The Vireya Venture

ISSUE 44 JULY, 2001

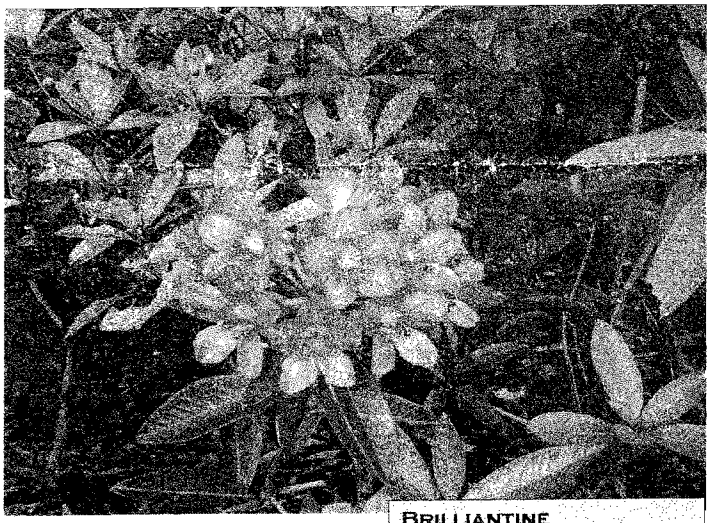
Included in this issue excerpts from correspondence from our Vireya compatriots in South Africa Paul De Jager, Maggie Carver in Tasmania and a copy of an article "Vireyas in Thailand." Hope you enjoy them.

Editors Notes

It is with pleasure that I sit to write this note. This is not just because the perfume of Aravir - (R.konori xPink delight) xR.jasminiflorum fills the garden in winter or because our Butter-

"I received so many positive comments on the Vireya Venture. Fellow venturers thank you "

milk R.konori* R.aurigeranum now 8' tall has probably 30 buds developing. It's because I received so many positive comments on the vireya Venture. Fellow Venturers ***thank you.*** For some it's the overseas mail and Aussie Stamps, others enjoy the fact that its hard copy and comes in an envelope. Most said the content was worth reading and that they



BRILLIANTINE
A GRAHAM SNELL HYBRID

looked forward to news of Vireya collecting, hybridising and cultivation.

Competing with the internet is not possible, it's a wonderful and powerful tool but as yet not everyone has access so maybe newsletters will survive for awhile.

Subscriptions have built our funds a little but now its up to those who enjoy the contact to offer something of your experiences with Vireya.

Each year our local rotary club have a charity auction to raise funds. I have donated one or two Vireya in bloom for the past 7 years and it has become something of a thing between members of the club to take home the Vireya. Last year $115 was handed over for two 8" plants and this year $75 for one. I would normally receive $12.00 wholesale for these plants, at last some people are recognising the true value of Vireya.

Paul De Jager - South Africa

Regarding Vireya in South Africa I can't speak for the country as a whole but that the single biggest limitation for me is the unavailability of plant material in this country.

I know of a few people in South Africa who do grow Vireya successfully but I can literally count them on one hand and they are generally not prone to distributing propagation material. A large wholesale nursery in the Transvaal has propagated several vireya Hybrids and released them onto the market in limited numbers via retailers. Other than these and a couple of plants obtained from local horticulturists I have had to rely on seed raising. This has been interesting, however I have had to figure out how to raise plants from scratch under the specific local conditions.

These are, in this part of the country wet, warm to hot summers (some days in February & March in the 30's, and cool to cold winters. No actual frost where we live but winter nights down to 5° C but mostly 10° C. I'd say the most stressful conditions for vireya are the hot, dry days which occur all too abundantly in spring but also occasionally in summer when "Berg" winds blow. These are hot dry winds coming down from the plateau toward the coast. Everything in the garden gets cooked. I suspect that it will not be possible to plant vireyas in the ground in direct sun as some Venturers have recommended but I am only just starting to experiment with garden planting.

I think conditions might be better for this at the coast where the humidity never drops too low or at higher elevations. At 800M altitude and 29° 36S latitude we are borderline between subtropical and warm temperate climates. I'd say there is a lot of potential in South Africa for both Vireya and Temperate forms of Rhododendron in the wetter eastern and southern parts of the country.

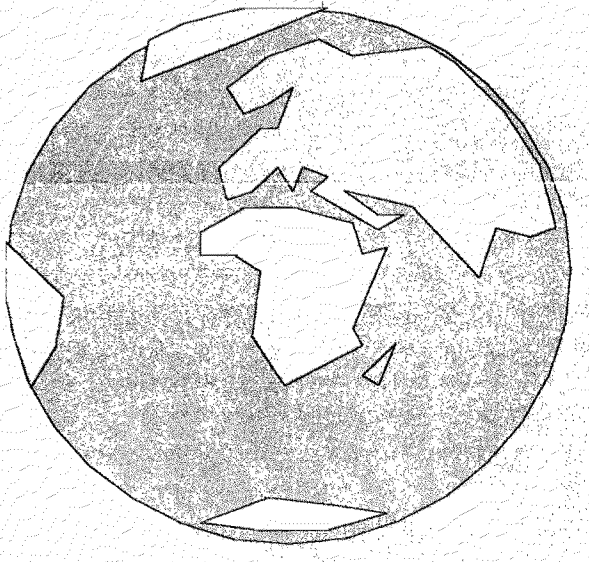
I have so far enjoyed the challenge of trying out such an untested venture even though it has been frustrating in many ways.

I certainly enjoy the fantastic blooms that develop on the few larger plants. I feel it will be some time before Vireya have reached their full potential in South Africa.

Paul De Jager
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Those of you who are able should carefully consider attending the Rhodo '02 International Conference in Edinburgh in May 2002

See abstract Page 5



Vireyas in Thailand

Thinikorn Komkris.
Member, Hawaii Chapter ARS

Those who have read the reprint of "Vireyas in Thailand" by Sylvia Saperstein in our "Viva Vireyas!" Vol 4 Issue 9, (September 2000) may wonder what has happened to that Vireya garden. I have heard that it has been aimed to be the biggest of its kind in the world. Mitch suggested to me that I should try to follow-up and report the progress to our fellow members. I must say that while the garden is in my own country, I have no connection whatsoever to the management there apart from a personal acquaintance with one of the garden managers. Also the arboretum is situated on the northern most tip of Thailand some 1000 Km from Bangkok on a mountain that divides Thailand and Burma. It is a place that one would hardly pass by in his daily life unless he intends to visit it! I was there early March 2001 only as an ordinary spectator. The disadvantage is that I may not be able to understand the total background of what I saw, but the good thing is that I am totally free to give a full appraisal of what I saw as just the opinion of one vireya enthusiast.

The arboretum is at about 1500 meters elevation (about 4800 ft.) with rain up to 100 inches from May through October. In a normal year the season can extend half a month earlier or later and there is little rain at all the rest of the year. There are good water sources so irrigation is not a problem. For a tropical standard the place is much cooler than ordinary lowland throughout Thailand. Frost in the winter is almost unknown. I would compare the location to be the same as Mitch's place at Volcano, Hawaii. Incidentally both are about the same latitude (20 degrees North) but the distribution of rain would not be as good.

The area lies on flowering native and exotic trees like cherries, magnolias and grevilleas. Walkways zig-zag down the slopes through a display of vireyas alternated with other flowers like Christmas azaleas, roses, ground orchids and bulbs. There is a nicely mowed lawn and in the background are taller rhododendrons much as R. arboretum and r. dendricola which were transplanted from South China and sent down the Mekong river by boat.

Approaching the entrance I always enjoy its magnificent scenery with hundreds of flowering vireyas of all colors. I have read books about vireyas grown in Australia or New Zealand. i.e. Flamenco Dancer, Simbu Sunset, Kisses, Triumphans etc., but unfortunately no species. I am pleased to report that they are now well settled in and all look very healthy. The staff there is now learning proper growing procedures in contrast to two years ago when

Maggi Carver - TASMANIA

My Vireya collection is quite small, (20) but all doing very well jammed into their pots, 5 or 6 into large clay pots on the verandah where they get sun until midday. They are blooming several times a year and are very healthy. I have some seedlings, (4) out of (20) have survived but they are extremely slow. Six months old and only four leaves. Perhaps some one could give me information or special tips to bring on seedlings. Perhaps I just have to wait!



Rosie Posie - note the petaloid

(Continued from page 3)

Vireyas were planted in holes. Then when they had a rather heavy autumn rain the water stayed in the holes no matter how steep the slope was. By the following April when I was there I could still see evidence of root-rot on a number of the plants. Now all the Vireyas are grown on mounted beds made by woven bamboo sticks. There are still thousands of unplanted bushes in the two hide-away nurseries (Visitors not allowed) growing in pots. Those that bloom there are moved to the display near the visitors entrance. For a vireya lover like me, they are a great visual experience.

With all the resources that are available now including land, climate, know-how, plant material and most of all adequate funding I have no doubt that it has the potential to be the largest Vireya garden in the world (if that is the objective). So you might imagine the feelings of this small vireya garden owner who has to wait every month for cultivars. However, as of now there seems to be no intention for that garden to sell plants.

Some say that jealousy motivates a man to find fault with the work of others. So I do manage to find some criticisms of what is happening there. First, I am not sure that the way they are planting is a proper way of landscaping with vireyas. The plants are some 3 feet apart, and although there seems to be some grouping according to cultivar or colour, the overall picture seems to be one of a mixture of colours and cultivars with varying heights. A big arboretum should exist for the purpose of demonstrating something and not a place for visitors to walk. The rhododendrons in the garden are simply referred to as "Kularn Pan Pee" or "Thousand Year roses" no matter if they are larger elepidotes or dwarf azaleas or vireyas. This gives me the feeling that they are misleading ordinary people to look upon all these plants as the rhododendrons one would expect to see in temperate gardens. One has to admit that vireyas can never replace the temperate rhododendrons with their profusion of colour display in springtime, but vireyas have their own beauty. this ought to be explained to visitors and help them to understand what Vireyas really are. To introduce the public with this kind of orientation should include information on the origin of vireyas, their species and their relationship to the offerings on display in the garden. I didn't see a single sign. Lastly, they don't seem to care about the names of plants. Maybe they do not want to reveal names to visitors, and I just hope they have a system of tracking down names when they want to. We gardeners know how frustrated it can be when we have a plant without knowing its name. I had to search for name tags to learn their names, but could only do this on those plants next to the paths. Only a very few of the original tags remain and once they are gone it doesn't seem that they are replaced. All rhododendron lovers I know share this idea with me after they have visited this garden.

All in all, a great garden it is, and the vireyas can be very much at home and happy here. But to be the biggest, I have to ask what is the use. They need to be more serious and set up a purpose. For example: a collection of all known cultivars and species. Or something along those lines. Not just a display of something pretty with the public not knowing what they are admiring.

Reprinted from:
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Newsletter of Hawaii Chapter
American Rhododendron Society



Uluru a Sylvia Saperstein Hybrid. This hybrid may be seen growing in these Thai Gardens.

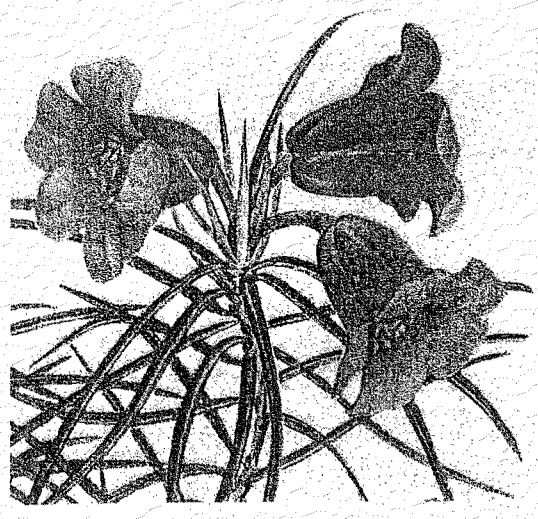
An International Conference

First Circular - Expression of Interest

Rhodo '02

Rhododendrons in Horticulture and Science, Edinburgh 2002

Friday 17th - Sunday 19th May 2002



Rhododendron stenophyllum

An International Conference sponsored by

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

&

The Royal Horticultural Society London

The Royal Botanic garden Edinburgh can be most beautiful in May with its magnificent collection of Rhododendrons and world famous Rock Gardens. It was founded in1670 and moved to its present site on the northern side of the city close to the Firth of Forth, in 1821. It has a large area under glass and provides a complex of relaxing, beautiful walks through the Woodland Garden, the Arboretum and the new Chinese Collection. The historic city centre, dominated by the Castle, is a 20 minute walk or a 5 minute bus ride and provides excellent shopping facilities, museums, theatres and splendid Scottish architecture.

The Conference will provide a range of lectures by many internationally renowned speakers covering many aspects of rhododendrons and related plants. It will aim to provide a mix of horticulture and science and will appeal to a wide audience and will cover cultivation, collection and status in the wild taxonomy including recent molecular work, problems with pests and diseases and the use of plants for modern gardens. There will be a poster display of recent work and an art exhibition of Rhododendron paintings, many of which have been painted from plants cultivated at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

For those wishing to have a more extended stay, the Conference immediately precedes the prestigious Chelsea flower show (21st-24th May) and coincides with the Floriales - a three month horticultural spectacular in the Netherlands, which occurs only one year in ten.

Conference participation will be limited to 200. If there is sufficient interest, there will be workshops on rhododendron identification, hosted by Dr David Chamberlain and Dr George Argent. These would be on 16th and 20th May respectively and each restricted to 25 persons. Pre and Post Conference tours will be arranged to visit some of the most spectacular Scottish Gardens, but numbers will probably be limited to 30 persons per tour.

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