

The Vireya Venture.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.16 JULY 1993

It is with regret that the death of Mr Alan Raper on April 28th at the age of 60 years has been anounced.

Most of the suscribers to this newsletter will have known Alan and have heard of his death, for those who have not he was a nursery man with few equals in his knowledge of Camellias and Rhododendrons, and his ability as a propagator of many other species too.

His first Nursery was at The Patch, in the Dandenongs, and a second was established at Warrandyte, with much of his propagating work still being done at The Patch. In addition he was Chairman of the Committee of Management of the Olinda Rhododendron Garden, and he had held various offices with the Australian Rhododendron Society. He will be sadly missed.

Despite the relative dryness and the unusually strong and gusty westerly winds that we have had on the coast, the last two months have seen some of the best flowers yet on Vireyas in our garden, it maybe that the age of the plants has been a factor, plus the loss of three large trees in February which not only lightened some parts of the garden but also removed some of the root competition.

My thanks must go to our contributors, particularly to Brian Clancy for his account of that fine Vireya meeting in Melbourne in March.

Your contribution is needed now. Please send it to:-

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

RHODODENDRON lochiae

Mrs Sylvia Saperstein of Main Arm, Mullumbimby, N.S.W.2482 has written:- " Last year I was given half a dozen seedlings of 'Devils Thumb' lochiae. Now, at a year old their characteristic habit is very apparent. In spite of no shaping the plants have maintained a very compact habit; bushy with very short internodes. This characteristic manifests itself in varying degrees from plant to plant. One would indeed be excused for being sceptical about its classification with the Mount Bellenden Kerr selection whose habit and leaf contour are so markedly different. R.lochiae tends to be a reluctant flowerer on the North Coast (the Thornton Peak selection being the exception) so I do not expect to see it flower for another couple of years.

If anyone else has flowered it I would be pleased to hear about it, either in this newsletter or in a personal letter."

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On referring this to Donald Teese who had collected R.lochiae from several mountains in 1978 and 1979, as described in the Australian Rhododendron Society Journal of September 1983 - he commented:- " I think it will take a proper study on each mountain to work out all the details of variation. We found large variations on the mountains in leaf size and shape, but these things could be caused by exposure, shade, soil etc. We (Yamina Rare Plants, 25 Moores Road, Monbulk 3793) usually sell seedlings raised off diffent stock plants and never distinguish. However the seedlings vary tremendously from compact small leafed forms with pale leaves to vigorous upright large leaved dark green forms. We did have Devils Thumb, Thornton Peak and Mt.Finnegan types plus the original plant in the trade, but usually never separated them."

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WITCHES'S BROOM

An article in the Am.Rhodo.Scty. Journal No.2 for 1994 caught my attention with its description of the possibilities of propagating evergreen azaleas in a dwarf form, ideal for Bonzai, rock gardens, etc. - by the use of the occasional occurrence of Witches' Broom.
This is a multitude of small thin shoots caused by Exobasidium vaciniiuliginosii (see Leach's 'Rhododendrons'). My interest was prompted by seeing for the first time, in June, the fasciation of two Vireya plants, and for a moment I confused these two abnormalities. However fasciation is the fusing together of parts of normal size of a plant which are quite distinct as a rule. This is not common, I can only remember it on cucumbers in the past.
While Witches' Broom does affect other rhododendrons I have no knowledge of it on Vireya.

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Also from the Journal, an advertisement (?) which just said:
PREPARE FOR GLOBAL WARMING BUY VIREYAS

Editor

VIREYA SHOW NUNAWADING VICTORIA

A successful and enjoyable Vireya Show was held at Nunawading over the weekend of 19/20 March,1994, by the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society. As in previous years the Show provided field days for all members, particularly Vireya growers, to get together to exchange information and discuss their favourite rhododendrons, to view new varieties and to buy rare species and hybrids. The attendance of members was very high. The only disappointing feature of the whole Show was the poor attendance of the general public. However, those who did attend were eager to buy Vireyas.

The monthly meeting of the Victorian Branch was held on the previous Friday night. From the monthly competition at this meeting, 40 trusses or sprays of species and hybrids were staged to provide the cut flower section of the Show. The best of these exhibits by popular vote was a large flowered truss of R.zoelleri x (R.christianae x R.konorii) with vivid burnt rose petals deepening to a pure yellow throat. A spray of 'Ivory Coast' was an interesting exhibit with 8-flower trusses, white with green stamens. The wall behind the trusses and sprays, some nine metres wide, was decorated by Val Marshall in an outstanding mural of Vireya information featuring 120 photographs maps, and snippets of information. The coloured photographs of rare species included R.baenitzianum. One placard revealed that there are 717 different cultures in New Guinea each with their own language and their own Chief.

The large number of Vireya plants on display included eight plants of R.laetum with pure deep yellow flowers; a plant of R.laetum x 'Gardenia Odyssey' with very good waxy yellow 14-flower trusses; a plant of R.laetum x R.aurigeranum with many trusses of yellow flowers; R.laetum x R.macgregoriae with sunset coloured flowers; 'Pink Seedling' in full bloom, one plant in a fern log and one plant in a pot; a plant of 'Carillon Bells' x R.stenophyllum with salmon flowers was very similar to six plants of 'Josephine Gordon' of the same parentage; 'Rogue Red' x R.lochiae with many small red flowers; R.lochiae x R.leucogigas 'Hunstein's Secret' had a large 14-flower truss of bright pink flowers; a 1.5 metre x 1.5 metre plant of R.konori x R.zoelleri with many deep rose pink flowers with a yellow throat; an outstanding plant of R.konorii with six full trusses and thirty flower buds; many plants of 'Simbu Sunset' in flower but inclined to be a bit leggy.

Hanging baskets included plants of 'Sunny x R.rubineiflorum (not in flower), 'Carillon Bells' in pink flowers and 'Coral Flare' with masses of pink flowers.

One of the most interesting features of the Show was the informal discussions between members. Both Bob Hennessy and Harold Lewis were expectantly awaiting the flowering of R.hellwigii, Jack O'Shannassy drew attention to his magnificent hybrid of R.lochiae x 'Hunstein's Secret' which he proposes to name 'Donvale Pink'. This has the same parentage as 'Bob's Crowning Glory' but is significantly different to warrant naming.

Two members with contacts in New Guinea feared that there would be no forests left in New Guinea within 20 years.The late Alan Raper. who had been grafting 'needle thin' scions of the hybrid R.anagalliflorum x R.gracilentum onto standard stocks, explained that the type of graft is a modified side-graft. The normal slice is made into the stock but the flap is not removed but used to hold the needle-thin scion in place.

One member standing in front of the (true) 'Arthur's Choice' stated that he had four plants of 'Arthur's Choice' and they were all different from the true 'Arthur's Choice' in bloom on the stand. Incidentally, this plant of 'Arthurs Choice' was sold as it was wheeled in on the barrow and before it was placed on the stand.

Best Plant in the Show was awarded to Bill Taylor's plant of 'Sunny x R.rubineiflorum which he had bought from Geraldine Roelink at the same show the previous year. Whilst the winning specimen was very well grown under cover with much young growth it had no flowers or flower buds and because of the luxuriant growth it was 12 months away from flowering. Geraldine puts tremendous roots on all her plants under cool conditions and, as a result, they are just bursting to grow.

At this show last year, I bought a small plant of 'Eloquent Bouquet', placed it in a fern log and it has more than doubled in size. It is reputed to be a fragrant white but I do not know the parentage. 'Robert Bates' also purchased last year now has eight flower buds. Incidentally, I take cuttings out of all new purchases and now have additional plants of both 'Eloquent Bouquet' and 'Robert Bates'.

Without any doubt, in my opinion, the very best plant in the show was R.konorii, grown by Laurie Caddy in a fern log for 17 years. This outstanding specimen was 1.2 metres high by 1.2 metres wide with six fragrant white trusses and 30 flower buds. One member commented that these flower buds were as big as golf balls. However, precise measurement showed that they were about three-quarters the size of a golf ball. Unfortunately this magnificent specimen had one truss well past its best. If this truss had been removed the plant would have been perfect.

Regrettably, the Australian Rhododendron Society has no rules or guidelines for judging plants. Most judges adopt the negative approach and look for faults, whereas in life and in plants, always look for the good points.

From: Brian Clancy
Bentleigh
Victoria.

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PRETREATMENT of CUTTINGS

Arising from a query about the disappointly early death of some cuttings which had been dipped in Benlate as a precaution against fungal attack, Eric Jordan of Oakville has passed on the following comments:-
'I would like to draw attention to the use of Benlate or Bayleton on plants prior to taking cuttings, and also on the cuttings. This may make them impossible to root. I do not know what effect this has on Vireyas but on Grevillea Robin Gordon no cutting must be taken until at least 6 weeks after application when all the effects of the fungicide have dissipated - if not forget about ever putting roots on them!

This leads to the point -do not dip cuttings in these systemic fungicides as this may stop the rooting process. It is more advisable to use plain bleach, a few teaspoonfuls in a gallon of water. Dip cuttings for a short time and then wash them off. Some use a few drops of Solyptol in the water to kill any fungus. I have used Condy's Crystals (potassium permanganate) at a strengh just enough to turn the water a light pink, for the same purpose.

Try using on your plants 6 weeks prior to taking cuttings a small amount of slow release potassium based fertilizer, eg Osmocote or Nutricote, but not muriate of potash, the sulphate is alright. Aother method that I used when taking cuttings at one nursery where I was a propagator, was to put a few drops of Previcur and a thimble full of Formula 20 in a bucket of water for dipping cuttings. Bleach was used if there was mildew on the cuttings.

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This may not have been the cause of the premature death of my cuttings but it is good advice for the future. Of course there are other procedures that may have been at fault. Your comments are invited for our next issue.

While on this subject you may be interested to know that the Chinese were centuries ahead of us in using hormones to promote the rooting of cuttings. They treated woody stems with the urine of barnyard animals, which in some magical way caused roots to form. Western scientists found the active ingredient to be indole acetic acid, still used in cutting powders.
For this item we must thank Dr.Dave Goheen who has been writing some most interesting notes on rhododendrons for the newsletter of the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

Editor

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Also from Sylvia Saperstein:-
For those Vireya growers who are persecuted by earthworms in their pots, in spite of a brick under the pot, I have a homely hint to offer. I have been successful in getting rid of them by soaking the pot in a bucket of ordinary dish washing detergent at a strength you would use for an average wash up. 15 minutes is long enough and the detergent has no adverse effect on Vireyas
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R.brookeanum gracile ?

In 1980 the Australian Rhododendron Society imported from U.S.A. a variety of Vireyas which in all totalled 137 cuttings from 44 hybrids and species. These were assembled and despatched by Peter Schick of Fort Bragg, California, with the help of Bill Moyles and Pete Sullivan of San Francisco. These cuttings went into quarantine at the nursery of Graham Snell's and we are indebted to all of these enthusiasts for some very fine Vireyas.

Amongst them were two that are now of particular interest, namely R.longiflorum from Strybing No. 62-520 and R.brookeanum var. gracile. The longiflorum label read 'longiflorum hybrid' in fact but for some time I had this listed as the species because I misread the label.

This year both plants - in different beds in our garden - flowered very well indeed, the 'longiflorum' in particular was covered in trusses. It was then that my wife commented on their similarity and in fact when both leaf and flower were put alongside each other, they were identical.

By chance I came across the note on R.brookeanum var.gracile when looking up some other hybrid in the 'Vireya Names' booklet. This referred to a personal communication from Pete Sullivan on the receipt of a shipment of Vireyas (purported to be Veitch cultivars) from the National Arboretum; this clone was tagged 'longiflorum'; when it bloomed it was evident the identification was faulty. Sleumer's subsequent identification of it as R.brookeanum var. gracile was also untrue, and it is probably a British hybrid.

In correspondence with Pete Sullivan he stated that Dr Sleumer and/or his staff's identification was based on a truss sent by the Director of Strybing Arboretum, Mr.Brydon, who then determined that this was not keying out either. Pete and Bill Moynier are in the process of trying to straighten out this trouble. Had it not been such an exceptional clone the simplest way would have been to trash it. As it is they have named it for the time being,'Peck of Trouble'.

So we do not have these two species unfortunately, but we do have a rather good hybrid and perhaps we shall learn more about it in the future.

Amongst the other plants imported were many that are now well regarded, foremost being 'Valentine' (R.lochae x R.gracilentum) registered here as 'Saint Valentine' and promoted commercially for the benefit of the Aust.Rhodo.Society. Peter Schick's note on it read 'good plant (pinch) good red'. Also of interest, Vladimir Bukovsky from T.Lelliot initially, Narnia and Calavar, Pink Creeper x R.laetum (Pink Creeper's origin is unknown and it has now disappeared, apparently it came from the garden of the late Maury Sumner of San Francisco) R.herzogii with Lou Searle quoted as the source, and very many more.

Editor

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