

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 18 Number 6 June 2005



Fraser South Rhododendron Society
is a chapter of the
American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the
third Wednesday of each month at:
United Church Hall
5673 - 200th Street
Langley BC

www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth

This Month:

**THE FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY'S RENOWNED**

ANNUAL PICNIC

SUNDAY, JUNE 19TH

OFFICIAL COMMENCEMENT AT 3:00 PM

BUT COME AND HELP US SET UP

ANYTIME AFTER 1:30 PM

2005 Officers

President: Bobby Ogdon
604-572-9993

Vice Pres.: Dalen Bayes
360-933-4596

Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg
604-853-5737

Treasurer: Alan March
604-532-9062

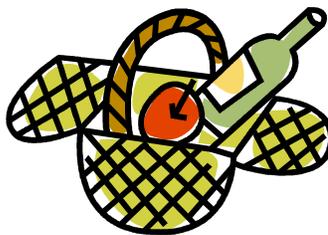
Directors:
Les Clay - yr. 3
Harold Fearing - yr. 2
Colleen Forster - yr. 1

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald
604-990-5353

Website: Chris Klapwijk
604-888-0920

Quick Hits



Picnic!

Don't forget our annual picnic

Date: Sunday June 19th

Time: 3:00pm

**Place: The home of Trevor
and Doreen Badminton.**

Please check the exact

address on your FSRS Membership List or call one of
the members of the executive.



Next Meeting:

Don't forget to mark down the
date of our next meeting -

Date: Wednesday, Sept 21st

Time: 7:30 pm

Place: United Church Hall



From the President

THE LEARNING CURVE IS STEEP ...

The learning curve is steep, and immediate. You had best be competent by the time you exit the parking lot, oops, I mean the car park. The contrasts are about as subtle as a sledge. As you enter the car you search for the steering wheel. Once that is sorted out you need to travel in the correct lane of the road (the jury is still out on the definition of “correct,” but it is best to side with the majority). You approach your first roundabout with fear and trepidation. Which way around? Who has the right of way? How many lanes? Which exit? My initial fears dissipated with just a few exercises. Soon I entered the intersections with a confidence perhaps too vigorous, as Judy cowered away from the traffic entering from the right, admonishing me to slow down. After four weeks and 2400 miles, including numerous ubiquitous roundabouts, I admit to a fervent respect for these traffic facilitators. They actually move traffic efficiently, much better than our traffic lights, which effectively stall vehicles. Why don't we try roundabouts here?

Not all contrasts between England and Canada are as beneficial and rewarding. Let's talk, briefly, about plumbing. How can this civilized culture tolerate and promote showers that rank among the poorest quality in the world? The water flow is erratic as is the temperature. It gets worse if anyone in the neighborhood (alright, I exaggerate here) decides to shower or flush. And, what is with the string hanging from the ceiling that must be activated before hot water is available? Related to plumbing is the placing of clothes washers in the kitchens, oh, make those washer/dryers. After a complete cycle taking upwards of three hours, the clothes have to be pried away from the cylinder walls. We have permanent-press, they have permanent-wrinkle.

England is apparently the only country in the world that doesn't speak English, at least English that is understood by travellers. We were staying in a B&B in Cophthorne near Crawley, south of London. The conversation and small talk were stilted at best. It was embarrassing to be stuck in a milieu of miscommunication where we were all ostensibly speaking the same language but nearly requiring charades to make progress. It seems the owners were raised in London and had adopted the regional dialect with great proficiency. Typically, Don questioned, “ ‘av you ‘ad a chawns to reeuhd thuh Die-lee Mile? Naw’ mooch in i’ jus’ a bi’ o’ this an’ a bi’ o’ tha’. Reedin’ thuh moanin’ pye-puh ‘as been me ‘abi’ fuh foady yeuhs. ‘Oi think you’ll loik i’. Leave i’ in thuh garage.”(garage rhymes with marriage not barrage). Some argue for a differentiation of class indicators according to pronunciation, maintaining it is the lower class who fail to pronounce consonants, in particular the glottal stop (the omission of ‘t’s) and the dropping of ‘h’s. I wonder if those who espouse such are revealing class insecurities. I further wonder if somewhere they offer intensive English classes for tourists. And, what is the essence of Englishness? Is it the language? Or the class consciousness? Or fixation with the weather? Or, the innate social dis-ease that appears to be a congenital disorder at the core of all social interaction?

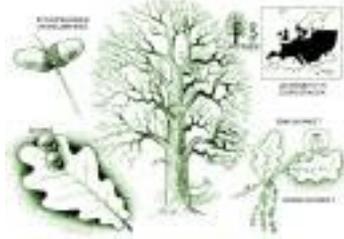
The exception that proves the rule is the London taxi. The majority of cabbies must have learned their language skills and their social graces elsewhere. With 25,000 cabs plying the City streets trolling for fares it is a very competitive business. The drivers who own their cabs (meaning an outlay of 30-40 thousand GBP) tend to be more helpful and understanding than those who rent vehicles from fleet operators, but of course you do not know this when you flag one down. I suppose I should also include bouquets for the bus drivers. The London Transit system is the world's largest, surpassing Egged (a distant second), the national bus company in Israel. To facilitate travel within the city boundaries, London traffic has been restricted by imposing a fee on all vehicles that enter that designated area. We are told that the rush hours are much improved, though it seems anything worse would be total gridlock.

While this was to be a vacation including a diversity of leisure activities we scheduled many specific garden visits. I longed to see rhododendrons of greater size and age than are found in Canadian gardens. My wish was fulfilled. However we saw many contrasts with Canadian gardens. The large estate gardens and rhodo gardens are, in a word, “awesome.” Huge rhododendron tree trunks, some with a calliper in excess of twelve inches are attention-getting. As well, other arborea and companion plants of great age are inspiring. Leonardslee's vast landscape crammed with very mature rhodos and azaleas in full bloom is breath-taking. The mass plantings of *R. luteum* fill the air with a sweet perfume. I was somewhat disappointed in a conspicuous lack of labels and name tags, but found this to be the rule in most gardens. The exception was Wakehurst Place, a wonderful garden of great age, now associated with Kew. Their watchword is “Saving the World's Plants for Life,” a motto instigated by the Millennium Seed Bank, a

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The Mighty English Oak
Quercus robur



Lanhydrock House
Cornwall

unique enterprise which supports seed conservation from around the globe.

Many of the historic castles and estates are surrounded by world class gardens. Hever Castle, originally the home of Henry VIII, boasts an Italian garden dating back more than a century. Beyond the garden mazes are rhodos two centuries and more in age. The Lanhydrock estate includes several gardens including formal herb and hedge areas, though to one side dozens of huge, invasive *R. ponticums* lie in a burning pile after apparently outgrowing their usefulness. The National Arboretum in Gloucestershire is overwhelming in size and age. Many of the trees (notably, *Quercus robur*) have been standing for 600 years.

While the gardening contrasts are generally favorable to England I noted a negative aspect when viewing home gardens. It is almost like the small garden has ceded all responsibility to the historic estates. I saw only a scant smattering of rhodos in small home gardens (small meaning selection, not size). For example the B&B in Copthorne had a back garden measuring 30 by 70 feet, with four large trees: a 20 foot Bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*) and three 30-foot *R. ponticums*. Yet, many gardens had few plants at all. Rhodos in the landscaping are rare. I saw no home gardens with as diverse collections of rhodos as we would find in our FSRS gardens.

I am sure the images of England will stay with me for many years, perhaps for several newsletters, but I will try to temper my episodic Englishness. For the moment I am struck by the contrasts, many of which must wait until later to be fully explicated. One culture, society, or people is not better than the other, just different. We can all learn. I especially appreciated their transportation system. Still, I noticed that they ride in tubes, and we put toothpaste in ours.

Bobby Ogdon



From the Editor

This Month: :

This month is, of course, our Annual Picnic and Auction, to be held on Sunday, June 19th at the Rhodo Ranch, the home of Trevor and Doreen Badminton, at 3:00 pm. Please consult your FSRS Membership list for the exact address, or call one of the members of the executive if you need directions. The Rhodo Ranch is a wonderful venue for our picnic and we are deeply grateful to Trevor and Doreen for hosting us all once again. There is an extensive covered area outside, so don't stay away because of the weather.

You have probably already been contacted by Karen Linton, who has done such a wonderful job of coordinating the potluck contributions, but don't forget to bring:

- a chair to sit upon
 - a plate to eat off
 - cutlery to eat with
 - the adult beverage of your choice, if desired
- a mug for the adult beverage of your choice, or the tea and coffee which will be provided
 - your potluck contribution, for sharing with others
 - utensils to serve your potluck contribution, if necessary
 - any friends, neighbours, or visiting relatives whom you think enjoy meeting us and learning more about the FSRS

Also, don't forget that the Annual Picnic is also the second of our two major fund-raisers.

Look around you, there is sure to be something worthwhile to contribute to the auction: superfluous gardening tools or equipment, horticultural texts on a subject which no longer interests you, the occasional rhodo grown too big for its placement? Bring something someone else will be interested in, and then bid early and bid high for something you are interested in.

Last Month: Last month was our annual Beer Bottle Truss Show. It was a smaller event than usual as many of the Chapter members were away, and I understand that there were also some timing conflicts with the Boy Scout troop which uses the church hall just before us. Unfortunately I cannot even report on the results as I have not been able to obtain the listings yet. A full report will be included in the September newsletter. At that time I will also have the final figures on the Plant Sale held April 19th.

Next Month: Our next meeting will be in September - Wednesday, September 21st. The scheduled speaker is Bobby Ogdon.

Notes: Well, not really a note, more of an apology. This month's edition is not only sort of late, it is also sort of thin. Frankly, jet lag from the return from our China trip has been disturbingly persistent - why is it that it is so much easier to fly west than east? I am sure there is some scientific reason why the flight from Vancouver to Beijing presented no problems at all, but eight days after the flight from Hong Kong to Vancouver I still cannot be asleep when I should, or be awake when I should. It is certainly more than just the number of hours one's internal clock is out - it must have something to do with whether one is out of sync forwards or backwards.

In any event, by way of apology, I leave you with this - the ultimate Yak picture:



Brenda Macdonald



COMPANION PLANTS

X, Y, and Z are for
Xanthoceras, the Chinese Flowering Chestnut
 the **Yak**, *Rhododendron yakushimanum*
Zenobia, the Honeycup, or Dusty Zenobia

Xanthoceras sorbifolium Family: Sapindaceae

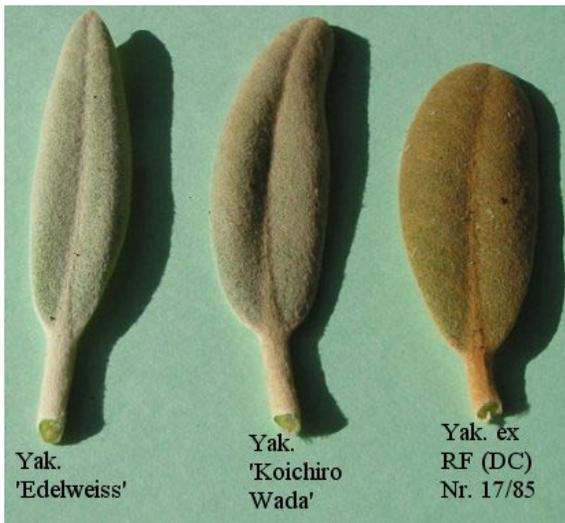
The Yellowhorn, or Chinese Flowering Chestnut, is a single-species genus from the woodlands of northern China, introduced to cultivation in 1866 by Abbe David. The sweetly fragrant flowers do indeed resemble the horse chestnut, being held in terminal racemes 8-10" long. The individual blooms are 1" across, white with a green to reddish base. The plant forms a large upright shrub or small tree, quite variable in size, being described as 10 ft x 6 ft, or 22 ft x 15 ft ! I guess it all depends on where you plant it. Although hardy to Zone 5, it prefers a warm sunny site to ripen the wood and set the flower buds, in near neutral soil, not particularly rich. The lush pinnate leaves are about



12" long, and composed of 9-17 glossy leaflets. I personally have not seen a specimen of this plant, and few nurseries list it in their inventory, but for those of you who want the rare and unusual, it's worth the search.

Xanthoceras sorbifolium

Xantho = yellow and ceras = cherry (red). The genus name probably relates to the blossom colours. The specific epithet, *sorbifolium*, describes how the pinnate leaves are similar to the Sorbus or Mountain Ash tree.



Rhododendron yakushimanum Family: Ericaceae

It is probably the most well-known and widely used species of rhododendron in hybridization – and in the 1980's and '90's, it was, in my estimation, grossly overused. Some of the hybrids that made it into the market were definitely lackluster ! Notwithstanding, the species and some of its selections are truly exceptional, being awarded a First Class Certificate back in 1947. Heavy foliage indumentum, starting silvery white and maturing to light brown; rich pink flower buds that open and fade to blush white like apple blossoms, and hardiness born of eons on the windswept high peaks of Yaku-shima Island of Japan, all combine to make this a plant for every garden. Add to that the compact habit, long retention of foliage, reliable blooming, sun tolerance – well, the list just doesn't end. No wonder it's all the rage in making new hybrids! Who wouldn't want to pass on all those features?

Of the better selections of the species are 'Mist Maiden', 'Ken Janeck', 'Exbury form', 'Koichiro Wada' and 'Yaku Angel', but

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many fine hybrids have also been developed that retain the best characteristics. More have been made now that do not have the (objectionable to some) fading of the blooms, and retain the bud color right through the bloom period. These things are strictly of a personal preference – I find beauty in both. Some worthy ones to try are: ‘Yaku Princess’ (pink to white), ‘Barmstedt’ (red to rose), ‘Dopey’ (red), ‘Elya’ (rose), ‘Teddy Bear’ (soft pink), ‘Cupcake’ (apricot pink), ‘Morgenrot’ (rose red), and ‘Mardi Gras’ (pink to white). There are many more, and the best one for your garden is your favorite.

Rhododendron yakushimanum

Rhodo = rose and dendron = tree. The genus name aptly describes the rose bush appearance and/or frequent rose-colour of the blossoms. The specific epithet, *yakushimanum*, indicates that this particular species is found on the Japanese island of Yakushima, a small island just off the coast of Kyushu - the most southerly of the main islands of Japan.



And at long last, but by no means the least, I offer

Zenobia pulverulenta Family: Ericaceae

A dainty shrub from the Carolinas area of U.S.A., the Honeycup, or Dusty Zenobia grows quite happily in the deep humus soil of our rhodo gardens. The fragrant anise-scented white flowers emerge in late spring, looking exactly like large lily-of-the-valley blooms, on the ends of the branches. Leaves emerge in spring with a lovely glaucous cast, maturing more glossy, and may be somewhat evergreen in a moderate winter, but well hardy to Zone 5. It is not well known in cultivation, but was introduced more than 200 years ago. Hilliers of England rates it as “a ravishingly beautiful small shrub”. The branches are graceful and arching, filling a space of 4 ft x 4 ft or slightly more. Fall color is yellow-orange with a purplish tinge, to pure scarlet. Two recent selections have been made: ‘Winter Star’ - with lavender pink blooms, and ‘Woodlander Blue’ – with a longer lasting, much more blue early foliage. Again, I have not seen these plants myself, but I have put it on my list of “must-haves”, and one day there will be one in my garden, I’m sure.

Zenobia pulverulenta

Zenobia was a 3rd century warrior queen of the middle-eastern area known then as Palmyra, who fought against the Romans. It is not clear what connection this rather dainty, graceful, and virginal-white shrub has with a Persian queen with a reputation for, if not more courage than her equally ambitious husband, than certainly for more recklessness, as she strode up and down the ranks of soldiers, exhorting them in her clear and manly voice. The specific epithet, *pulverulenta*, describes the somewhat powdery or dusty appearance of the glaucous new foliage.

Happy Planting

Colleen Forster

Note from the Author; This now concludes my second adventure through the alphabet of companion plants. It has been my pleasure to offer these for your gardens, and I hope you have found my ramblings useful to some degree. I will no doubt continue to write articles now and then on a variety of subjects, if you can bear it, and I thank all of you who have had nice things to say about the ones so far. Keep up the search for companionable plants – they are in abundance, and by no means limited to the ones I’ve described. Your rhodos will thank you, and thrive.



Up the Garden Path

The Victoria Rhodie Conference

If you haven't been to one of the ARS conventions, you're missing out on a real treat. The 2005 convention, in Victoria, included excellent talks, wonderful garden tours, plant sales and lots of opportunities to meet and socialize with other "rhodoholics". Several FSRS chapter members attended, and I think we'd all agree that we had a great time learning about our favourite genus.

Her Honour, Lieutenant Governor, Iona Campagnolo opened the conference with a speech that clearly identified her as a knowledgeable and enthusiastic gardener. To everyone's delight, she remained for the coffee break, greeting as many people as she could. Dr. Quentin Cronk then gave an entertaining, and sometimes whimsical presentation on the evolution of our modern day obsession with the genus *Rhododendron*, starting with Joseph Hooker's book on the rhododendrons of Sikkim and the Himalayas.

John Hammond showed lovely photos of the many gardens in western Scotland that contain such a wealth of mature specimen plants. He mentioned some of the connections that exist between the early plant explorers and modern gardens, and this topic was picked up and developed by Judith Walker's presentation on Thursday. Ms Walker has been compiling a history of rhododendron production nurseries and hybridizers in BC. Like most people, I've heard about George Fraser, the Greigs of Royston Nursery, and so on, but Ms. Walker has put all the pieces together to form a cohesive story of early rhododendron production in BC. I hope we're able to have her come to one of our meetings some time because her talk is one that I think we'd all enjoy hearing.

We heard a couple of talks about the taxonomy of rhododendrons. Dr. Hall, from the Univ. of Washington,

reviewed some of his work in sequencing DNA to establish evolutionary relationships within the genus. He also linked his molecular studies to earlier work on species distribution and to selection pressures some of the tropical rhododendrons have due to pollination problems that exist in areas where there are no bees. He gave us a glimpse into the possible future of rhododendron taxonomy. Lynn Bublitz of New Zealand spoke about current taxonomy and the geographical distribution of the *maddenii* species and hybrids. While he didn't talk too much about taxonomy, per se, Peter Wharton showed pictures of some of his collecting and study visits to southern China. He said that his professional focus has switched from strictly collecting seed, to working with the Chinese to preserve native habitats.

Joy Stones and Ted Cutlan from Tasmania showed slides of their nursery and local gardens. They could easily work for the Tasmanian travel industry as their slides and commentary whetted everyone's appetites to visit. We've all been invited to attend the Tasmanian rhododendron convention in 2006, which is immediately followed by the New Zealand convention. (Hmmm, very tempting; maybe Mike Bale and Mary Anne Berg could organize a trip down under for us. I am kidding, and I can just imagine their collective groans at reading this, but wouldn't it be great fun!)

Eric Allen of the Pacific Forestry Centre talked about insect and disease invaders and their consequences. He spent time reviewing Sudden Oak Death and the possible ramifications this disease could have in North American native woodlands and in our gardens. It was a sobering presentation that really drove home the need to follow national and international regulations when shipping plants.

ARS Gold Medal winner, Keshab Pradhan of Sikkim gave two presentations during the conference. While Sikkim is a relatively small country, it has great climate zone diversity due to elevation changes. Mr. Pradhan showed slides of many ecological associations, and outlined some of the work that has been done and the challenges that exist in conserving native habitats. As well, during his presentations, he included slides of some of the Sikkimese people and their daily lives, just to give us all a taste of modern Sikkim. At the banquet, Mr. Pradhan was honoured by ARS when he received the Rhododendron Pioneer Medal for his work in assisting modern plant explorers

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in obtaining seed of many Sikkim species for inclusion in the world's species collections and for use in hybridizing programs.

Sue Klapwijk and Vern Finley told me that they enjoyed the Sunday morning session by Richard Hebda and Joseph Irving on species distributions of Magnolias and Rhododendrons. (I didn't attend this session as I had a couple of other things to do in Victoria while I was there.)

The garden tours were so enjoyable, and my only complaint about the entire conference was that there was never enough time at any garden. (But, I think this is a usual complaint about all garden tours). Members from our chapter have visited many of the gardens before, but it's always fun to see how gardens change over time. Gardens that many members of FSRS would know included the Abkhazi Garden, Finnerty Gardens at U. Vic., and the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, as well as Towner Crest and Firwood. There were several gardens I'd never visited before: the Varcoe/Kowalyk garden in the Saanich Peninsula, and the gardens of Robin Hopper, the Massas and the Blackmores in the Metchosin area. Each garden was delightful, and all were completely different, but you simply had to be there! One of the comments I overheard was at the Massa Garden which is a relatively young garden. One of the

eastern conference attendees wondered why things were planted so far apart, fortunately one of the local gardeners explained how lucky we are to be able to grow rhodies to great size in relatively short time spans, and that the plant spacing was excellent. I think we sometimes forget just how favourable our climate is for so many rhododendrons.

The Victoria chapter made sure we had lots of chances to eat (anyone who organizes a dessert night that includes chocolate fondue gets my vote), and they maintained a continual display of trusses that changed daily. I'm sure all the members of the Victoria chapter were exhausted by the end of the conference, but congratulations are certainly in order to them for their hard work. Next year the conference will be in the Washington DC area, and the conference organizers outlined some of their plans. They also said that they'd arranged to have very reasonably priced accommodation, actually bargain prices for the DC area.

If you get the chance, do attend an ARS conference. They offer education as well as entertainment, and it's a wonderful opportunity to see some of the world's great private gardens.

Norma Senn

What's in Bloom?

The following is a selection of rhododendrons and companion plants currently in blossom.



R. 'Old Copper'

parentage: 'Vulcan' x 'Fabia' **type:** elepidote

hybridizer: T. Van Veen

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul **hardiness:** -20°C | -4°F

photo: Chris Klapwijk



R. 'Goldsworth Orange'

type: elepidote **parentage:** *dicroanthum* x *discolor*

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul

hardiness: -20°C | -4°F

photo: Chris Klapwijk



R. 'Attraction'

parentage: *ponticum* x *unknown* **type:** elepidote

hybridizer: M. Koster & Sons

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul **hardiness:** -20°C | -4°F

photo: Chris Klapwijk



R. 'Edith Bosley'

type: elepidote **parentage:** unknown

hybridizer: Bosley

size: to 2.5m | 8' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul **hardiness:** -15°C | 5°F

photo: 'Mike' Trembath



R. 'Mrs. John Clutton'

parentage: *maximum* x *unknown* **type:** elepidote

hybridizer: A. Waterer

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul **hardiness:** -15°C | 5°F

photo: Chris Klapwijk



R. 'Mrs. T. H. Lowinsky'

type: elepidote **parentage:** unknown

hybridizer: A. Waterer

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Jun-Jul **hardiness:** -15°C | 5°F

photo: Chris Klapwijk