

ARS Whidbey Island Chapter NEWSLETTER

Website: whidbeyrhodies.org

Meets the 4th Wednesday of each Month
Fire District 5 Headquarters Station
215 East Race Road, Coupeville, WA
Refreshments: 7:00 Meeting: 7:20

May 2008

Next 'Meeting': May 28

Program: Bill Heller

**Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden
Tasmania**

Join renowned rhododendron photographer, Bill Heller, on a trip to the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden outside of Burnie, Tasmania. On 250 acres, the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is a natural amphitheater sloping to the Emu River with over 22,000 Rhododendrons and companion plants.

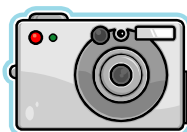
See more program details, [this page](#).

Calendar of Upcoming Events

May 28	Chapter Meeting Bill Heller
August 3	Chapter Picnic
Sept 24	Chapter Meeting
Sept 25-28 ...	Western Regional Conference Hilo, HI
Oct 22	Chapter Meeting
Nov 19	Pie Social/Annual Meeting Election of Officers
Dec 10 (Wed)	Holiday Dinner @ Christopher's in Coupeville

Bill Heller's Emu Valley Tour

The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is located just outside of Burnie, Tasmania in the northwest part of Tasmania. Tasmania is located south east of Australia, in fact if you look close at a map there is a straight break in the southeast corner of Australia that perfectly matches the same break in the northeast coast of Tasmania, so several million years ago Tasmania broke off from the continent of Australia.



The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is a 250 acre garden with a natural amphitheater sloping to the Emu River with over 22,000 Rhododendrons and companion plants. The garden was started in 1984 and has a very large selection of Hybrid Rhododendrons and a large selection of Species Rhododendrons. To properly display the Species Rhododendrons, the garden has created regional areas which represent the flora of the region from which the Wild Species Rhododendrons originate. These areas include Bhutan, Sikkim, Assam, Burma, Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces of China, Japan, Taiwan and North America.

There are several lakes, waterways, bridges, gazebos and a fountain. The Japanese Area has a broad selection of Rhododendrons and Azaleas, flowering cherries, maples, conifers, bamboos, irises and wisteria supported by a reflection pool, two lakes, a covered bridge (of authentic design and construction method), a Ceremonial Tea House, stepping stones and more.

The garden is a photographer's dream, so you know I had a great time photographing all the wonderful sites and Rhododendrons. The Hybrid Rhododendrons and Azaleas were some that I recognized and knew well, but there were also many new Australian Hybrids and special plants from the area. Among the Species Rhododendrons there were some I knew, especially the Yakushmanum in the Japanese Section, but there were also many ones I had never seen, or never seen in flower. One of the highlights was the Maddenii Rhododendrons with their large magnificent flowers and the splendid collection of Vireya Rhododendrons in their vibrant colors and shapes.

This program on the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden will take you though the Rhododendron, Azaleas and Companion Plants and sites of this wonderful garden in Tasmania, all set to music and projected from a computer program. So come and enjoy a trip to an exotic location thousands of miles away from the Northwest.



Cookie reminder:

Fran Spicer & Cee Schacker

From the Prez

Bill Stipe



The cool, wet spring we have been experiencing has some good and some bad effects. The rhododendron flowers have lasted longer than usual, but it has been too wet to do much work in the garden. The weeds however love it. The shot weed has bloomed and will soon send its next crop of seeds across your garden. The best defense is to remove the plants before they "shoot". It is time to start deadheading the early bloomers. Deadheading assures a good bloom for next season. If you have not yet applied fertilizer, there is still time. The warm weather, when it arrives, will bring another generation of root weevil to feed on the rhododendron leaves, I am trying a new bioinsecticide called MET 52™. It is a fungus that will kill the larval stage of the weevil. It is not available to the general public yet, but the supplier has provided a sample to test its effectiveness. Hopefully, it will be available later this season. The chemical bifenthrin (generic name) is available and has proven very effective against root weevil. It is available in several brand name formulations, the most common being Talstar™.

Our Dollar plus Table is your chance to obtain some small plants, not necessarily rhododendrons, for your garden. If you have some seedlings, cuttings, or divisions that are in excess of your needs, bring them to the meetings. Kathy Rix will price them and collect the money to add to the Chapter's General fund. There will also be a plant for the raffle. Come to our regular meetings to take advantage of these sales.

Canadian's Visit a Huge Success

I hope you were able to participate in some part of the tour and hospitality put together for the visit of our Canadian friends. Many thanks to **Mel & Marilyn Wright; John Cienki/Stephanie Rodden; Joan & Robert Bell; Barry & Kathy Rix; Pat Sasson; Stephen Schwarzmann; Fran & Jack Spicer; Bill & Mary Stipe; John & Felicia Marshall, Jack & Norma Lounsberry; Kristi/Meerkerk Gardens; Frank Fujioka; Dave & Katie Dickerson; Don Lee;** who hosted guests opened their gardens or helped direct parking. And all the rest of you can pat yourselves on the back, you made our guests feel at home with potluck dishes, good conversation and friendship to share. Bill has received many thank yous and expressions of gratitude and reciprocal invitations. Here is an email I received from the Nanaimo Chapter President extending an invitation the next time any of you get to Vancouver Island:

Please pass on my thanks to your members for the wonderful time I had while visiting Whidbey Island with the North Island Rhododendron Society.

I can honestly say it was one of the best tours/visits I have ever had. The hospitality, generosity and friendship that were extended was fabulous.

Again, thanks and please extend my welcome to your members to "call on me" when on Vancouver Island.

Paul Lawry, President Nanaimo Rhododendron Society

Truss Show Recap

The Truss Show we gave in conjunction with the Greenbank Garden Club's plant sale was bountiful and well received. *Thank you* all those who took the time to cut and bring trusses for the display, **Stephen Schwarzmann** for volunteering to put the show together and **Paul Loudon** for hauling the plant display stands. We were pleased that several of the Garden Club members asked for the trusses at the end of the day.

Annual Picnic

Mark your calendars, our Annual Picnic is coming up on August 3rd at Lounsberry Park! We're working out the details so watch for flyers in the mail the latter part of July.



Website Anew

I have just completed a major facelift for our website which now has it's own web address. Visit us at:

whidbeyrhodies.org

Meerkerk Medley



The eighth annual Meerkerk Medley is an evening of fun, friends and fantastic cuisine. Guests are invited to dine in private homes. This fund-raiser for Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens, a charitable organization, is tax deductible. For information regarding hosting a dinner or attending, please contact Gwen Brass, 221.8061, or gwenb@whidbey.com

Meerkerk Notes

Join our dedicated group of volunteers who tend the Gardens year 'round. Come and share your talents in gardening, propagation, plant cataloging, education, fundraising, special events and more...

♦ **Work Parties:** Join us for monthly work parties the 2nd Saturday of each month, 8:45-12:00. We share a potluck lunch at noon.

♦ **Wednesday Construction Team:** Join our crew in building and repairing structures in the Gardens, 9-noon.

♦ **Thursday Mornings: Hands-on-Horticulture:** Enjoy working with gardening volunteers and the Meerkerk staff on horticultural projects in the Gardens.

♦ **Every Thursday in Spring: Grateful Deadheaders:** Join the Meerkerk Gardens' Grateful Deadheaders every Thursday morning 9am to Noon and receive a hand made tie-dyed T-shirt! Bring your favorite pruners and gloves and join us deadheading rhododendrons.

♦ **Independent Opportunities:** Work on your own schedule on a solo or team project in the Gardens or your home office. Contact: Penny@meerkerkgardens.org

SPECIES PROFILE

Wallich ex G. Don 1834

Steve Hootman

A Species Profile reprinted from the
Rhododendron Species Foundation newsletter.

Rhododendron barbatum is another of the numerous fine species collected and introduced to western gardens by Joseph Hooker during his historical two year expedition (1848-1850) into the Sikkim Himalaya. Although this species was first scientifically recorded by Wallich in 1829 and introduced on a small scale possibly around that time, J. D. Hooker is rightfully given credit for bringing this outstandingly ornamental plant into general cultivation. *R. barbatum* is one of the finest of the red-flowered species for all-around garden worthiness. With full rounded inflorescences of bright scarlet to crimson flowers in early spring, smooth and peeling reddish-brown bark, and attractive deep green foliage, this species has remained one of the most widely grown and sought after of all of Hooker's introductions.

Rhododendron barbatum is native over much of the Himalayan Range, from Uttar Pradesh, India in the west, through Nepal, Sikkim & Bhutan to western Arunachal Pradesh, India in the east with populations in adjacent areas of S Tibet. This species is quite common in the wild, sometimes occurring as solid stands in forest openings but more commonly seen as scattered individuals in coniferous and mixed forests. It is found from 8,000 to 12,000 feet (2,400 to 3,700m) in elevation and typically grows as a large upright shrub or small tree.

In cultivation, this species generally forms a large upright shrub or small tree up to 20 or 30 feet (around 9m) in height (after considerable time). The attractive and colorful bark ranks among the finest in the genus and is one of the outstanding ornamental attributes of this species. On older stems the smooth and shiny bark is peeling and reddish or purplish in color, providing beauty and color through the often rather dull winter season. The younger stems and leaf petioles are more or less covered with bristles or "barbs" which add to the overall ornamentation of the plant. The glabrous (smooth) deep green leaves are elliptic to somewhat lanceolate in shape with heavily impressed veins on the upper surface. This attractive foliage nicely offsets the tubular bellshaped deep crimson to scarlet flowers in late winter or early spring. These are borne in a dense rounded inflorescence and are usually long-lasting if no heavy frosts occur. In a "good" spring without hard freezes here in the RSBG, plants of this species have been known to remain in flower for up to five weeks.

This species is a member of the small subsection *Barbata* which also includes the species *erosum*, *exasperatum*, *succothii* and *argipeplum*. There has been a great deal of confusion over the correct name for the latter species which is still most often seen in collections as "*R. smithii*." This species is very similar to *R. barbatum*, but is easily separated from it by the presence of a loose indumentum on the undersides of the leaves, otherwise, they are virtually interchangeable in the

landscape. A taxon known as "*R. imberbe*" is often seen in cultivation and is virtually identical to *R. barbatum*, differing only in its lack of bristles on the branchlets and petioles. This plant is often considered to be a natural hybrid but is more likely just an unbarbed *R. barbatum* and has accordingly been lumped into that species. During an expedition to Sikkim in the spring of 1997, I was able to observe numerous populations of *R. barbatum* and *R. argipeplum* in their native habitats. In many of these populations I noted individuals matching the descriptions for *RR. barbatum*, *argipeplum* and "*imberbe*" all growing side by side. In these same colonies one could also observe plants showing varying degrees of intermediate combinations of the features used to distinguish between the taxa mentioned above. Plants with varying degrees of indumentum and bristly petioles, plants with no indumentum or bristles, plants with indumentum but no bristles, etc., all clearly illustrating large variable populations. This is, of course, a limited perspective on the taxonomy of these two species which do occur as distinct, fairly uniform populations in many parts of their respective ranges. It is probably best to interpret the taxonomy of these taxa as correct for the time being, keeping in mind that intermediates do occur where the ranges of the two species overlap.

In the garden, *R. barbatum* is an easily cultivated, long-lived and usually free-blooming species. Primarily a woodland species in the wild, it performs best in similar conditions under cultivation, preferring the light overhead cover of larger trees. This protects the plant from the hot afternoon sun and heavy winds as well as light frosts which can otherwise damage the early flowers. As always, a well-drained organic soil with adequate moisture through the growing season is best for good growth and health. Although rated as hardy from 0° to +5°F., this species is often considered to be too tender for even the maritime Pacific Northwest. This is simply not true if high altitude or selected hardy forms are cultivated. Numerous plants have attained heights of 10 to 15 feet here in the garden, surviving but suffering damage to the foliage and flower buds in a particularly bad year when it reached +4°F. The members of this subsection are said to be susceptible to powdery mildew but we have seen little evidence of this on *R. barbatum* in our area.

This species won an Award of Merit when exhibited by Winterfold House, Surrey in 1934. Probably due to its early bloom season, *R. barbatum* has been little used in hybridizing programs. There are several hybrids in the trade featuring this species as a parent however, including 'Brightwell' (x *forrestii*), 'Appleford' (x 'Portia') and the well-known 'Nestor' (x *thomsonii*).

Please submit articles of interest for Sept Newsletter by 9/12/08

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