
R.tuba : a vigorous grower with long lasting flowers. R.armitii is similar but has a smaller, thinner flower tube.
R.phaeochitum : does not need to flower, it sells itself on the appearance of its striking new growth alone.

Of the hybrids 'Coral Flare' is one of the best for beginners with its dense rounded form,'Lochmin' can be neat if pruned, 'Princess Alexandra' is hard to get to bush up, while 'Pink Seedling' is not so good in Melbourne, being prone to disease. However 'Pink Delight'flowers well for maybe six months of the year.

'Felicitas' and 'White Aravir' are both prone to rust unfortunately; and a few hybrids are showing some variation possibly because they have come from sister seedlings and not the original plant that was registered, 'Arthur's Choice' and 'Buttermilk' are examples.

'Robert Bates' is strongly scented, a good grower, it pays to pick the flowers to keep it down to one metre. 'Penrice'flowers

are fine, but it is not bushy and our way to overcome this is to put three plants in a pot. 'Pendance' is a very dainty white with a blush of pink, while 'Pendragon' is not flowering too well here, but it is very sunhardy and drought resistant. 'Carillon Bells, [redacted], 'La di da' and 'Gentle Jenny' can also be recommended while the R.leucogigas x R.lochae is a large plant that is best when given light shade from other plants.

Vireyas in the garden like the company of other plants around them. One of the smallest flowered of all is 'Crimson Scallywag' a hybrid of R.inconspicuum. And - one plant still to come on the market promises something very different! In its first flowering it had 26 flowers in a truss. The second time it had 52 flowers. The third time it had 101 flowers ! Now it has settled down to some 90 to 101 flowers, but counting them is not easy. So, watch out for [redacted] of Angels'.
'CHOIRS

This was a very interesting evening and my brief notes, as recorded here, are not verbatim, but I hope will give the general facts of the talks.

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The display of Vireyas included the cut flowers from the evening meeting as well as a good number of plants in containers. Apart from some magnificent blooms of the more usual species and hybrids, three that were new to me stood out. The first was the very small 'Crimson Scallywag', the second was R.womersleyi not in flower but a very well grown spreading plant in a container from Alan Raper. It was of particular interest after Lou Searle's description of it as the one nearest to tree size. Alan said it was given partial sun and did well with it. The third was R.tuba with long salver shaped flowers,slightly curved and a good yellow. Sleumer describes it as 'salmon pink at the tube and white at the lobes', and later 'One specimen seen'. However Stevens in his '...distribution of flower types...' groups it with the whites so it must have been collected again,and it retains species status although it was a suspected natural hybrid.

The afore mentioned 'potting shed' is a very roomy building but it was well filled with benches of plants, mainly Vireyas, for sale by A.R.S. members and nurserymen. During the days the attendance of visitors was fairly constant but the show deserved better patronage. The species for sale included R.superbum, the Michael Black form of R.zoelleri, and R.tuba . R.superbum and R.Konorii always seemed quite distinct species to a gardener's eye in New Guinea, but in fact the only botanical distinction is that R.superbum has dense scales on the ovary while R.konorii has hairs over scales on its ovary.

One other unusual find was a tree fern from P.N.G., the New Guinea 'Highland Lace'tree fern, Cyathea tomentossima.

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VIREYAS in PAPUA-NEW GUINEA

Our thanks to Lou Searle of Morton Creek, N.S.W. for this article on his experience with Vireyas in P.N.G.

"I first heard of Vireya rhododendrons from a former Senior Entomologist of the Dept. of Agriculture in P.N.G. They were still called 'Malesians' in those days. He had retired and had settled in Nambucca Heads. When I wrote and told him that I was going to Chimbu for the Department he wrote and told me of the Highlands rhododendrons, and asked me, please to send him seeds of any plants that I found. He thought that he would be able to grow them at Nambuca. He mentioned in particular one that he thought was R.aurigeranum - it turned out to be R.zoelleri.

My job with the Dept.Agric. entailed a lot of driving so I got to see a large area of the Highlands. I saw so many rhododendrons that I soon became rapt in them. My previous horticultural interests had been mainly orchids and in my 27 years on the coast I had accumulated a fairly large collection. These all went to the Lae Botanic Garden when I transferred to the Highlands. In the more than a quarter of a century that I lived on the North Coast of New Britain I walked hundreds of miles throughout that island and never saw, or rather never recognised, a rhododendron. When one has an interest in a specific genus, he tends to become tunnel-visioned. But, at least three species of vireyas are known from there and now in the Highlands and having seen many rhododendrons I realise that I have seen these plants before.

During World War 11 a party of us, six in all, walked from Bena Bena which is a few miles east of present day Goroka, to the Rai Coast east of Madang. We crossed the Finisterre mountains at about 11,000 feet and it was on this walk that i saw my first vireya. As I now know, It was R.konori. It was flowering throughout the grasslands on the southern slopes of the range. There were similar plants in the timbered country, but I can't remember any in flower. I never got back to that area - it must be one of the least collected areas in New Guinea, very hard walking and so cold! We had a case of King George 1V whisky with us, and at one camp a bottle exploded, due I expect to a combination of the cold and the rarefied air.

When I had learnt a bit more about Vireyas - I did not know that word until Dr. Sleumer sent me a copy of his book - I found that R.macgregoriae could be almost any colour bar blue and green. R.konori varied also from a very drab off-white, which Don Stanton and I found on the Wahgi-Sepik divide, through to my No.37 which featured on the cover of the quarterly Bulletin of the American Rhododendron Society, No.4 of Vol33, 1979, a variety which showed a lot more pink than usual. I wonder if it is still in cultivation? All of course are beautifully fragrant. R.superbum also varies in the amount of crimson in the throat, but not in its fragrance. I never found a flowering sized plant of this species except as an epiphyte. The trees on the northern side of the Highlands highway at Daulo Pass (8,000 plus feet) are adorned with large plants.

The trees beside the road at Tomba pass, between Mt. Hagen and Wabag at about 9,000 feet, are just as abundantly hosts to R.herzogii. And as Dr.Peter Stevens has noted, the length of the tube in these Tomba Pass herzogii is much greater than their more easterly counterparts. Referring back to R.superbum, it ranges from nearly 10,000 feet down to 3,400 feet at a place called Karimui, which is actually in Papua but as it is much closer to Chimbu than any other place in the Gulf district it was administered from Kundiawa, the head quarters of Chimbu. I had an experimental station there to do trials on new foods and there I established the first serious Citrus propagation area for P.N.G. Mt.Karimui stuck up a further 2,500 feet out of the plain.I had no time to investigate the mountain as I had to fly into Karimui and never stayed over for more than three nights. But I am sure that at 3,400 feet the 2500 feet above us would have been most interesting. R.zoelleri also occurred here as an epiphyte.

This latter species also occurred in large communities as a terrestrial shrub, there were two main areas in Chimbu along the road to Gumine from Kundiawa, when in flower looking almost like a flame up the mountainside. Observing the more southerly community fron the other side - the left bank of the Waghi river, it qite often happened that we were looking down on the aeroplanes plying from Goroka to Mt. Hagen or vice-versa. What magnificent country it was!

The Pocul Range east of Kundiawa was a prime collecting area, here I saw my first plants of R.pleianthum - as Michael Black said "much better than any man made hybrid" - about half a dozen plants in a small area at an altitude of 6,500 to 7000 feet, very straggly plants under heavy tree cover with what should have been tap roots running over the surface of the ground. But what beautiful flowers! The best with 26 large blooms to the truss. Here also R.vandeursenii, R.stevensianum, R.phaeochitum, R.herzogii, a beautiful pastel shaded pink-apricot R.macgregoria, R.inconspicuum both pink and white, and R.inconspicuum x R.macgregoriae, this cross is now named 'Sweet Mac'.

The pick Collector's area is, of course, Mt. Whilhelm, local name 'Enduwa Kombugu', where we would find R.mais, R.anagalliflorum, R.atropurpureum, R.beyerinckianum. Here I found the most perfect specimen of R.pleianthum - but not in flower, at 12,000 feet. Also R.commonae, R.culminicolum, R.herzogii, R.macgregoriae, R.rarum, R.vandeursenii, R.womersleyii, plus many of their hybrids. As far as I know R.atropurpureum is found only on one other mountain and that is Mt. Kubor which, all 13,000 feet of it, was just across the Wahgi valley from our home in Kundiawa. R.womersleyi, despite its small leaves, was the species most approaching tree size that I ever saw.

There were many large plants around the shore of Lake Aunde which is the lower of two glacial lakes which overflow into what becomes the Chimbu river. The upper lake, 200 feet higher, is Lake Pinde and together they feed the Pindaunde valley which becomes the Chimbu river.

I was lucky in that I had the use of a helicopter 3 or 4 times a year but disappointed that my largest parcel of material from Mt. Wilhelm to the Aust.Rhodo.Scty. was sent surface mail by the Post Office instead of air mail which had been intended. I was indeed fortunate that in the last few years of my stay with the Dept. of Agriculture I was a free agent and my job allowed me to cover the whole Highlands area, from places whose names I have forgotten in the east, to Laiagam in the west and Mendi and Tari in the south.

It would be nice to go back and start all over again.

xxxxx

The high temperatures here in Wollongong in early February (up to 39°C) resulted in some burnt leaves and a few minor losses from those plants that were in full sun even part time, particularly those that were not fully acclimatised to the sun. So Lou Searle's comments above sent me to compare conditions here with those in P.N.G. highlands that are described in the book 'Enga' ,and refer to Wabag and Laiagam.

The annual rainfall is between 2,000 and 3,000 mm, being lower in the valleys than the higher mountains. Variation during the year is not high, being lowest in June and July, although even then it is not less than 100mm per month.
Temperatures range between 10° and 23° (the average maximum and minimum) with little variation during the year. Extremes are about 29°max. and 3°min. Frosts may occur above 1600m. Ultra violet radiation levels are high in that smog free atmosphere and high altitude.
The relative humidity is quite high, averaging 79% in October to 86% in May. With their mild day temperatures conditions are most pleasant and the high humidity is not noticeable, but as temperatures drop at night it results in much cloud in the early morning and it is rare for no rain to fall over periods of up to four days.

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Phytophthora
An article in 'Camellia News' for Dec.1992 on the incidence of Phytophthora in W.A.forests, where it is of major concern, states that research has confirmed the value of foliar sprays of phosphorus acid in combating the disease. So keep using M-dKP - even if you may have nothing to show for it but healthy Vireyas.

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International Rhododendron Union
The fifth International Rhododendron Conference was held in May last year at Bad Zwischenahn, s.Bremen, Germany. It was attended by Ralph Sangster, President, and four other delegates from Adelaide. These included John Schutz who presented one of the papers, which were all given in English. John has a major interest in Vireyas at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.

From :- "RHODODENDRONS 1993 with Camellias and Magnolias"

Registrations of Vireyas for 1991/92 totalled 45, of these 41 were of Australian origin as listed in issue No.9 of this newsletter. The others were one from U.S.A.(Cape Cod Sunshine listed in issue No.8) and three from New Zealand. These are:-
Claremont (R.laetum x R.zoelleri) x R.jasminiflorum var.punctatum.
Hybridized,raised and registered by M.D.Cullinane. Flowers 15 -17 /truss, salver shaped 50mmx50mm,with 5 flat lobes, light purplish pink (55C) to pale purplish pink (55D) inside, outside pale purplish pink (56B) with light yellow green (145D) tube. Shrub 0.65m x 0.5m. in 3 years.
Coral Chance R.macgregoriae x R.commonae.
Probably a natural hybrid collected on Mt.Yakopimandah P.N.G. and registered by G.F.Smith, Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust. Has 10/12 flowers per truss, campanulate, 25 x 30 mm, 5 lobed, moderate reddish pink (41C) throughout. A compact shrub 0.8 x 0.5m in 4 years.
Happy Wanderer 'Orania'x'Rosy Chimes'
Hybridized, grown and registered by O.S.Blumhardt, Lyndale Nurseries. Has 5-6 open campanulate flowers in a truss, 5-lobed, 30x45mm,strong red (39A) shading to vivid orange in centre of throat and in tube. Spreading habit and repeat flowering.

The Journal of the American Rhododendron Society for winter 1993 has one other registration:-
Cape Cod Lobster R.lochiae x R.culminicolum
Hybridizer uncertain,possibly Richard Cavender or Peter Sullivan. Raised by R.Cavender, registered by Dr.R.Chaikin. Truss of 3-7 flowers, 5-lobed 1.5"x!.75" of vivid reddish orange
(43B) throughout. Shrub is 1'high x 4'wide in 7years from cuttings, blooming in February and June to December.

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Vireyas at Vincent Square, London
The Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh have about 100 species growing successfully under glass. To bring them to the attention of a wider audience they were exhibited at the R.H.S. Spring show in 1992, a major effort in very cold weather. They were displayed in pots that were stood on other pots to gain height,and then covered with plastic netting with a layer of bark chips or moss on the surface to give a naturalistic setting, aided by the addition of appropriate large ericaceous shrubs. Small Vireyas such as R.anagalliflorum were displayed as if growing epiphytically, on an artificial tree.

Their problem was the one that affects all our shows too - how to control the flowering time. Various experiments were tried to retard or to advance this but the results were unsuccessful with flower loss in general.

Nevertheless the show attracted much attention and gained the award of the R.H.S. Gold Medal.

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PESTS

In the Mix: In reference to the complaint about the white curl grubs on page 6 of No.10 issue, Roy Skott has the answer to this. He recommends adding one teaspoonful of Naphthalene flakes to each 5 litres of your potting mix just before use. This is a very simple and effective way to sterilize your mix if using soil and/or compost as a component. It kills grubs, worms and their eggs, nematodes etc.
If mixed in too early it will dissipate and may allow re-infection. Also naphthalene can be irritant so do not handle it.
In the Air: Grasshoppers have a canny habit here of not waiting for your most prized Vireya to open its flowers, but entering through the bud to get at the nectar, thus doing the maximum damage. They are not easy to see and are hard to catch and spraying is not feasible against such transient creatures. One recommendation may help, in a pot at least, but I still have to prove it. This is to use Disyston at the base of the plant, when the fumes arising will keep the pests away.
If no damage occurs you will not know if it has worked or not, but it will save spraying for lacebug etc. My thanks to a rose grower for this advice.

xxxxx

Registrations.
The total Vireyas now named and registered is 232 and of these 159 are Australian. The latest advice is that another 14 applications for 1992/93 are in process here, with more expected. The increasing availability of species will no doubt see these figures continue to rise.
R.hellwigii,whose hybrids are now becoming available, will be of interest, as it is a comparatively rare plant that occurs only on the Huon Peninsular of P.N.G. It is very similar to R.superbum from which it differs only by its deep red colour and lack of fragrance, and also to R.konorii. Natural hybrids are known between it and R.superbum and these have fairly intense uniformly rose coloured flowers, moderately fragrant, according to P.van Royen's 'The Alpine Flora of New Guinea".
Another which could be of interest in warmer areas is R.longiflorum.There is one hybrid of it here that flowers well which came from U.S.A. in 1980, but the other parent is unknown.

xxxxx

If you are anywhere near Wollongong in September, come to the Botanic Gardens on the 17th, 18th, or 19th for the local floral show, the "Flora-warra'. And while you are here call in on the Rhododendron Park at Mt. Pleasant which is open now until the end of October at weekends.

xxxxx