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SRS Yearbook Winter 2013-4

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Cover Pictures: Front: *Rhododendron leptocladon* by Richard Baines
Back: Baili Rhododendron Reserve, China, with *R. x agastum* (*R. delavayi* x *R. irroratum*) by David Chamberlain

Editorial

Welcome to our yearbook for 2014. Once again I am indebted to all my contributors. Without you there would be no yearbook.

This year has once again been very active for the society. Perhaps, rather than being disadvantageous the late spring produced some surprises, as described by Mike Thornley at Glenarn. Our Spring Tour to the gardens of Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire hit flowering time perfectly (see articles in the Autumn Review). We once again staged a successful Scottish National Rhododendron Show at Gargunock. And to round off the year, the Autumn Conference was shared with our sister society, the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group.

This yearbook contains a great cross section of interesting articles, with something for everyone. I feel at times, we do not have enough material for keen rhododendron enthusiasts who are just setting out on a plan for a garden. Therefore I am pleased to publish an article by Mike Thornley about rhododendron planting in high rainfall areas. This includes my own situation, and I certainly made plenty of mistakes at the beginning, leading to losses.

Also I am honoured to publish the “memoirs” of 50 years of Peter Cox’s explorations, part 1 in this edition. Fascinating history, hybridising new tender rhododendrons, and a rhododendron reserve in China, all in this edition.

Read on and enjoy.

John Roy

Growing Rhododendrons in High Rainfall Areas

Michael Thornley

Anyone who reads Harold Fletcher's 'A Quest of Flowers' (Edinburgh University Press 1975) which describes the plant hunting expeditions of Frank Ludlow and George Sherriff, and unfortunately now out of print, will realise why the west coast of Scotland is a particularly favoured area for growing rhododendrons. On the Himalayan passes, between India, China and Tibet (the source of large numbers of rhododendrons introductions) the rain appears to fall almost continuously. High rainfall, and acid soil, are the key factors to growing rhododendrons successfully. But the terrain on which rhododendrons grow in the wild provides other clues: the land is often mountainous and steep and, consequently, is also well drained so that the ground water is carried away. At lower levels the larger leafed rhododendrons cohabit in stands of the same or similar species, often within a forest. In other cases medium sized rhododendrons grow at forest margins and at higher level, above the tree line, the small leafed dwarf rhododendrons grow on moorland.

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It should be noted that, in nature, rhododendrons are not molly coddled but fend for themselves. They have shallow, spreading root systems which are easily damaged if they are forked over or hoed in a garden bed, but make for the easy moving of plants if they have outgrown their allotted spaces. Much can be gained from studying the photographs in books of rhododendrons growing in their native habitats or reading accounts by plant collectors. Kingdon Ward, for instance, in his book 'Assam Adventure' (London 1941) describes descending the Poshing La:

"In some places the water runs along the narrow crest of the ridges before tumbling over the side. The result has been to cut deep grooves along the ridge, with banks twelve or fifteen feet high, overhung with trees."

Reading this I doubted his description but following the same route in 2004 I found that it was exactly as Kingdon Ward had reported. Moreover the cutting action of the water had revealed that the ground in cross section consisted of a thin but rich layer of humus and where everything below was grit and sand. The plants had no incentive to develop deep root systems and instead these were confined to the thin humus layer.

Therefore most rhododendrons will not survive in claggy or permanently wet ground. The problem is exacerbated if the usual advice is followed to dig a reasonable sized hole and fill it up with leaf mould, as this will often only result in a water filled pit. If the soil is self draining there should not be a problem but when planting on flat ground it will be worth taking Peter Cox's advice and create a slightly raised mound, placing the rhododendron on top of this and spreading the roots over the soil and temporarily stabilising the plant with a couple of large stones. In this way good drainage is established with the slight risk of drying out, which can be dealt with by mulching the area around the rhododendron using leaves raked up from the grass.

Planting on sloping or steep ground often ensures a well drained site. But often we find that the natural leaf mould and top soil can be quite a thin layer over clay, or barren sub soil, necessitating the need to create shelves or pockets, to provide an anchor point on the slope and into which compost can be dug, prior to planting. One method of working on a steep slope is to cut out a divot on three's side and hinge it over and outwards to create a platform. Again it is worth placing the plant in a slightly raised location or on a slight angle, or alternatively creating a drainage slot out of a pocket on steep ground, to avoid the build up of water around the roots. Also take some time to carefully tease out the roots, especially if they have been in a pot for a while and an application of ericaceous fertiliser always gives the gardener a psychological boost, and probably helps the plants too.

In the wild some rhododendrons grow epiphytically, their root systems anchored to the well drained but damp deep moss and to the bark of the host trees. Archie and Sandy Gibson, who created the garden at Glenarn, sometimes placed small rhododendrons, such as *R. valentinianum*, on tree stumps, which provide very free draining sites, but our efforts to emulate this approach have only met with limited success. You need a tree stump with just the right amount of moss and, ideally, it should be a Scots Pine, which seems to harden in the ground like a fossil rather than softwood stumps, which soon rot down and can become a source of honey fungus.

Almost all rhododendrons, except some azaleas, are evergreen. Large leaved rhododendrons are like a boat under full sail, and therefore susceptible to damage from high winds. Likewise, these rhododendrons will find it difficult to survive in exposed and cold gardens. However, they will thrive in sheltered places and glades, even in the most unlikely locations, as Sir Osgood MacKenzie demonstrated so successfully at Inverewe. Some gardeners, such as the late Geoff Dutton who created what he called a marginal garden in the southern Grampians ('Some branch against the sky: the practice and principles of marginal gardening' Newton Abbot 1997), plant quick growing spruce in a large area of their gardens into which they will later cut openings, which can be gradually expanded once the shelter has been established. However, many gardens benefit from the shelter that is provided by established planting or from the historic woodland canopy.

Only the most tender rhododendrons require head cover as protection against frost but if the overshadowing is too dense it will also inhibit flowering. Better to plant tender rhododendrons in particularly favourable locations: those warmer, less frosty sites that can only be identified by a careful study of the garden's microclimate. (It is said that tender rhododendrons benefit from the close proximity of other plants and by being placed on steeper or raised ground, to gain protection and to divert frost away, as well as by avoiding an easterly aspect and morning sun that can encourage too early flowering and make them prone to frost damage).

Ideally, rhododendrons planted in sheltered parts of the garden should still have clear sky above them, to get them away from the major root systems of large trees but, as important, to allow them to grow straight up towards those clear voids in the air into which they can fully expand. A site that appears open in winter can become as dark as a curtained room in summer, all the light excluded by the heavy canopy. In direct contrast to rhododendrons that benefit from some protection, dwarf rhododendrons prefer a completely open site, with high light levels and no overhead cover whatsoever. The

classic location for dwarf rhododendrons is the rock garden.

Rhododendrons are gregarious and grow well together, each affording the others protection and also creating wonderful effects of texture and colours. However, getting the spacing right at the outset will ensure that plants do not grow into each other and will avoid the need to move plants around later, like musical chairs. Sylvester Christie of Blackhills, near Elgin, wrote one of the best articles on the planting of rhododendrons which he entitled 'Rhododendrons in the Space Age' (Rhododendron with Magnolias and Camellias: Royal Horticultural Society 1974). In it he makes the obvious, but often forgotten point, that if rhododendrons are not given sufficient space in their youth there will be problems in old age, not only for the plants, which will be drawn up or intertwined with near neighbours, but also for the ageing gardener who will be less able to deal with the problems.

Gardeners, like the rest of the world, often want it both ways; they seek advice on how to grow rhododendrons but are looking to control the process so that they are not too large or too high. But plants live in an ever expanding environment and this problem, if it is a problem at all, can only be addressed by distinguishing between and selecting rhododendrons that either grow into trees, or into large shrubs, or small plants, or dwarf rhododendrons (although on the west coast of Scotland some dwarfs rarely remain small for any length of time).

Given the need of the larger rhododendrons for space and protection they may be best placed at a distance from a house and part of, for instance, woodland. The smaller, more exotic shrubs might be positioned in intermediate areas of the garden, possibly as features, with a backdrop of trees and other plants, or within spaces, glades, or 'rooms' created in the garden. Close to the house is often an appropriate location for dwarf rhododendrons. This is by no means a fixed rule but is a useful framework. Another way of looking at composition is to place the sturdy species plants at a distance from, and the more exotic and hybrid rhododendrons nearer to the house, creating a graduation from the 'wild' to the 'man made'. But this is getting rather too close to the selection of particular rhododendrons to suit the different areas of the garden, a huge subject that has to be left to another day.

New Scottish *Maddenia* Hybrids from Larbert

Henry ‘Chip’ Lima

When I moved to Scotland from California in 2002 I was worried that I would miss my favourite plants, fragrant subsect. *Maddenia* rhododendrons. Bill Moyles from Oakland, California convinced me that there was a lot more that could be done with *Maddenia* and lepidote hybrids and that Scotland would be an excellent place to produce these.

My first impressions of Scotland’s plants were at the RBGE and Arduaine Gardens, where they had subsect. *Maddenia* of different varieties than I was used to, and I thought these were promising parents for my own hybrids. A few of the hybrids common in California were also in Scotland, such as *Rhododendron* ‘Lady Alice Fitzwilliam’ and *R.* ‘Fragrantissimum’. What I didn’t find were hardy large flowered, fragrant, or non-white *Maddenia* subsect. That’s when I decided to become a plant importer and I brought in a lot of the Californian hybrids as unrooted cuttings. Seven years later, I’ve identified the good hybrids in Scotland that were originally from California. Having said that, none of them is fully hardy here, but at least they do well in a cold greenhouse or in a sheltered garden. So what I want now in Scotland are hardy fragrant and colourful *Maddenia* hybrids.

I’m well on my way to getting some reliable hybrids in white, pink and yellow. I’ve used hybrids from California, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and the UK crossed with *Rhododendron edgeworthii* and the following three from subsect. *Maddenia*: *R.* sp nova (SEH171 NE Yunnan), *R. liliiflorum* (Peter Wharton), *R. levinei* aff. (TH 2805). This gives a range of hybrids.

These three subsect. *Maddenia* species are the most important for hybridising for my purposes, and they are fragrant and hardy in my garden. In two very significant ways these three species have a lot to give, in that they are much more compact and cold hardy.

My hybrids are all completely hardy here and have been in the ground for 5 years or more. They have come through the unusually long and cold 2010 and 2011 winters without damage, when the temperature fell to -12°C and they were frozen for weeks. *Rhododendron moupinense* x *R.* ‘Vuna’ has 5 inch (12cm) wide lightly fragrant

flowers and the coral colour is unusual. The new growth is maroon red, cuttings root easily, and it is only 16 inches (40cm) tall in 7 years. Hopefully this very dwarf plant will continue to flourish. *R.* 'Tinkerbird' x *R. lindleyi* has soft coral pink buds, is very fragrant, and has dark green handsome rugose leaves. It is vigorous, very tall and upright, but not floppy like *R. lindleyi*. I've crossed this with *R. liliiflorum*, *R. levinei* aff. and *R. edgeworthii* RBGE hardy form and have a range of good looking seedlings. *R. ciliatum* x *R. dendrocharis* 'Glendoick Gem' is lightly fragrant, dwarf and has good fuzzy leaves. *R.* 'Goldfinger' x *R. dendrocharis* 'Glendoick Gem' looks like *R. edgeworthii* but it is more compact and hardy though not fragrant. I think of this one as a good parent rather than an end result.

Some of the hybrids from the RCM and SRS seed list have turned out well. Two have done well for 7 years in the garden: *Rhododendron* 'Heaven Scent' x *R.* 'Candle Light' (survived -16°C) and *R.* 'Golden Gate' x *R.* 'Peach Surprise'.

The hybrids first listed above were some of my first attempts. Since 2010 I've made 512 crosses which have not all worked, thank goodness (due to lack of space) or I'd have no life or room! My garden is now packed with seedlings to grow on and evaluate.

I'm not limiting my crosses to subsect. *Maddenii*. There are many between *Rhododendron maddenii* ssp. *crassum* and ssp. *maddenii* with *R. cinnabarinum* 'Aestival', *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *xanthocodon* Concatenans Group 'Arunachal Pradesh', and hybrids such as *R.* 'Polyroy', *R.* 'Felicity Fair', *R.* 'Moon Orchid' and *R.* 'Heavenly Trumpets'. There are the blues x whites such as *R. augustinii* x *R. maddenii* ssp. *maddenii* and *R.* 'Plantinum Ice'. There is a line with *R. spinuliferum* x *R. maddenii*, and hybrids such as *R.* 'Wheatear' and *R.* 'Spinbur' etc. I've got a nice batch of seedlings from the following yellow cross: *R.* 'California Gold' (only hardy to -10°C) x *R. changii* (hardy to at least -16°C). Time will tell if the seedlings are any good

For the next five years I've hundreds of seedlings to evaluate and hope in that time to have 10 or 20 worth keeping and naming. I'm looking forward to culling out seedling failures to make room for other plants and maybe even a bench to sit on.

Scotland is indeed a great place to raise hardy *Maddenii* subsect. hybrids and keep this gardener amused and happy well into the future.

Please contact me if you are at all interested in hearing more.

chiplima@outlook.com

Larbert is in Central Scotland Between Edinburgh and Stirling.



Left to right: *R.* 'Vuna', *R. moupinense* RSF dark pink, and the cross between them



Left to right: *R.* 'Tinkerbird', *R. lindleyi*, and the cross between them



Left to right: *R. ciliatum* EN592, *R. dendrocharis* 'Glendoick Gem', and the cross between them



Good parents: Left to right:
R. sp nova SEH, *R. liliiflorum* PW, *R. levinei* affinity
 TH2805



Left to right: *R. 'Goldfinger'*, *R. dendrocharis 'Glen-
 doick Gem'*, and the cross between them



Far left: *R. 'Heaven Scent'*
 x *R. 'Candle Light'*
 Left: *R. 'Golden Gate'* x *R. 'Peach Surprise'*

Half a Century of Plant Hunting

Part 1 1962-1997

Peter A. Cox

Due to developing a medical condition that prohibits any more plant hunting excursions, it is time to reflect on the great changes that have taken place in the 50 years I have been travelling in search of wild plants. Most of these trips have been in China and the Himalaya, mainly looking for rhododendrons but also other plants of potential horticultural merit.

The chief difference between the earlier trips and the more recent ones has been, from the collecting point of view, that on my first four trips we were permitted to collect live plants. This made such a difference, as invariably, many plants do not set seed every year or seed ripens at a different time from one's visit. On my first trip to China in spring 1981 we were able to introduce several good garden plants. These were brought in as plants only. We had no hesitation in collecting these in very small quantities and I would do so today if it were not for the restrictions. Careful and limited plant collection does far less harm than local populations do from grazing, cutting and burning. In some cases we may have saved plants from extinction.

My first trip in 1962 to Turkey like most other early excursions, involved a prolonged period away from home. This was before the three of us, Peter Hutchison, John Apold and myself were married. We bought a long wheel-base Land Rover and drove all the way to north-east Turkey, taking most of the food we needed for camping plus gas cylinders for cooking. All we had to stock up with was wine and beer. Although mid summer we managed to collect seed of the five rhododendron species native to north-east Turkey.

By the time of our next trip in spring 1965, this time to north-east India, I was married and Peter H. was not, so Patricia came too, leaving behind our small son Kenneth for nearly two months. Indian mothers were horrified that we had left a small boy for so long. We were warned that food would be scarce in the mountains so we had sent out all we would need by sea to Calcutta and then on to Assam. We were probably the last plant hunters to use that method of sustaining ourselves. Again we were able to collect plants, which were carefully tended in the garden of a retired tea planter in

Shillong. We explored an unknown area called Talley Valley (an odd name to us) in the Subansiri Division of what is now called Arunachal Pradesh and discovered three new *Rhododendron* species, alas none very hardy: *R. santapauli*, *R. coxianum* and *R. subansiriense*. We had plans to go to the ridge further west bordering the Kameng Division but despite us pulling out all the stops, the Indian Government would not allow us. The plants travelled home well until an ultra-vigorous taxi driver spilt the lot going round a corner in Hyde Park, London but luckily nothing ran them over and I was able to pick them up off the street.

I have already mentioned China 1981. Five of us flew to Kunming, Yunnan, then on by road to the Cangshan range. We were the first westerners to go there since Joseph Rock in 1949. We had worked on the Chinese for many years to get permission to go. Our Chinese hosts from the Kunming Botanical Institute admitted afterwards that they did not know what to expect from us or how to feed us, but they really did us very well. China had hardly had a chance to recover from years under Chairman Mao and everything was very primitive. There were only three hotels of sorts in Kunming, (by 2000 there were 300), no private cars and all roads were terrible. We had four excursions to the mountain, two on the west side and two on the east. We were followed everywhere in the villages by the locals and when they showed us a propaganda film, they all turned around to look at us instead of the film! We collected many different plants, several of which there was no seed found, and stored them in an old shed where most survived amazingly well. Lady Macle hose, wife of the governor general of Hong Kong managed to get the plants into the first class cabin and we were allowed to accompany them! Sadly it was not possible from the Chinese point of view to repeat a similar exercise. No rhododendrons were new from here as the Cangshan had been well explored by Forrest and Delavay but we were very lucky in collecting seed from virtually every species as 1980 had been a great flowering year. We were indeed lucky and honoured to be able to make this trip and we have to thank many people for pulling the necessary strings including the Royal Society.

Efforts to return to China failed so three of us planned a spring trip to east Nepal for a 19 day trek up the Milke Danda in spring 1985. This had been well explored many times but we reckoned it was worth collecting a few seedlings. These included a plant of the very late into growth *Populus glauca* which has made a very fine tree at Glendoick. The plants were carried by a porter in a basket, with an umbrella on top to shade them from the sun and this worked well too. Everything went according to plan until we got to the check in at New Delhi airport where a tiresome BA employee refused to allow the plants to travel on our plane. But they were sent on the next day

and Peter stayed on in London to rescue them.

By 1986 the Chinese had got into accepting organised tours so that autumn we were on a Raoul Moxley tour to Sichuan and Yunnan. There were 18 of us including several elderly women and it was a mistake to attempt to cover so much ground with far too many hours on the road. We all fitted into rather an old bus with bald tyres and once nearly turned over avoiding a dog on the road. The driver lost so much face that after we were going again, we were driven non-stop for 11 hours. Somehow all our bladders held out. Peter's son James suffered badly from altitude sickness and lay out on the floor. We arrived at our guesthouse at midnight. I was delighted to be able to re-introduce the splendid red-flowered *Meconopsis punicea* from this trip.

China was still difficult for anything organised by oneself, so in autumn 1988 we set off for Bhutan, a delightful country with more undisturbed forest than any other part of south-east Asia. Bhutan has always been very strict about collecting anything and towards the end of the trip we were warned that we would be searched on the way out. Everyone had their own secret hiding places. I was searched last and must have looked very guilty but they gave up looking into my baggage half way through. I do not think they were very well trained. Our best find was what we call *Rhododendron hodgsonii* aff. which occurred as an isolated population of a plant closely related to *R. hodgsonii* but with brilliant thick dark chocolate-brown indumentum.

By 1989 China was beginning to open up and David Chamberlain, Peter and I were off in spring to Sichuan starting on the well-known Emei Shan. This has a road nearly to the top, then a cable car or thousands of steps. We tried to cover it in two days from the bottom and the top and failed on the middle reaches where we most wanted to get to. We did find *Rhododendron dendrocharis*, only very recently introduced, peeping out of some rocks mixed with a rubbish dump. This has proved to be a great little plant in cultivation, hardy, relatively easy to grow and a very good parent for hybridising. After Emei we travelled north with a driver that thought speeding up, turning off the engine and free-wheeling saved fuel. He did this repeatedly. It was while we were in the north that Tiananmen Square blew up and we were very lucky not to be caught in Chengdu where there was quite a bit of trouble with buses and shops burnt out. It was a thrill to see thousands of *Lilium regale* still there in the Min valley where E.H. Wilson had collected it nearly a hundred years earlier.

1990 saw us back in Sichuan again, this time September and getting further west to Kangding and beyond. This was the first time Peter was not in the party. We were able

to camp with the Sichuan Mountaineering Association in charge, which was alright apart from the food. The Chinese could not organize this as well as the Nepalese and the Bhutanese. One night about 18 inches of snow fell, which we had to keep shaking off our tents. We had to give up our plans of going over a pass and being picked up at the other end.

Spring 1992 we were back under the organisation of the Kunming Botanical Institute with Guan Kaiyun our interpreter of 1981 in charge. This was fine but Guan did not like camping and we stayed in some very primitive abodes. Camping was more comfortable and much better for getting into the mountains. We reached as far north in Yunnan as Deqen and then down to the Mekong for the first time. We had meetings with the local authorities in Zhongdian who spoke of wanting tourism. I have not been back since then as tourism appeared in a big way and it is now called Shangri La. This was very much a hunting ground for George Forrest and Joseph Rock so there was little chance of finding anything new or not introduced. It was son Kenneth's first trip out east and we were lucky to meet up with David Burlinson from the travel firm Exodus. David used Kenneth's help for the next eight years to organise trips first to Yunnan and then Tibet.

Ted Millais of Millais Nurseries, who had been with us in Bhutan, told us he was planning a trip to the Mekong-Salween divide in autumn 1992. This was too good a chance to miss. By then it was possible to plan a trip to China, rather than have the Chinese plan it, and our hosts were "The Institute of Mountain Hazards and Environment" although we sometimes referred to them as "Mountain Hazards and Disasters". They fed us on Spam and dry biscuits for every meal. This was the first and only time I went to China twice in one year but sadly Peter could not make it. It was real trekking with continual camping for 18 days and we were all very smelly by the end! We all got very fit except me as I slipped on a piece of bamboo and twisted my knee so I hobbled along behind the others for the rest of the trip. We had hoped to get over to the Salween valley but we never made it, largely because the porters refused to take us there. Apparently the different local minorities do not necessarily get on together, partly due to grazing rights. Towards the end of September we found a gully where the snow had recently melted and there was a great show of alpinines in full flower, as good as I have seen anywhere, except possibly Tibet in 1998.

In spring 1994 we were back on the Salween-Mekong divide with the same hosts. This time it was snow that stopped us crossing over to the Salween valley but there was a lot in flower including *Rhododendron forrestii*, flowering just where the snow had

melted. We also found a population of the much sought after *R. proteoides* just coming out, next to *R. aganniphum* and the hybrid between the two, *R. x bathyphyllum*.

Autumn 1995 was split into two, the first half in Sichuan the second in north-east Yunnan. The first part was organised by the “Mountain Travels and Disasters” which gave us rotten vehicles that kept on breaking down. Their way of keeping things going was to swap parts between different vehicles, which seemed to work but delayed us badly. The area between Emei Shan and the Yangtse proved to be little explored which gave us the chance to introduce rhododendron species unknown or little known in cultivation. These included *R. asterochnoum* (closely related to *R. calophytum* but with a little indumentum), *R. denudatum*, *R. coeloneuron*, *R. huanum* and *R. ochraceum*. The latter has proved to be a great plant. Peter Wharton collected it the previous year from near Chongqing, but our collection has proved a better form. This was the first year that Steve Hootman (Executive Director and Curator of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, USA) and I travelled together. One very hot day near Leibo, other members of the party gradually gave up, but Steve and I struggled up a steeper and steeper gully, coming to a place with huge square boulders and an extraordinary assortment of rhododendrons growing between and on them. These included *R. asterochnoum*, a small seedling of the rare *R. insigne* and *R. ochraceum*. This was only growing on the top of the boulders which Steve, great at getting to difficult places, managed to climb. *R. ochraceum* has bright scarlet flowers in the neatest of round trusses on a rounded bush.

In north-east Yunnan we were again with the Kunming Botanical Institute with better vehicles. The weather proved to be horribly wet with mud slides and accidents holding us up. Others had beaten us to it so there was nothing new. While the rest went home, Steve and I did a rapid visit to south-east Yunnan, the home of the big-leaved *Rhododendron sinofalconeri* with fine yellow flowers. I do not think this had been previously in cultivation. Also we found what is now called *R. valentinioides* and *R. serotinum* aff. *R. sinofalconeri* and *R. serotinum* aff. have proved to be the fastest-growing rhododendrons we have, invariably putting on one foot of growth a year.

Spring 1996 saw my first trip to Tibet with Exodus, where everyone suffered from the altitude to begin with, but after a few days were acclimatised. Kenneth had led a trek the previous year which was a great success, and we planned to trek over the Doshong La near the Tsangpo Gorge. This is famous for its snow and rain in addition to its wonderful plants. Kingdon Ward reckoned that it rains or snows here every day of the year and we certainly had our share. To our astonishment a mess tent plus a

generator were carried over the pass for our comfort, so we were able to play bridge until midnight, much to the aggravation of the non-bridge players. The season was a bit later than 1995 so there was not the great show of *Rhododendron forrestii*. But we hit *R. parmulatum* perfectly with its extraordinary variation in flower colour and the quantity of spots. We were extremely lucky to get over the Doshong La. Nearly every party that has tried it in the autumn have failed and I believe foreigners are now banned.

Autumn 1997 saw us up the Salween to the extreme west of Yunnan and to the Burma frontier. This time Peter was able to make it again. The Salween, one of the great rivers of south-east Asia, is known as the Angry River, and its turbulence is very noticeable. Our first excursion was on the Salween-Mekong divide above Fugong and it was some excursion. We came to a cliff with a 'levada' cut into it with just a narrow strip of rock to negotiate along the cliff edge. Luckily we could not see the awful drop owing to mist and rain. We all spent the night under a cliff overhang with water pouring down beyond. Efforts to get higher soon landed us in snow so we retreated, slithering on the mud, but we did manage to collect the tender rhododendrons *R. kyawii*, *R. nuttallii* and *R. megacalyx*.

Our main trek was up the Pula river, then towards the Dulong (formerly Taron) river and it was great to see the splendid trees of *Taiwania* towering above the rest of the forest. This is a very rich area starting with subsect. *Maddenia* rhododendrons, big-leaved species *R. protistum*, *R. sinogrande* and *R. arizelum* and the new *R. gongshanense* which is absolutely useless in cultivation because of its very early growth. Then ultimately we saw semi-dwarfs and dwarfs including *R. calostrotum* ssp. *keleticum* and *R. forrestii*. A large area of conifer forest had been removed many years ago, probably under the directions of Chairman Mao so that his enemies had nowhere to hide. But luckily the *Taiwania* had been spared. These are now strictly preserved with terrible consequences for anyone cutting one down. But the Chinese were in the process of building a road over to the Dulong and blasting was sometimes uncomfortably close for our comfort.

Part 2 in next year's SRS Yearbook. Peter Cox's plant hunting explorations 1998-2012.

For those seeking more detail of the above trips 1962 to 2002, read the two Peters book *Seeds of Adventure* and for 2004-12 articles Peter Cox has written.

Photos in this article by John Roy who accompanied Peter over the Doshong La in 1996



Left: Peter on trek in south east Tibet in 1996 finding *Rhododendron charitopes* ssp. *tsangpoense*

Below: *Rhododendron charitopes* ssp. *tsangpoense* named after the Yarlung Tsangpo, the main river draining the northern facing Himalaya and Tibetan plateau

R. parmulatatum on the south side of the Doshong La, the only place this plant has been found in the wild





Left and below: More rhododendrons of the south side of the Doshong La

Above: *Rhododendron imperator*

Right: *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* ssp. *xanthocodon*
Concatenans Group



Left: *Rhododendron pronum*

Rhododendron pronum

Ian Douglas

The photograph accompanying this article (bottom of the opposite page) came from Cyril Barnes, and is of some significance to “rhodoholics”. It shows the first flowering of *Rhododendron pronum* in this country.

Rhododendron pronum was first found by George Forrest in side valleys of the Mekong River, in south west China. He found it in 1924 at 12,000-15,000 feet (type specimen F23375), but not introduced into cultivation at this time. He introduced it from his final expedition in 1931, shortly before his death (F30880). Mr Randle Cooke, Kilbride near Hexham in Northumberland, received some of the seed and it was one of his seedlings which eventually flowered, and is illustrated.

The timescale was very long. Seed sown 26/5/1932. Germination 15/6/1932. First flowering May 1979! That’s forty-seven years from germination to flowering! Unfortunately Mr Cooke died in 1973, so he did not survive to see his plant in flower. It may still be seen by the public though, at RBG Edinburgh. This very plant survives to this day on the west side of the rock garden.

Rhododendron pronum was also collected by Joseph Rock (R11306 and R25458). Since Rock was working for the United States Department of Agriculture, it can be assumed that this seed ended up in the USA.

There is a clone in cultivation known as “Tower Court Form”. J. B. Stevenson of Tower Court, and Randle Cooke were both sponsors of Forrest’s last expedition. It may be assumed that this form came from the Forrest collection, but it would be interesting to know if this is so, or did it come from Rock seed?

Does anyone out there have any further information?

Rhododendron Colour Combinations at Glenarn

Michael Thornley

2013 has been the best flowering season in our 30 years at Glenarn. This must be put down to the two previous wet summers when rhododendrons recuperated in almost Himalayan conditions of dampness and warmth. Everything came into flower including old rhododendrons that had not made themselves known before and others that we had planted such as *R. longesquamatum* whose shaggy foliage had provided some recompense for the lack of flowers for 28 years. By good fortune we had spent the winter updating the records and were ready to re-label the whole collection. For 5 months, most days, early each morning, were spent walking up and down the garden laden with samples as we sought to match identified rhododendrons with others elsewhere (or not, as it often turned out). We ground to a halt with the late flowering azaleas, which we left for next year.

While we could see that the plants had budded up well we never anticipated the fireworks display that was to explode over the garden. Winter was prolonged and we almost missed out on spring, stepping straight into summer. At the end of March the prospects were poor. Magnolias had disappointed and the few that did flower often were frosted in the bud. However after the familiar overture of the early red rhododendrons, shining intermittently like traffic lights in the woodland, the orchestra started to lay down great waves of colour that, in the cool air, reverberated on, day after day, even month after month so it seemed.

As we go down the drive *Rhododendron argyrophyllum* resembles a hot air balloon tethered in the glen below. It appears as a swelling dome of pink, foliage completely blotted out by the flowers that have the merest touch of mauve, as if they had absorbed the last traces of colour draining out of *R. augustinii*, which is nearby but now almost ready to step off the stage. Immediately beside *R. argyrophyllum* is *R. wiltonii* whose flowers, with highlights, are a purer pink, animated by little painted dashes of olive green leaves. Rising over and beyond them both are deep pink billowing clouds of *R. 'Loderi'*.

Further down the drive dark trunks of *Eucryphia* act a backcloth. *Rhododendron* 'Blue Tit' stands upright at the left of the group, while the lavender blue butterfly flowers of precocious *R. reticulatum* flutter above the solid pink mass of *R. glaucophyllum* that

anchors the whole composition to the ground. At the bottom, near the black gate, the frothy flowers of *R. yunnanense* are stirred by its willowy, semi-deciduous leaves. Behind it are the pressed out leaves and bell shaped flowers of a *R. campylocarpum* hybrid, overtopped by an unusually floriferous *R. griffithianum*. Three rhododendrons, ascending in size, slipping through various shades of cream, light yellow and white, like milk in glass jars stood on the cool, stone shelves of a dairy.

On grey mornings *Rhododendron augustinii* and all who purport to be in the same tribe (a variable bunch they are too) bring patches of blue sky into the trees. However it is the evening sun, reflecting off a golden sea, which creates the most theatrical effects. We had been inspecting the new planting on the peninsula in the centre of the garden and, turning to regain the path, were stopped in our tracks by a huge canvass of colours.

Painted across the bottom in thick, flashy acrylics is the rich orange of *Rhododendron dichroanthum* whose colour runs into and mixes with the citrus yellow of *R. wardii*. Above this pulsating base is a great diagonal mass of pink, painted on with broad brush strokes of what would have once been called *R. cinnabarinum* Roylei Group crossed with *R. yunnanense*. Low down on the left glow the embers of *R. cinnabarinum*, which give off small puffs of pink and white smoke (patches of *R. orbiculare* and *R. yunnanense* poking through the leaves) that rise into the evening light like bubbles of oil in water. This abstract yet living landscape is given a blue sky, again of *R. augustinii*, which is threatened by towering cumulous clouds of *R. falconeri*.

By July we are sated with this banquet of flowers and looked forward to the long relieving wash of a thousand tones of green. We had begun to think that nothing else could compare or compete with what had gone before when *Rhododendron* ‘Aladdin’ walked on to the stage for the final curtain call.

Rhododendron ‘Aladdin’ is *R. auriculatum* x *R. griersonianum* although accession card No. 324 in the records describes the cross the other way round. A plant, 7 to 8 feet high, was obtained in 1941 from Belmore on the other side of Loch Long, close to but not to be confused with Benmore. The original was cut down but two seedlings remained “wh. look true”.

One of these, now a small tree, stands on the boundary. From below it is as if one is looking up into an inverted woven basket, each thin leaf and branch of equal length – a jackdaws’ nest of sticks. The leaf stem is yellow with bristles, the base of the leaf

is auricular and the edges wavy. Viewing the underside through a hand lens reveals soft silvery hairs and a network of veins forming a miniature landscape of tiny green fields. The generous, funnel shaped flower has 5 pink petals, with darker pink stripes and deep red stamens. The whole flower has an opalescent sheen, as if it had been dipped in sugar. It is waiting to be eaten, thin wafers of ice-cold sorbet to cleanse the palate.

6 months later, as I am writing this piece, I re-visit the places and plants that I have been describing. It is autumn and the rhododendrons, which are now holding their browned leaves, have lost the freshness of new growth. The wet foliage of one plant merges with another, so that they are almost indistinguishable. It is difficult to believe that there was so much colour and I wonder what all the fuss was about.

The Development of Corrour Estate and its Enigmatic Rhododendron Collection

An Historical Perspective of a Remote, High Elevation Garden that Flourishes despite its Location

John M. Hammond

Introduction:

Originating in the heart of Glasgow's St. George's Cross district, the Great Western Road threads its way through the city's prosperous West End and becomes the A82, the principle route from the Lowlands to the West Highlands & Islands of Scotland's rugged West Coast. Leaving Glasgow's suburbs behind we head north along the winding road as it skirts the scenic shores of Loch Lomond, beyond which the climb begins into the wild open moorland where the red deer roam at will. We are now heading for the village of Crianlarich to make junction with the A85 cross-country highway coming up Glen Dochart from the historical cities of Stirling and Perth. Here the climb begins for real to the Bridge of Orchy and, as the A82 winds its way upwards to seek a route through the mountains, the road continues to zig-zag to reach the barren, inhospitable wastes of Rannoch Moor, stretching eastwards across the bog towards the horizon.

Before us are the dark brooding mountains surrounding the fabled Glen Coe, and shortly after passing Glencoe Ski Centre the road begins to run on a narrow ledge as it falls steeply down the glen to Glen Coe village, reaching sea-level at Ballachulish alongside Loch Leven. Soon the A82 bridges the narrow entrance of Loch Leven to run northwards alongside Loch Linnhe with the western flanks of Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Scotland, overlooking the town of Fort William around ten miles (16km) ahead. Some seven miles (11.25km) north of Fort William, after skirting the slopes to the west of Ben Nevis, the road divides at Spean Bridge, and we take the A86 eastwards towards Kingussie and Dalwhinnie, whose distilleries produce a wee dram that is well worth investigating. Skirting around the north side of Ben Nevis, the road climbs up Glen Spean for 14 miles (22.5km) until we arrive at the west end of the main body of Loch Laggan, home of the Ardverikie Estate and the location for the 'Monarch of the Glen' TV series.

Here we exchange the metalled highway for a private forestry road and the 4WD's come into their own. On crossing the River Spean the rough gravel road heads south, climbing steeply as it winds its way through the conifer forest. Five miles (8km) later we leave the conifers behind and exit to the wild, open moorland, the road following the 1500ft [440m] contour for nine miles (14.5km) on a ledge above Loch Guilbinn and the River Ossian. As we head south, the remote, bare moorlands are all around us when, suddenly up ahead, a large area of conifer forest envelopes the lower slopes of narrowing valley between the mountains and a magical vista slowly opens up in front of our convoy. On approaching Corrour Shooting Lodge the road drops down slightly into the complex of buildings at the north-east end of Loch Ossian, which sits astride of the 1250ft (380m) contour and is surrounded on the south side by a shelter belt of mainly Sitka Spruce for most of its 2.8 mile (4.5km) length.

Very occasionally, Corrour happens to get a passing mention in a non-mainstream rhododendron publication. Indeed, some enthusiasts have heard of a magical rhododendron garden that survives against all the odds in a remote corner, 'somewhere in the West Highlands'. However, this is no myth. Few enthusiasts and horticulturalists realise that a major rhododendron collection is extant on the Corrour Estate; so, as this article unfolds, it will become all too evident that these location details are very important. Equally pertinent is its latitude of $56^{\circ} 47'$, which is equivalent to the northern extremity of Newfoundland in Upper Canada. Located over 60 miles (96.5km) inland from the Atlantic, and to the east of two mountain ranges, the Corrour Estate derives little, if any, benefit from the Gulf Stream. Indeed, given the severity of the last three winters, together with the unstable climatic conditions on a global scale, it is very likely that a significant portion of the North Atlantic Drift has been diverted elsewhere, or its temperature has been dissipated, prior to reaching the shores of Britain.

By now you will have begun to realise that what we are discussing is no ordinary rhododendron collection. Indeed, it flourishes despite defying most, if not all, of the traditional advice, wisdom and hardiness ratings relating to the cultivation of both species and hybrids. Who established this oasis in the midst of the desolate moorland above the natural tree-line? Why, and for what purpose, were the upland conifer plantations created on the Estate? What brought about the large scale plantings of a wide range of rhododendrons between the 1250ft and 1650ft (380m-500m) contours on the side of a mountain with an annual average rainfall of 88 inches? And, how is it that they survive in spite of extremely low winter temperatures, e.g., -27°C (48.6°F)

below freezing) having been recorded at times during 1983? Heavy snow and low temperatures are an annual occurrence at this elevation.

Research work over a number of years with the aim of clarifying the background of Sir John Stirling Maxwell's involvement with rhododendrons at both Pollok and Corroul has been quite time-consuming. Indeed, the overall records available for rhododendrons are somewhat sketchy, and only one record to date has been found that details Sir John's involvement with hybrids. There are many conflicting dates for the development of the estate and, equally problematic, the chronology of events is often based on the memories of individuals, which in some cases are not accurate.

As a starting point an outline of the history of Corroul has been set out in chronological order, based on extant records. This has then been over-written with details taken from Sir John's papers and publications, together with notes taken from papers written by academics and friends with whom he discussed the high-elevation conifer and rhododendron plantings. Collating the available data into an article provides a much improved perspective of the development of the plantings at Corroul. In no way is this article claimed to be a definitive account, indeed, there is on-going research to be completed at the R.B.G., Edinburgh. These notes are a contribution towards reaching an understanding of the pioneering work of a single-minded philanthropist, who was a visionary in his belief that there was another way of raising and growing trees and rhododendrons at high elevation in an a particularly hostile climate. The following notes put down a marker, as the basis for further research, and Sir John's work with forestry is briefly explained up-front, as this has implications in terms of his way of approach with creating the rhododendron collection.

Historical Background:

Standing alongside the fabled 'Road to the Isles', the historic cattle-droving track from the Western Isles to the cattle markets of Crieff and Falkirk, are ruins of Old Corroul Lodge, some three miles south of Loch Ossian, by the Allt a' Choire Odhair Mhóir (Stream of the big dun coloured valley) on the edge of Rannoch Moor. Nobody knows who originally constructed '*the highest shooting lodge in Scotland, being 1723ft above sea level,*' on the western slopes of the 3084ft (940m) Càrn Dearg (Red rounded mountain). It was also one of the most inaccessible. Located on the McDonells of Keppoch estates, the Lodge formed part of their deer forest, but the Clan were in an endless land feud with the MacIntoshes, as the Scottish nobility were especially protective of their deer. Early in the 19th Century the MacIntoshes regained practical possession of the disputed Keppoch lands, but this was somewhat

in vain, as the overlordship by the Duke of Gordon turned into absolute ownership. His trustees decided to break-up and sell the Lochaber estates in four lots to settle part of the outstanding debts, irrespective of the interests of his septs and vassals. Corrou, at the time, was a part of the huge range of hills and deer forests owned by the Gordon Family, perhaps better known as the Earls or Marquises of Huntly, and their lands stretched from Banffshire to Fort William.²

On 17th February, 1834, Lot 3 and part of Lot 4, the Loch Treig Estates stretching from Glen Spean to the Perthshire border near Rannoch Station, being a large part of the Keppoch lands, were sold by the Duke of Gordon to John Walker, Esq (d.1857) of Crawfordton in Dumfriesshire for £45,000. Walker had inherited his father's business, being one of several merchants in the West Indies sugar trade with refineries in Greenock. Included in the sale was the Inverlair Estate, the land that became the Corrou Estate, and three areas of land to the north of Spean Bridge. The sale laid the foundation for the Corrou estate boundaries stretching from the River Spean south to the Black Water.² Prior to 1831, deer shooting was restricted to the laird or his eldest son, but in that year the law was amended to permit, '*any certified person could do so, either on his own land or on the land of any person with his permission.*' This change, coupled with the rising popularity of deer stalking in the wake of Prince Albert's love of the sport, encouraged many landowners in the Highlands to sell estates to entrepreneurs who were looking to invest in an estate that included lands and facilities suitable for deer shooting parties, as well as an opportunity to improve the economic status of the estate. Some of the wealthy manufacturers and entrepreneurs, from the Lowlands or 'South of the Border', had no comprehension of the physical scope of, or the upkeep required to maintain a Highland estate, or the economics involved in attempting to achieve a financial return from the tracts of 'forests' they were investing in. To some extent this is still true today.

There is no more desolate region in all Scotland than that extending northwards from Loch Rannoch to Loch Laggan. Once it was a vast primeval forest broken only by the bare mountain summits, but research suggests a change of meteorological conditions over many centuries from moderate rainfall, favourable to tree growth, to excessive rainfall has been destructive to higher forms of vegetation. Above 1000ft the only vestiges of the primeval woodland that remain are a few patches of stunted birches and rowans. This might be considered the least likely situation for successful horticulture. Here the rain falls faster and in greater quantity than evaporation and surface drainage can remove so, the soil becomes waterlogged, and the moss overwhelms all except such plants as heaths, which are structurally adapted to endure

extremes of drought and moisture, heat and cold. Wherever the surface of the moor is broken, bones of the departed woodland are exposed to full view, skeletons of trees lying in inextricable confusion as they fell in a long-forgotten past, embedded in the all-prevailing wet peat.

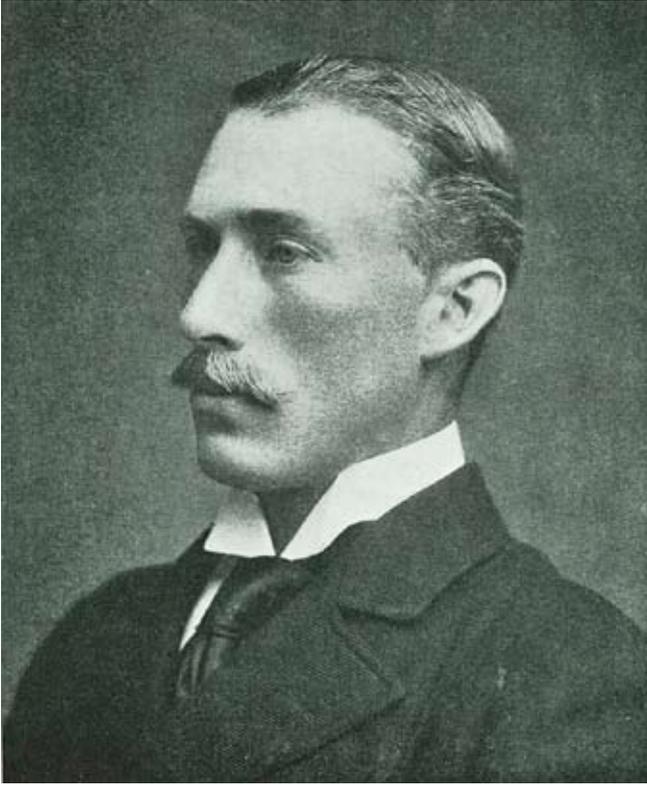
Access to the Old Corroul Lodge was by train to Struan Station, 5 miles (8km) north-west of Blair Atholl on the Highland Railway line to Inverness, followed by a 24 mile (38.5km) ride in a horse-drawn carriage to Rannoch Lodge at the west end of Loch Rannoch. Then it was something of an ordeal for the final 9 miles (14.5km) on the rough track 'over the hill' on horseback to the Lodge, with a couple of gillies leading a strong pony harnessed to a very small two-wheeled cart following on behind with the luggage. The overall time for a journey from London via Edinburgh or Glasgow was around 14 hours, by which time the sun would be setting as the party departed from Rannoch Lodge and it was left to the ponies to find their own way home for the final two hour journey across the moor.³ Given there was no road access to Old Corroul Lodge, it is difficult to imagine bringing all the materials needed to site by horseback or a small two-wheeled cart to originally construct and fit-out the Lodge, i.e., stone (probably quarried locally), timber beams, building materials, fittings and furniture; to say nothing of the need to fetch in food, drink, clothing, guns and ammunition to sustain a shooting party. What is not in doubt is the commanding view that the location of the Lodge provided for a shooting party, standing sentinel on top of the site of an ancient dun (hill fort), looking out to the north-west across Loch Ossian and then the panorama continued in an anti-clockwise arc for around 230° across the moors and mountains.

What we do know is that following his 1834 purchase of the estate, John Walker made the Old Corroul Lodge 'habitable' and, as sheep farming was a profitable business, he was able to let five areas of the estate to shepherds for grazing. Only around 50 acres of the estate, at Fersit and Torgulbin, were considered to be arable land. Walker made no improvements to the Corroul Estate itself and the only native woodland on the estate was on the south shore of Loch Ossian at Leitir Dubh (Black slope), comprising of birch, rowan, alder, willow and bird cherries, some of which was stunted, or misshapen by the weight of the heavy snows. In 1857 George Gustavus Walker (1830-1897), later Colonel Sir George, inherited the estates and there seem to have been few alterations in the way they were run; however, the clouds of change were already on the horizon, although the driving force was based in the Lowlands and its tentacles would gradually envelop the Highlands from the mid-1850s onwards.

Against a background of fierce adverse political arguments emanating from both the Caledonian Railway and Highland Railway companies, together with steadfast opposition from influential landowners, many of whom had an interest in the fish trade, the West Highland Railway Bill promoted by the North British for a line from Glasgow to Fort William, passed its third reading in the Commons on 3rd July, 1889. As early as 1845 a sequence of Railway Bills had promoted various schemes for a line connecting the Lowlands and the West Highlands, but all had failed to achieve Parliamentary approval. When the ‘news’ reached Fort William it culminated in a night of rejoicing with a torchlight procession through the town, many houses were decorated with flags and bunting, and all along the route the streets were lined with people cheering. There were many speeches on the foreshore near the pier and the celebrations continued until the dawn. The railway was coming to Lochaber at last!³ On 12th August, 1889 the West Highland Railway Act received Royal Assent for a route that came up Loch Long, then followed within sight of the A82 as it climbed steeply from the north end of Loch Lomond to Bridge of Orchy from whence the alignment diverged to the north-east to climb for 20 miles in an unlikely direction across the morass of peat moss, heather and bog of Rannoch Moor, running directly through the Corrour Estate, then lost height rapidly via Loch Treig, Tulloch and Spean Bridge to enter Fort William from the north-east. The promoters of the line came to an arrangement with Colonel Walker to purchase 128 acres of the estate for the alignment of the route, sidings, and operational buildings. Not only had the railway been a long time in receiving Royal Assent, it was going to take all of the contractor’s ingenuity to construct an alignment across the inhospitable Rannoch Moor.

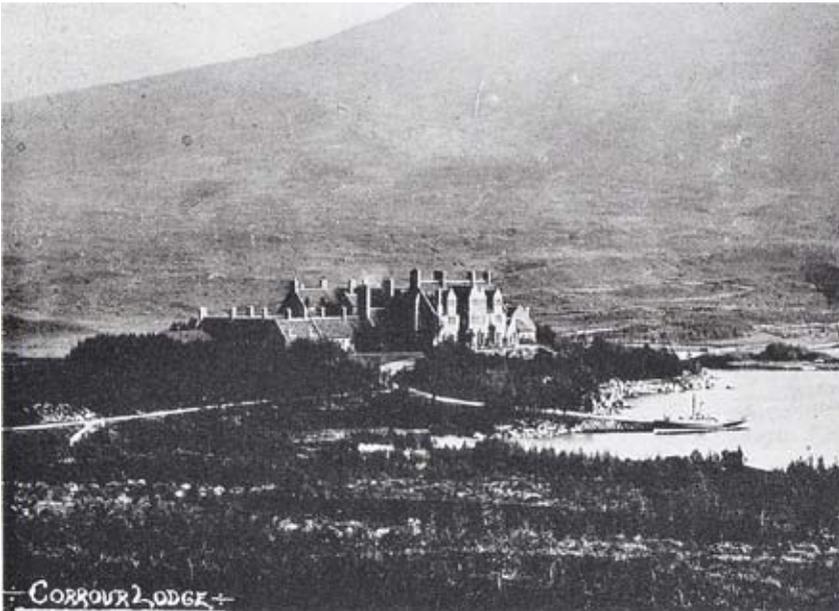
The Clouds of Change Gather around Corrour:

Sir John Maxwell Stirling-Maxwell, 10th Baronet, KT (6 June 1866 – 30 May 1956) was the eldest son of Sir William Stirling of Keir (1818 – 1878) who succeeded in 1865, but being a nephew he then took the names of Stirling-Maxwell. Unfortunately, Sir William died at the early age of 50 in 1878 leaving his two sons aged 12 and 10 to be brought up by an aunt, as both his wives had already died, so the estate was placed in trust. The elder son John inherited the baronetcy when he reached the age of 21 in 1887 and was given the choice of either Keir, near Dunblane, or Pollok, near Glasgow, to inherit. Sir John chose Pollok Estate that had been empty for ten years, which left Keir Estate to be inherited by the younger son. Pollok Park, 4 miles south-west of the city-centre, has its origins as the Lands of Nether Pollok in the County of Renfrew, which were granted in around 1270 by Sir Aymer Maxwell of Caerlaverock to his third son, Sir John Maxwell. The present Pollok House was probably designed by William Adam, who was first consulted in 1837, but he died in 1847 prior to its



1852 completion. Pollok, an 10,800-acre estate, of which 1,186-acres (480ha) formed the designed landscape, remained relatively unchanged until it was inherited by Sir John in 1887, and he immediately set about updating the house, following which, he added the east and west wings and a new entrance to the house between 1890 and 1905 to accommodate his share of his father's art collection and library that had been housed at Keir.

Sir John had been left a large sum of money in his father's will to purchase a country



**Top: Sir John
Stirling
Maxwell c.1905**

**Corroual Lodge
in c.1910
around the
time the South
Road had been
completed**

**All black
and white
photographs
are courtesy
Nether Pollok
Ltd**



estate and initially he considered Strathconnan and Knoydart, but decided these were too inaccessible. Then, by chance, early in 1891 the Corroul & Fersit estates became available as, with the coming of the West Highland Railway, Colonel Sir George Gustavus Walker

Above: The Alpine Garden at Corroul Lodge in c.1910

Right: Sir John Stirling Maxwell and Sir Herbert Maxwell (standing) inspecting the first flowering of the Alpine Garden in June 1905



Left: Looking north across Loch Ossian towards Corroul Lodge from the edge of the conifer plantings in c.1910

decided it would be financially advantageous to put the property on the market. Shortly before his twenty-fifth birthday Sir John bought both estates for the sum of £63,750 in May 1891, in the knowledge that the railway would provide a direct means of access to both estates and

enable him to pursue horticultural objectives and ideas. He came to an agreement with the promoters of the West Highland Railway to construct a private station and a siding for use by the estate workers and guests, one mile west of Loch Ossian. Built with a passing loop, Corrou Station happened to be close to the 1347ft summit of the route and became the highest railway station in Britain. Two years later Sir John purchased the Beinn a' Bhric Estate from Cameron of Locheil for £15,500, which greatly improved Corrou's deer stalking.



Top: Looking north up Loch Ossian from the Yacht Waiting Room in winter in c.1915

Right: The intrepid David Chamberlain surveys the rhododendron collection at Corrou in the snows of 2013. Photo by David Purvis



Left: As vigorous, large, and well flowering a plant of *Rhododendron lacteum* that is likely to be found in cultivation in Britain
Photo by John Hammond

Below: in flower in the spring of 2013.
Photo by David Purvis



With the opening of the West Highland Railway on 7th August, 1894 the navvies living at the lawless shanty town of Kinlochleven, the site for the construction of the first of the great Highland hydro-electric schemes based on the damming of the Black Water, found they could go by train to Corroun and then walk the 15 miles (24km) to the site by an ill-defined path across the moor. Kinlochleven had no road access, so the navvies had to go in by boat, or trudge around the unmarked shores of Loch Leven; however, the path from Corroun was a dangerous and foolhardy walk for men unfamiliar with the lie of the land and several men lost their lives on the moor. Nevertheless, although Corroun Station did not appear in the timetable until 1934, it continued to be occasionally used by the public from the time the line was opened.

Development of Corroun Estate:

Francis (Frank) Steel Colledge, lead architect with the firm of Wharrie, Colledge & Brand of Glasgow, was responsible for the design and construction of a farmhouse and steadings on the Pollok Estate. In 1897 Sir John Stirling-Maxwell gave the firm its only commission for a major building, Corroun Shooting Lodge. Nominally designed by Frank Colledge, it is said that Sir John had an involvement in sketching his requirements, which would have been in keeping with his keen eye for detail that pervaded through his many interests, including that of architecture (in 1937 he published '*Shrines & Homes of Scotland*', a highly-regarded book on Scottish architecture⁴). At an early stage in this massive project, Sir John appears to have realised that the special provision of a means of rapid drainage was the key to creating gardens and woodland in a water-logged region such as Corroun. By damming the streams in the strath, this enabled the 120ft (30m) deep Loch Ossian to be created, and Sir John chose a site for the Shooting Lodge at an elevation of circa 1280ft (390m) on the terminal moraine, a vast jumble of granite boulders, some of which had crumbled into a coarse sand, having been brought down by glaciers from the neighbouring mountains. The location looks out across a beautiful sheet of water extending 2.8 miles (4.5km) to the south west and onwards across the northern edge of Rannoch Moor and the Grampian Mountains.

A new road was constructed in 1894 from the recently opened Corroun Station to the west end of Loch Ossian, a distance of 1 mile (1.6km) at a cost of £1034. In the same timeframe Sir John made a number of improvements to the Old Corroun Lodge to make the facilities more comfortable for both the guests and the staff. With the opening of Rannoch Station the guests travelling to the Lodge were still faced with a six mile journey over a new carriage road that had been laid from the head of Loch

Rannoch to the Lodge. In 1895 the new road to Loch Ossian was extended by a pathway to the Old Corroul Lodge, so guests arriving by train at Corroul could travel the four miles by pony and trap to their destination. Equally, workmen arriving at Corroul by passenger train, or materials being delivered in rail wagons to the siding, could more readily gain access to the construction site for the new lodge. Sir John was a man with mission, and there is little doubt that he was instrumental in ensuring the construction of the Lodge was completed in two years; a remarkable achievement, given the remote location, the harsh winter conditions and the access difficulties.

Loch Ossian sits astride the 1250ft (391m) contour and Carn Dearg rises from the south side of the loch to a summit of 3084ft (941m), whilst Beinn na Lap (dappled mountain) rises from the north side of the loch to a 3704ft (937m) summit. It is particularly difficult to adequately convey in a couple of paragraphs just how exposed to the elements the site of new Corroul Lodge was. Reference can be more readily made to an old photograph taken around 1910 looking eastwards, after the dormers were added to the Lodge, which not only graphically illustrates the isolated, treeless moorland location of the structure, but also is a stunning image in terms of the immense size of the shooting lodge created from local Rannoch granite at a site where access for construction work was extremely limited, bearing in mind that other than the granite, practically all materials had to be shipped-in by rail; indeed, around the turn of the century the bulky load-bearing timbers were usually sourced from eastern Canada.

Around the north and east sides of the structure the plantings of young conifers can be seen, which are the beginnings of a shelter belt; whilst in the centre of the image on the extreme right-hand edge can be seen the commencement of the 1892 conifer plantings above the south shore of Loch Ossian, which in time will encompass the only area of native woodland on the estate. An added complication in terms of constructing the lodge was the severe winters, when little work would have been practicable. Moored at the pier is the steam yacht 'Cailleach', bought by Sir John at a cost of £1,235 from Matthew Paul & Co. Ltd of Dumbarton, makers of marine steam engines, yachts and launches; who built the yacht, then disassembled it and despatched the parts by rail to Corroul for re-assembly. 'Cailleach', loosely translated from the Gaelic, and borrowed from the Irish, means 'Old Goddess'. 'Beira', the Cailleach Bheur, lived high up on the mountains of Schiehallion, the Cuillins and Ben Nevis where she ruled Scotland as the Queen of Winter and protected the deer and goats of the mountains. When guests arrived at Corroul Station they were met by a pony and trap, then driven along the road to the newly constructed waiting room at the west

end of Loch Ossian. Prior to 1902 they were carried by launch to the pier adjacent to the Lodge at the north-east end of the loch. From 1902 the guests were transported in the new yacht. Running from the Lodge around the south side of the loch can be seen what appears to be a relatively rough road; whilst a more substantial road can be seen running from the lodge and diverging around the north side of the loch. There are records which suggest that a pathway was made around the north side of the loch during the period that the lodge was being constructed. It seems Sir John was not entirely happy with some aspects of the Lodge itself and in 1904 he had a number of alterations carried out by L. & J. Falconer, an architects practice in Blairgowrie with a branch in Fort William. Larger dormers were added to the second floor bedrooms, which provided a better view out across the loch, and a number of internal changes were made. In the season the deer shooting was leased out, as a means of off-setting some of the costs of running the estate, although Sir John reserved a couple of weeks for himself and his friends to go stalking.

A road was built in 1910 around the south side of the loch as an alternative means of access for guests who were then able to bring road vehicles by train to Corrou. This eventually led to the termination of the yacht service. A more adequate track around the north side of the loch was constructed at a cost of £29,000 by a group of around 10 Irish workers in 1947-1952. They used a significant quantity of gelignite explosive to blast an alignment through the rock. Near the North Road gate the original alignment of the track can be seen running much closer to the loch and the remnants of the old bridge abutments are still evident. Improvements were made to the road around the south side of the loch in the same period.

Experimental Upland Forestry:

In 1867, when the neighbouring estate of Ardverikie and Benalder, beside Loch Laggan, was leased by Sir John William Ramsden, the family already owned the Glenfeshie Estates. Ardverikie Estate was purchased outright in 1871 and over a twenty year period additional estates were acquired and their Scottish holdings eventually amounted to 400,000 acres. Commencing in 1873 extensive plantations were carried out over an area of 10,400 acres at the rate of 1 million trees per year and a new lodge was constructed on each estate. These plantations were an inspiration to Sir John Stirling Maxwell and no doubt influenced his decision to purchase the Corrou and Fersit estates when they became available in 1891.^{7 & 12}

Tree planting began at Loch Ossian in 1892, the earliest plantings being on the shore at the north end of the loch, and the islands at the south end (2.5-acres).⁷ These initial

plantings were at an altitude of 1269ft (387m). Clearly, Sir John was anxious to put a shelter-belt in place and the conifer plantings gradually enclosed the north east end of the loch (38.2-acres), reaching an altitude of 1700ft (518m), and were mainly planted by contractors under the supervision of John Boyd, who was a forester on the Pollok Estate, until 1905. Another very early planting of conifers, which took place just prior to the turn of the century, was the isolated roundel planted in the Birch wood on the south shore of Loch Ossian.

Around 1890 most of the exotic conifers planted in Scotland, from seed sent back by the early botanical expeditions, were between 35 and 60 years old, and the majority of these trees had been planted on fertile and sheltered sites where they thrived. There had been few, if any, attempts to grow these conifers on more difficult sites and it was only around the turn of the Century that experiments were initiated by Sir John at Corrour. He began the forestry plantations to improve the landscape and to create shelter for deer, but also to find out, 'whether it is possible to convert bad moorland soil into forest at this altitude in Scotland.'⁷

The conditions around Loch Ossian were not very well suited to forestry, the location being above 1250ft (380m) with poor, water-logged peaty soils and very exposed slopes. In order to prove such upland sites could be successfully planted Sir John, with his two foresters Simon Cameron and John Boyd, tried several experiments in the early years of the 20th Century, using a variety of types of conifer, with mixed results. He was continually experimenting, but always carefully recorded and questioned his results.

The idea of establishing forestry plantations on high elevation peat lands was first proposed by Professor Augustine Henry (1857-1930), whose name will be familiar to many horticulturalists, but whose influence and involvement in many areas of forestry has largely gone unrecognised, as has his role as a 'pathfinder' in the Sino-Himalaya for the early plant-hunters who later introduced many of his discoveries. Henry was born a Scot, contrary to some reports, and was born in Dundee on 2nd July 1857. He led a very full life, not only travelling and collecting plant material widely in China whilst working for the Chinese Customs Service, but also in later life after spending the major part of 1901-1902 writing-up at R.B.G., Kew the multitude of specimens he had sent back from China. During this period he became particularly interested in trees and went to study forestry at Nantes in France, then the premier forestry school in Europe. He then spent several years co-authoring *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* with H.J. Elwes, a huge seven-volume publication for which he travelled all

over Britain & Ireland to collect information. Augustine Henry met with Sir Herbert Maxwell on a regular basis in London and also stayed at Monrieth House. Sir Herbert proof-read the first volume of *The Trees*, and was instrumental in Augustine Henry visiting Sir John at Corrou in late-September, 1905. Augustine Henry suggested that Sir John visit Belgium to see the planting experiments in peat on the Hertogenwald near the German Border.²¹ This visit was made in 1906 and the Belgian planting method was introduced on the Corrou Estate soon after.¹⁰

The Belgian Forestry Service had developed a method by which a network of ditches was created to drain the peat. The surface material that came out of the drains, referred to as turfs, was dragged out of the drain and turned upside down in rows several feet apart and left to dry. With the original Belgian method a circular plug was cut out of the centre of the turf, creating a hole in which the young plant was placed and the hole filled with a mix of sand, gravel and manure. However, the Corrou experiments showed that by planting-time the turf would have settled and dried sufficiently to be easily slit open to insert a tree, with the roots carefully spread out under the turf, which provided the young tree with a better nutrient supply and more stability. In his early experiments Sir John extensively planted Scots Pine, but that did not thrive, and overall he tested 71 different species of conifer around Loch Ossian. He found that, ‘of all the trees we have tried Sitka promises the best return’, and further noted that it is very much less subject to frost damage than at lower elevations.⁷ In cultivation at low altitudes Sitka Spruce suffers from frost damage as a young tree and may remain in a state of being checked in growth for a number of years. Owing to its great resistance to wind, and loving a wet climate, it is well suited to bleak mountain slopes above the frost line. A tree planted according to the Corrou method stands upright in the centre of the turf with its roots sandwiched between two layers of rotting vegetation, which releases nutrients, provides aeration, and keeps the roots away from the peat soil, which may still be too wet and cold.¹¹

These experiments showed that conifers planted in the turfs thrived, proving it was possible to plant trees successfully in deep peat at high elevations. One of the most important innovations at Corrou was the use of phosphatic fertilisers (slag) to give the young tree a boost.⁷ The experiments at Corrou laid the foundation for modern ploughing techniques on peat land that were developed in subsequent decades based on the pioneering work of Sir John.

Establishment of the Rhododendron Collection:

When Sir John inherited the Pollok estate in 1887 the 1,186-acres (480ha) designed

landscape encompassed two areas of woodland, North Wood and Pollokhead Wood that had existed for many years, probably from 1741 when the walled garden was constructed with its glasshouses and stoves. North Wood contains the largest area of old woodland with oaks and beech over 200 years old, a yew and younger mixed tree species with a rhododendron underlay of old hardy hybrids. Lady Hannah, wife of the 7th Baronet, took a particular interest in the establishment of the woodlands and some of the ornamental trees and shrubs date from the late-18th Century onwards. Sir John wasted little time and set about improving the gardens in the same timeframe as he had carried out changes to Pollok House. He had an eye for detail and visited several country estates with highly regarded formal gardens in many parts of Britain, sketched the layouts, then set about designing and laying-out the formal terrace gardens to the south and east of the house at Pollok, the parterres being originally formed with yew hedges in-filled with gravel.

Sir John brought with him a large portion of his father's important collection of 2000 library books from Keir and continued to enhance this with a collection of horticultural books. As early as 1892 he was elected as a member of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society and was a great friend of F.R.S. Balfour of Dawyck and Sir Herbert E. Maxwell of Monrieth (1845-1937); little wonder that he not only became interested in trees, he also developed a keen interest in rhododendrons which he used to enhance the gardens at Pollok. Gradually rhododendron planting was extended northwards from the Pollokhead Woodland Garden, along the woodland drives and into the North Wood.¹⁴

In parallel with these improvements he commenced work on sketching the design of the rockery garden which would lead from the front of the new Lodge at Corrour down to the shore of Loch Ossian. The site of the Lodge, on a jumble of glacial rocks and boulders, was fortuitous in regard to the creation of an alpine garden, and appears to have the subject of considerable discussion between Sir John and Sir Herbert Maxwell as to the laying-out and planting-up of the rockery. In the midst of which Sir John asked Sir Herbert for the hand of his daughter, Ann Christian, in marriage, and they were married on 12th November 1901. They had one daughter, Anne, on 8th September, 1906. Sir John's design for the alpine garden was interpreted and plans drawn in 1904 by L & J Falconer, the architect's practice that was carrying out alterations to the upper floor of the Lodge. The design for a complex sequence of curving steps in tiers leading down from the Lodge to an alpine garden close to the shore of the loch was drawn-up but was never carried out by L & J Falconer's practice, according to the company records. It is uncertain who constructed the terraces, curving steps

and the lily-pond, however, by filling-in suitable hollows in the rockery with soil, a variety of plants flourished, including, primulas, speedwells, dwarf rhododendrons, dianthus and a wide range of rock plants. Sir Herbert Maxwell gives an excellent overview of the alpine garden in his book, '*Scottish Gardens*'.⁶ Sir John and Lady Anne organised the planting-up of the garden in the same year, under the watchful eye of Sir Herbert. There is a photograph taken in June, 1905 of Sir John with Sir Herbert inspecting the plantings in the alpine garden, which suggests its construction was completed in 1904.

There are two groups of what appear to be hardy rhododendron hybrids on the 'North Road', close to the side of the loch, just inside the cattle grid at the entrance gate to the main area of the estate. These are very old and it is very likely they pre-date the plantings on the south side of the loch. These hybrids were probably planted around the time the new lodge was constructed and the track was developed for access around the north side of the loch in the late-1890s, so these may be the oldest plants on the estate. In the Victorian/Edwardian era, prior to the onset of the Great War, it was a tradition to plant large groups of 'showy' rhododendrons at the entrance gates to the main house of an estate, as something of a status symbol. The main supplier of plants for this purpose was Waterer's of Knapp Hill, and Sir John used hybrids from this nursery to extend the plantings along the pathways at Pollok.¹⁴

A mile (1.6km) from Corrour Lodge, on the south shore of Loch Ossian, Sir John developed a 63 acre (25ha) rhododendron garden amidst the native birch, rowan and alder, intermingled with and surrounded by conifers for shelter. He did not consider the environmental conditions at Pollok House were suitable for other than germinating and initially growing-on the seedlings, as their growth tended to be retarded by the pollution and checked by the frosts. The products of coal combustion in the closely packed city dwellings, combined with the output from hundreds of factory chimneys in the manufacturing districts that surround the city, all combined to darken the air with smoke, sulphurous fumes, and also resulted in a fall-out of grit at Pollock when the wind was in the east.

Donald Maxwell MacDonald, Sir John's grandson, recalled during an S.R.S. visit in 1985 that the rhododendron plantings commenced in 1910, the better part of 20 years after Sir John originally planted the conifers for shelter.²⁰ These new plantings began on the shore of the loch and then ran up the steep slopes, utilising open areas that had been created within the shelter, between the 1250ft and 1650ft (380m-500m) contour levels. The whole concept was original, bold and on a massive scale; indeed, in some

ways it replicated his experimental work with upland forestry, which he adapted to use for planting his rhododendron collection on rough moorland. Drainage channels running down to the loch had been provided with the aim of taking away some of the excess rainfall being retained by the waterlogged peat but, with an average rainfall of 88 inches on an already saturated moorland, there was never any real concerns that the soil would dry out, even in the drought of 1984.¹⁶ A sequence of zigzag paths was created, commencing at the loch side, which ran up the slope to provide connection with the pathways on the various 'levels' on the mountainside. Sir John planted hundreds of different species that had been raised from wild seed collections sent back over the years from the plant hunting expeditions of Wilson, Forrest, Kingdon Ward and Rock. Those from Wilson's early collections would have been purchased as seedlings raised by James Veitch & Sons of Coombe Wood, probably at the time of the major plant sales when the nursery was being closed down in 1914. Sir John subscribed to Forrest's expeditions to Yunnan in 1925 and 1930, and to Kingdon Ward's 1935 expedition to Assam and Tibet. He also raised seed sent back by Farrer, which may have originated from the R.B.G., Edinburgh, as he communicated regularly with the staff from 1914 to 1954 and obtained plants and seed from a large number of collections, with the support of Professor William Wright-Smith.¹⁷ Most, if not all, of the species at Corrou were represented by multiple plantings, in some cases the large numbers suggest that he used the majority of the seedlings raised from an individual seed pan in his experimental planting. Attention to detail, which permeated through all his activities and interests, extended through his experiments with both forestry and rhododendrons.

There is little doubt that in the early 1900s Sir John's project at Corrou came to the attention of other 'key' personalities in the rhododendron field and, by invitation, Sir John was one of four garden owners who joined the exclusive Rhododendron Society in 1917, which brought the total membership up to 19 at that date; Sir Herbert Maxwell had joined the previous year. This brought Sir John into direct contact with many of his peers who had similar interests and thus provided him with an opportunity to source and acquire many of the various forms of a particular species, which then found their way to Corrou.

Prior to the Great War, Sir John became an active hybridiser, and there is a record that indicates he named, introduced and registered seven hybrids, one of which was *Rhododendron* 'Jock' (*R. williamsianum* x *R. griersonianum*), but further work is necessary to unravel the names of the other hybrids. Prior to 1918, Sir John crossed *R. edgeworthii* and *R.* 'Luscombianum' in the greenhouse, and *R. smirnowii* and an

R. arboreum which happened to flower late after being moved. He had a special interest in fragrant rhododendrons and worked with specific forms of *R. fortunei*, *R. decorum* and *R. auriculatum*, which he lamented, were all pale in colour. Writing in 1927 he noted, "It is unfortunate that the fine forms of *R. decorum* introduced by Farrer have not proved hardy. The stock of these must have been terribly thinned out these last two years. The writer proposes to pot up the few survivors in his garden and cross them with hardy and brilliantly coloured hybrids." It is likely that a significant number of the mature unidentified hybrids at Corroul are seedlings from his crosses and it is known that *R. 'Jock'* is planted alongside the loch on the North Road. In this way the plantings continued until the commencement of hostilities in 1939, by which time the range of material was probably the equal of any major collection in a single garden in Great Britain or Ireland, which was quite an achievement in itself. Sir John's daughter Anne married John Maxwell Macdonald 19th of Largie on 22nd April, 1930 and they had two sons John and Donald (b. 9th Nov 1938).

One of the specific rules of being a member of the Rhododendron Society was the requirement for each member to contribute articles about the development of their garden for the annual *The Rhododendron Society's Notes*, which was published for the mutual benefit of the members and not circulated outside the Society. Sir John had several short articles published, but only one mention in passing, of his rhododendron collection at Corroul.

World War II and its Aftermath:

In the summer of 1939 a team were engaged building a road from Strathossian (three miles north of Corroul Lodge) to Fersit (at the north end of Loch Triage), and by September they had only got half a mile up the road from Strathossian House when the work suddenly stopped. War was declared on Sunday, 3rd September, 1939 and the nation listened to the wireless spellbound, as Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared Britain was at war with Germany. On that same fateful Sunday morning the hikers turned up at Glasgow Queen Street Station as usual for their Special Sunday Excursion trains. The services were running as normal over the West Highland Line, but they were exclusively engaged in the grim business of evacuating schoolchildren from Glasgow to stations en-route to Fort William.³ When the special train arrived at Corroul an allocation of children got off carrying their gas masks and they were quickly taken to the Lodge. The following Sunday the special train took evacuees to stations between Fort William and Mallaig.¹⁵ War had come to the West Highlands faster than any in the local communities had thought possible.

In common with other large estates in Britain, Corroul quickly lost a significant number of staff who enlisted for the armed services. Sadly, the war years were full of tragedy. Shortly after commencement of hostilities Sir John suffered a series of small strokes, nevertheless, although wheelchair bound, he retained all of his formidable intelligence and continued to be actively involved in the organisations he held office in; including, Chairman of the Royal Fine Arts Commission for Scotland, Trustee of the National Galleries of Scotland, Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board, founder member of the National Trust for Scotland in 1931 and President from 1943 to 1956, and actively involved in founding the Forestry Commission in Scotland and served as Chairman from 1929-1932.¹⁸ He presided over meetings up to 1945 in spite of severe physical disablement. Sir John's wife, Lady Ann Christian, had died in 1937, the same year as Sir Herbert Maxwell passed away. In spite of the adversity he faced he lost none of his enthusiasm for forestry.

Then, after the third consecutive severe winter of the war, a plumber was repairing burst pipes at the Lodge in April 1942 when his blow-lamp set fire to the wadding insulation around the pipes. Quickly the fire spread to the pine panelling. With the few remaining staff working away from the Lodge and, by the time they had been alerted, it was well alight and burnt down completely leaving only a skeleton shell. Only the church and outbuildings were saved. Sir John was devastated. Apart from a few books, very little was saved and it is likely that many of his records relating to Corroul were lost. No record of the fire in the local newspapers has been found, and events were probably overshadowed by the more serious reports of wartime actions and shipping losses on the West Coast and in the Atlantic. Many such reports found their way into the Oban Times for April 1942, which also noted that 25 ships of PQ-15 Arctic convoy had gathered at Oban and departed, towards the end of the month for Iceland en-route to Murmansk, with air cover provided by Sunderland Flying Boats from No.228 U-boat hunting Squadron which was stationed at Oban. Sir John was determined to replace the Lodge and commissioned architects in 1945 to prepare detailed plans for a replacement lodge, however, the designs were not executed due to problems being encountered with the harsh building licensing restrictions in the aftermath of WWII, which prioritised the use of building materials to essential repairs and replacements of wartime damaged structures; added to which was the high taxation in the austere post-war economic climate. To the lasting regret of Sir John, the plans appear to have been shelved in 1947, a situation that he never really fully understood or came to terms with. It fell to Sir John's daughter Anne and his grandson Donald to support him and care for the plantings at Corroul. Four men from the estate died in the war, others never returned from war service; the head



Above: The 'ZigZag' paths climb through the woodland from the South Road to 1650ft

Below: A massive *Rhododendron thomsonii* ssp. *thomsonii* in full flower graces the side of the loch adjacent to the South Road

Both photos by John Hammond





Above: Looking out across Loch Ossian from high up in the garden in the spring of 2013, with *Rhododendron orbiculare* ssp. *orbiculare* and *R. decorum* ssp. *decorum* in the foreground

Right: All the large-leaved species flower well at around the 1600ft level, including *R. rex* ssp. *rex*

Both photos by David Purvis



keeper at Fersit died in a shooting accident, and the estate was never staffed with gardeners and foresters after the war, as replacement staff were unobtainable due to able-bodied persons being directed towards employment that benefited the wider economic revival. A Colt House bungalow, clad in cedarwood shingles, was built on the site of the Lodge in 1958.

On 7th October, 1966 the Maxwell Macdonald Family sold around 75% of the Corrou Estate to the Forestry Commission for £60,000, which was significantly less than the actual market price, but retained ownership of the property and land immediately around Corrou Lodge, together with the sporting rights. In return, as part of the sale agreement, the F.C. was to build a new road from the A86 at Torgulbin, at the west end of Loch Laggan, winding its way southwards through the estate for seven miles to Loch Ossian; together with repairing the four mile section of road from the Lodge to Corrou Station. Following completion of the new access road in 1972 the cost of maintaining the estate roads was shared between the F.C. and the Corrou Estate.

Writing in 1985 Donald Maxwell Macdonald noted:¹⁶

‘There has not been a gardener of any kind since the 1950’s and the only attention which the rhododendrons have received from that date until comparatively recently was a day or two’s hard labour by my mother.’ In 1966 the rhododendrons passed into the hands of the Forestry Commission, but very little was done by way of maintenance until the late 1970’s. At the time the F.C.’s forester in charge of Corrou became extremely interested in the rhododendrons and both himself and one of his assistants spent a considerable time on their maintenance.

In 1983 the Maxwell Macdonald Family re-acquired the rhododendrons and since that time with the assistance and advice from Sir Peter Hutchison and Peter Cox a start has been made on rejuvenating the collection.’

In Conclusion:

Sir John continued to pursue his interests with great courage, as long as he was able, and was accompanied on his journeys to Corrou by his valet and two nurses, who kept him well wrapped-up with blankets. After lunch he still insisted on being taken to inspect the forestry plantations. The wheelchair would sink into the peat bog, and was difficult to manoeuvre between the trees; or he would want to be taken up the zig-zag paths to see the woodland and rhododendrons on the south side of the loch, which really taxed the stamina of the young staff pushing the wheelchair! In the early 1950s the estate acquired two Land Rovers, one of which was specially built to

accommodate Sir John's wheelchair, which enabled his chauffeur to drive him around the estate to inspect his plantings. Sir John Stirling Maxwell died on 30th May 1956, within a week of his 90th birthday and, from a horticultural perspective, he left behind a remarkable legacy and a most thought provoking rhododendron garden, which continues to be evaluated by botanical experts and enthusiasts.

Corrour is a unique garden that contains a wide range of rhododendrons, including relatively tender species, large-leaved species, and some species that are seldom seen, which all survive on the mountainside. Perhaps more importantly, the plantings have been surprisingly successful in spite of excessively low winter temperatures being recorded on many occasions, including -27°C (48.6°F below freezing) at times during 1983. Winter comes early at Corrour, so it is normal for the whole of the estate to be blanketed by heavy snowfalls in the months from December to March, and the weather remains cold for the whole of the season.¹⁶ Whatever their location, and be they rhododendrons or trees, the weight of deep snow can be a disaster, either by bending over and distorting the main trunk, or by bending and shearing-off the branches. Many of the rhododendrons appear to have coped with these conditions much better than would have been expected. Whilst the snow would have provided respite for the plants when they were relatively young, this would not be the case for many of the mature plants, which in competition with the trees have of necessity grown upwards towards the light. In theory the plantings are above the frost-line, which is a key factor as they do not suffer from sharp changes in the temperature gradient and there is a gradual onset of dormancy. In the same way, spring comes late to Corrour, with a few species flowering before snow disappears, whilst the main blooming season is in June when the plants flower profusely, and no significant leaf damage has been noted during visits to the collection. Hardiness is a man-made concept that has no place in nature, and hardiness ratings have little, if any, relevance at Corrour.

On the open moorland the perpetual winds need to be taken account of and the conifer shelter-belt is a key mitigating factor. The large-leaved species growing above 1400ft all look in good shape and include *Rhododendron falconeri*, *R. rex*, *R. hodgsonii*, *R. arizelum*, *R. fictolacteum*, *R. praestans*, *R. macabeanum* and *R. 'Elsae'*. Yet, where the road runs close to the loch there are very large plants of *R. orbiculare*, *R. vernicosum*, *R. strigillosum*, *R. campanulatum* and *R. decorum* that flourish and are covered with flower each spring, despite being open to the northwest gales coming across the loch. Where plantings were made in open glades, or alongside the road on the south side of the loch, some of the plants have grown into enormous specimens, including as large a specimen of *R. lacteum* you will see anywhere with its feet in the wet

moorland! No attempt has been made in this account to discuss in detail the various rhododendron species that were planted as part of Sir John's experimentation. Suffice it to say that Donald Maxwell Macdonald's 1995 list covers 288 species and 78 hybrids, which in due course will need to be the subject of a further article.

A number of the properties on the estate were starting to deteriorate by the early 1990s, despite the Maxwell Macdonald family continuing to support the estate financially, as the income was relatively low and the harvesting of timber did not cover the expenditure. Major investment was required to update the properties, and with the Maxwell Macdonald family not making full use of the estate facilities, the Estate agents, Strutt & Parker, were requested to produce a sale brochure in 1995. Lisbet Rausing, a Lecturer in science history at Harvard University in Boston, purchased the 48,000 acre estate in 1996, and it is now run by The Corrou Trust. Moshe Safdie and Associates, the Boston-based architects practice in Massachusetts, was commissioned to design the new Lodge, which was completed in 2003. Under new ownership the estate is moving towards operating a balanced approach between a sporting estate and a natural environment. Meanwhile, the gardens at the front of the Lodge were restored in 2004 and reflect the planting design inspirations of Jinny Blom, the estate's landscape design consultant, who has also provided advice on other horticultural and forestry aspects on the estate. Members of the Scottish Rhododendron Society (S.R.S.) met Jinny Blom in late-May 2005 and, in the course of carrying out a preliminary survey of the rhododendron collection, a number of plants were identified and tagged. This visit was almost twenty years to the day that an S.R.S party arrived by train to visit the rhododendrons and were taken by Land Rover to see the plantings.²⁰ In 2013 a project began to tag and identify all the rhododendrons on the estate, as part of a wider scheme to identify and tag all the trees and shrubs within the boundary of the deer fence. The Rhododendron Species Conservation Group (R.S.C.G.), in liaison with Dr. David Chamberlain who also carried out some of the work independently, identified over 3000 rhododendrons that had been tagged by a member of the wider project team working out of the R.B.G., Edinburgh on behalf of the National Tree Collections of Scotland. Some of the tagged plants are self-seeded hybrids, which along with a large number of saplings, are crowding-out the original plantings and need to be taken out. Taking into account recommendations made by the R.S.C.G., the Corrou Estate is developing a management plan for carrying out remedial work within the boundaries of the rhododendron collection to ensure the plantings are secured for the future.

These days it is hard to find a true wilderness, that is, until you take a journey on the

West Highland Line, rated as one of the top-ten most scenic rail journeys in the world. Request the Conductor to halt the train at the isolated Corrou platform, the highest station on the railway network in Britain then, as the train heads off across Rannoch Moor, you are free to step off the platform and follow the road heading east through a landscape of heather and boggy pools that run across the open moor to Loch Ossian. Arrange your visit for mid to late-June and take the southern route around the loch and you will see Sir John's rhododendron legacy for yourself. And, like many other botanical experts and enthusiasts, you too can be amazed at size and flourishing condition of these specimens, some of which are over 100 years old, and wonder how it is that this collection continues to thrive against all the odds.

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Tender Rhododendrons

Richard A. Baines, Curator Logan Botanic Garden

Fifteen years ago I decided that I would start to put together a collection of tender rhododendrons focussed mainly on the subsection Maddenia. Living in Castle Douglas in south west Scotland most rhododendrons in this subsection are not hardy out of doors here and so have to be grown under glass.

During the hard winter of 2011 the minimum temperature in the greenhouse fell to -5°C over a 48 hour period with no significant damage recorded. Incidentally the outside temperature fell to -16.5°C !!

Almost all of the species have been collected from known wild origin material almost entirely grown from seed purchased via the RCM Group and the SRS.

I have also assembled a collection of hybrids ranging from the older hybrids such as *Rhododendron* 'Fragrantissimum' to modern hybrids such as *R.* 'Mi Amor' (*R. lindleyi* x *R. nuttallii*). To date this is the most stunning hybrid performer that I have flowered. Huge fragrant white trumpets up to 15cms long with a rich yellow throat are produced in large trusses. Said to be hardy to -9°C this is definitely one to try outside in milder gardens. The buds resemble artichokes as they develop!

Another impressive hybrid is *Rhododendron* 'Mysterious Maddenii' that has huge white flowers with a yellow blotch at the base. As it matures it develops an attractive mahogany coloured peeling bark.

One of the most unusual hybrids in the subsection is *R.* 'Vuna' because of its unusual colour. Fairly compact in habit this offers a different colour to most and appears to be easy to grow.

R. 'Jim Russell' is a tall growing hybrid with large frilly white/pink scented flowers that are borne in huge trusses. This appears to be very free flowering and never fails to put on a good show.

R. 'Cowbell' is a recent hybrid between *R. ciliatum* and *R. edgeworthii* with dark green foliage. Heavily fragrant white flowers with light pink stripes are produced in April. Like both its parents it is fairly hardy but greatly benefits from good drainage.

R. 'My Lady' is a cross between *R. veitchianum* and *R. edgeworthii*. It flowers early in the season with fragrant white blushed pink flowers with a pale yellow throat. It



has dark green bullate foliage and is hardy to -9°C .

I have found that *R. 'Harry Tagg'* gets frosted in bud every year and is killed during hard winters when planted outside. This hybrid is one of the most floriferous rhododendrons that I know with its large slightly reflexed white flowers that are tinged with pink and have a yellow blotch at the base. This

Above: *Rhododendron* 'Mysterious Maddenii'

Right: *R. levinei*

Below: *R. nuttallii*



hybrid was raised at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

R. levinei was received as *R. kiangsiense* (AC 5115). To date it is quite slow growing but appears to thrive in partial shade. The funnel shaped flowers are pure white and



Above: *R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum*

Right: *R. seingkuense*

Left: *R. taggianum* illustrating the artichoke like buds

All pictures in this article by Richard Baines

appear in late April. Although not the showiest in the subsection this characteristic is more than compensated for by its heavenly fragrance, its peeling bark and by the way the flowers are displayed.

Although *R. taggianum* has a very showy flower this is often detracted by its leggy nature. Prior to flowering it produces a large bud similar to an artichoke. Showing reasonable hardiness it is often too large to grow indoors as it is reluctant to respond to pruning.

My personal favourite subsection Maddenia species is *R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum*. Flowering in mid-summer it produces large trumpet-like flowers with five red stripes running along the length of the corolla. Growing it in a greenhouse overcomes the problem of poor drainage. I have recently started off another young plant as an epiphyte in a piece of cork reflecting its epiphytic habit.

To grow *R. nuttallii* satisfactorily I believe that you require a very large glasshouse, a lot bigger than mine!! My plants are very variable and originate from C&G 5631, AC5740 and KR4461. Often straggly they have bullate deep green leaves often with attractive reddish, purple new growth. In mid May massive flowers usually white but sometimes tinged with pink are borne on terminal clusters with individual corollas up to 12cms across.

In recent years there have been a number of interesting rhododendron species being introduced from Vietnam. One of the most exciting introductions has been *R. leptocladon*. Said to be hardy to -10°C it forms a straggly shrub with scented showy yellow flowers produced in May. Like most rhododendrons in this subsection it is easy to root from cuttings taken in early autumn.

R. veitchianum (Cubittii Group) is characterised by its large white flowers flushed pink with a yellow blotch. My plant originally came from Galloway House, Garlieston where it used to be trained up a north facing indoor wall in the same manner as an espalier. Originating from Burma this is a fast growing and vigorous plant that responds well to pruning.

R. seinghkuense (KW 9254) is quite a challenging plant to keep happy. It closely resembles a small-leaved *R. edgeworthii* and has deep brown heavy indumentum on the underside of its leaves. It does not like heat generated during hot spells such as this summer. Campanulate bright yellow flowers that are very showy when well grown, are produced in May.

R. maddenii ssp. *maddenii*, named after Lt-Colonel Madden is one of the most vigorous and hardiest in the section. The picture illustrates a plant that is deep pink in bud but opens out to ivory coloured flowers that are strongly scented.

The Baili Rhododendron Reserve in NW Guizhou Province, China

David F. Chamberlain

I first made my acquaintance with Baili in April 1994, right at its inception. Over a feast of strips of dog, cooked in a bouillon, we discussed what the project might become. I must admit that I did not then have the foresight to imagine the future of the misty hillside before us, dominated by *Rhododendron delavayi* and *R. irroratum* and a multitude of hybrids, some of which could clearly be referred to *R. x agastum*. So, when I was invited in September 2012 by the Reserve authorities, through the auspices of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, to advise on the rhododendron species at Baili, I was curious to see what had arisen from the dreams of 1994.

The internet explained that the Reserve extended over 123 sq. km and attracted 200,000 visitors per year who came to share the spectacle of the masses of rhododendrons during the flowering season. A search of the scientific literature indicated that 13 new taxa (11 new species) of *Rhododendron* had been described since 2010, within the Reserve, and that there were over 40 species within its boundary. With a slight degree of scepticism I accepted the challenge and set about building a team of five to tackle the challenge. Tobi Marczewski, whose recent PhD thesis was on hybridisation in *Rhododendron*, Richard Milne, a lecturer at Edinburgh University, my wife and Tobi's partner, Jane Droop, made up the party.

Travelling out at the end of March 2013, my wife and I spent three weeks with the rhododendrons; Tobi and Jane extended their trip to two months, to complete a detailed study of hybridisation within a population of *R. delavayi* and *R. irroratum*; Richard Milne joined us at the beginning of April and stayed for a couple of weeks. Thankfully, a team of scientists from the Kunming Institute of Botany led by Zhang Changqin joined us to act as our interpreters, and to share with us the tasks required to make our studies a success. On arrival, we were greeted by our host, Director Huang Chengling, who showed us to a modern high grade accommodation block, our base for the duration. She could not have been more helpful, supplying all the necessary transport, and the local guides. One of these guides, Huang Jiayong quickly became a king-pin. From a background as a local farmer, he has established an extensive and extremely impressive nursery for the species rhododendrons of the Reserve. He has also built up a detailed working knowledge of the rhododendron 'species' as they occur in the wild.

We soon realised that there was nothing conventional about this Reserve. For a start, it is based in an area of karst limestone, dominated by a landscape, at between 1700 and 2000m altitude, of conical pinnacles that stretch into the distance. The human pressures on the vegetation from farming and from small to large-scale coal mining are considerable; in places all that is left is thorn scrub dominated by wild rose and *Berberis*. Yet, there are areas that are dominated by partly managed populations of *R. delavayi*, *R. irroratum* and a truly stunning kaleidoscope of hybrids. In the past the rhododendrons, would have formed an understory in a virgin forest. Now, during the flowering season, the exposed native rhododendrons create a vibrant wash of reds, various shades of pink, pale yellows and white over the rolling hillsides. These areas can extend over several square kilometres, and are managed as a tightly policed tourist attraction. The highlight of the year is the Flower Festival that is staged for an audience of several thousand spectators at the end of March. This year there was a pageant based on the mythology of the local Yi Minority, the centrepiece of which was a large vase of *R. delavayi* and two sacrificial pigs. I suppose that the rhododendron is a harbinger of spring; we all worship rhododendrons, but this was a totally different interpretation of worship.

We were soon down to business. In comparison with other parts of SW China that I have visited the flowering season for most of these species is early. Indeed, this year the rhododendrons were in full flower by late March and were going over by the middle of April. Introductions were made to some of the recently described ‘new species’ including *R. cochlearifolium*, *R. huangpingense*, *R. jinboense*, *R. eriobotryoides*, *R. pudiense*, *R. jiulongshanense*, *R. bainaense* and *R. lilacinum*. Of these new species *R. cochlearifolium* was clearly the most doubtful. It was described from a single tree that supposedly had curious spoon-shaped leaves. A quick glance alerted us to a problem; nearly 50% of the leaves were quite normal! In any case what future does a single tree have in a genus that is out-breeding by inclination? Immediately, my concept of what is or is not a species was severely tested, as it soon became clear that besides *R. delavayi* and *R. irroratum*, both *R. denudatum* and *R. decorum* were also implicated as parents in a hybrid mélange, putting an entirely new meaning on the saying ‘when did you last see your father?’. We quickly established that the first five of our “new species” were almost certainly hybrids. While I did not see flowering *R. jiulongshanense*, vegetatively it appeared to be very close to *R. glanduliferum*, which is in any case classed as vulnerable in the wild and therefore an interesting record whether or not is a new species. *R. bainaense* appears to be a new species allied to *R. heliolepis*, but with whitish flowers, and *R. lilacinum* is a new member of Section *Tsutsusi*. So were the claims made on behalf of the Reserve over-rated?

Indeed not, as I was taken to see a recent discovery of a handsome plant with auriculate leaves, bristly stem, and a pale lilac 7-lobed corolla. The nearest affinity that I can make out is with *R. chihsinianum*. This is now being researched by a colleague in Kunming and will almost certainly be described as a new species in Subsect. Auriculata. One of the most tantalising records, of which I only saw photographs, was of a plant that looked remarkably like *R. williamsianum*, growing in a limestone area that is destined to be amalgamated within the Reserve. This should be confirmed during the next flowering season.

Baili is a nationally recognised rhododendron reserve and has the infrastructure that will help it to live up to its status. Yet, it has to balance the interests of the rhododendrons against the needs of the local population of 100,000 people that live in or on the periphery of the reserve. So conservation is both imperative and sensitive. One of the populations of *R. denudatum* that we studied was restricted to a narrow belt of scrub down the side of a tobacco field. The disturbance had brought it into contact with *R. irroratum*, with which it was clearly hybridising. We were left wondering whether the parental species had any real future; it was already difficult to be sure which plants were pure *R. denudatum* and which were not. A visit to Jiulong Shan left me with mixed emotions. There were areas with almost total destruction, but there were also some patches of secondary scrub that could still support rhododendrons, though *R. argyrophyllum* was being forced into very unsuitable habitats, along the margin of a marsh. This was also supposedly the best locality in the Reserve for *R. calophytum*. After much searching and directions from the local rangers, we did find a few seedlings, so I suppose that there is still hope. I believe that the only way forward is to attempt to develop a custodianship scheme to encourage the locals to take a pride in the few corners that remain that are worth preserving. Land clearance for grazing is very destructive but can actually encourage the growth of some species. We saw a good population of *R. annae*, intermixed with an entity belonging to Subsect. Triflora that was intermediate between *R. yunnanense* and *R. davidsonianum*, growing in one such area.

So, does Baili have a future as something more than a tourist attraction? Above all there is huge pride in the richness of the biodiversity within the Yi community, and the will to cherish and protect it, and the Reserve is largely managed by Yi staff. There are good contacts with the local community through Huang Jiayong. There are already impressive propagation facilities that are being used for ex situ conservation. One of the most successful subjects is *R. scabrifolium*, a species that has become very restricted within the Reserve; more than 500 young plants are ready for return to the wild.



Despite the relatively low altitude, quite a few of the species on the Reserve are classed as hardy in Britain, and virtually all of them could be grown in more favourable localities. I end with a strong recommendation that the Baili Rhododendron Reserve should be on the



Above: Rhododendron delavayi as a subject of veneration – Baili Flower Festival, March 2013
Right: Rhododendron ecotourism at Baili
Below: Intense study of a hybrid population Tobi Marczewski and Jane Droop, with colleagues from Kunming



itinerary for all rhododendron enthusiasts.



All pictures in this article by
David Chamberlain

Left: Maria Chamberlain
showing how she appreciates
Rhododendron delavayi!

Below: Huang Jia Yong, with
Rhododendron x agastum
Bottom: ex situ *Rhododendron*
conservation at Pudi, near Baili



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Above: Patches of *Rhododendron forrestii* through the mist at the top of the Doshong La

**Below: *Rhodoendron wardii* on the Temo La
Pictures by John Roy with Peter Cox in 1996. See page 11**



