

The **World** *of the Rhododendron*



Yearbook No. 23 ~ 2022

The Scottish Rhododendron Society



**Harbingers of spring.
Hellebores in flower and
alder catkins forming**

Pictures by John Roy

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***Rhododendron maximum* 'Red Max' in flower.**

Picture by John Gault

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Top: Fig. 1: *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' with *Rhododendron bureavii*.

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Below: Fig. 9: *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' combined with *Rhododendron* 'Silbervelours' and *Carex buchananii*.

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Editorial

This year so far we have had named storms coming through the UK causing major damage to infrastructure and woodland. There will not be many members who have escaped some sort of damage. As I write this at the beginning of March, thankfully things have quietened down. As gardeners, we are at the mercy of the weather and high winds can be very destructive. But as I look at the Facebook pages of some of the major UK gardens that have suffered damage and are facing huge clear ups, once that is complete the challenge is then to replace what has been lost.

It may be strange to you that another Yearbook is published not long after the last. But the 2021 Yearbook was delayed because of Covid so the 2022 Yearbook is now back where it should be.

This year I am pleased to announce another wide ranging set of articles. A follow up to the article about Cinnabarina subsection rhododendrons, a “tongue in cheek” article on the problems of summer drought in west North America, and an article about a very rare rhododendron found growing by accident start us off.

I am fascinated by the books by Frank Kingdon Ward and Mike Thornley has written an article about the travelogues of this prolific plant explorer. Two fine articles on “companion planting” add to our knowledge and a review of the importance of the 1981 SBEC expedition by the leader of the trip, gives us an insight into how this came about.

Editing the Yearbook is the highlight of my job as your Editor. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed preparing it.

John Roy

**The popular early flowering
rhododendron *R. ‘Nobleanum’***

Picture by John Roy



Some Thoughts on Subsection *Cinnabarina*, its Hybrids and Powdery Mildew

John M. Hammond

Writing in Yearbook No. 22, 2021, Chip Lima in, ‘*Rhododendron cinnabarinum* hybrids are making a comeback’, provided some interesting details regarding hybrids that have been made over the years, together with crosses that were introduced in the temperate climate of California, where they would need shade from the hot summer sun and more irrigation. I was not surprised to learn that they were difficult to grow in Scotland, as indeed is the case with some *R. cinnabarinum* crosses introduced in the South of England that are difficult to grow elsewhere in the UK.

Chip mentioned his 2002 visit to Scotland, presumably to the Rhododendron Conference held at the RBGE that Spring, and noted the problems caused to Subsection *Cinnabarina* by powdery mildew. Also writing in the same Yearbook, Mike Thornley in ‘Thirty-nine Trees’, discussed the impact of Covid-19 on his plans for Glenarn Garden in the spring of 2020 and the replanting work in the area of ‘Granny’s Hens’, together with details of the setbacks that had brought about the demise of some of the earlier plantings. This included the impact of ‘Powdery Mildew’ on *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group (and its replacement).

I have had a particular interest in the various forms of *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* and its cultivars for the better part of fifty years and became concerned in the late 1980s seeing the impact and defoliation caused by powdery mildew on many of these plants, as well as

R. cinnabarinum ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group in the author’s back garden in 2005 when it was around 7ft tall and 20 years old.



All pictures in this article by
John Hammond

other species, whilst visiting gardens with the SRS. Some of Lord Aberconway's hybrids were also badly affected, including *R.* 'Elizabeth', a beautiful, massive plant of which at Ardkinglas just collapsed and died close to the tall conifers. I can well recall at that time there was a view that powdery mildew was going to destroy a very significant number of rhododendron species and hybrids, as organisations and individuals with extensive plantings could not afford the cost of regular spraying with fungicide and did not have the means to gain access to the tops of any tall plants.

One Spring Day, in around 1989, I drove up to Cumbria to visit Lingholm Garden, located on the west shore of Derwentwater, a short drive from Keswick in Cumbria. It happened to be a gloriously sunny day for a walk around the woodland gardens that contained a good collection of both species and hybrid rhododendrons.

The origin of these plants is not well known, but on a previous visit I met the owner in front of the House, Lord Rochdale, who must have been in his eighties at the time, and he explained that in around 1930 Sir John Ramsden of Muncaster Castle came to dinner. After dinner they walked around the grounds and Sir John noted that the woodlands would be an ideal location for laying out a rhododendron collection. Prior to leaving to get back to Ravenglass, Sir John promised to send Lord Rochdale some seed to get him started with a rhododendron collection. True to his word, a few days later a pony and trap trotted up the drive with Muncaster's Head Gardener at the helm. In the back of the trap was a wheelbarrow of rhododendron seed left over from Kingdon Ward's 1926 & 1927/8 Expeditions to which Sir John had contributed a subscription. Later, Lord Rochdale received many young hybrids, including *R.* 'Loderi' crosses, from Muncaster Castle. The rest, as they say, is history!

So, back to the main storyline. I had a very interesting visit to Lingholm, as it was a good flowering year and many of the rhododendrons were covered in bloom, including the *Rhododendron* 'Loderi'. On walking back down the path through the woodland I came across a plant of *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group in a shady location, its leaves badly covered with powdery mildew, tending to hang down on the branches which were partly defoliated, the leaves scattered around on the ground. So, I called in at the small garden centre and asked if they had a plant of *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group for sale. I got a strange look from Mike Swift, who took over the role of Head Gardener in 1984. He noted that a 2ft 6ins tall plant he had potted-up was now covered with powdery mildew; however, he was somewhat amazed that I wanted to acquire it for experimental purposes, and he was glad to see me take it away.

I had a suspicion that the spores of Powdery Mildew overwintered in the debris in the soil at the top of the plant container; so, having placed the plant in a 'Quarantine'



**The leaves of
R. cinnabarinum ssp.
cinnabarinum Roylei
Group show no signs
of Powdery Mildew in
2005.**

whole plant was then sprayed copiously with ‘Nimrod-T’ fungicide (unfortunately, this very effective fungicide was later taken off the market) and the remaining soil in the container was absolutely drenched. After leaving the plant to drain and dry overnight, I replaced the soil at the top of the container. After the fungicide was given a few days to work I fed the plant with tomato food and a scattering of Osmocote and stood it on its own, behind a low wall at the bottom of the back garden. I regularly monitored the condition of the plant and quickly removed any infected fallen leaves. Gradually, the plant began budding-up and putting out new leaves, by the next season some leaves had reached normal size without any trace of powdery mildew. Subsection Cinnabarina requires plenty of light, so plant in partial sun, as otherwise it will tend to get leggy with poor flowering but avoid an open location where it will get hot sun during the summer. My plant has grown normally, has plenty of air circulation, with no reoccurrence of the fungus.

Shortly after my visit to Lingholm, Mike Swift moved to take up the Head Gardener’s post at Torosay Castle on Mull, Lord Rochdale’s son and heir closed the gardens to public viewing, then after Lord Rochdale had passed away, the son arranged for the House to be converted into apartments and the estate was sold.

When I moved house in 2001 the plant got a new home in the back garden. I also moved two plants of *Rhododendron* ‘Ring of Fire’, a very attractive Thompson Family hybrid from their nursery at Waldport on the Oregon Coast that should be grown more widely. Both these plants contracted powdery mildew in the summer of 2002, one of which was planted close to my *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group, but it was unaffected, as were other Subsection Cinnabarina in the garden. Twenty years later the original plant is over 10ft tall and 6ft wide, it has been propagated by both cuttings and air-layer on several occasions, with no history of powdery



In the lower part of the photograph is a small air-layer, 9 inches in length, when new in 2008. This provides a sense of scale to the size of the branch that is being layered, which is located at the top on the plant and for experimental purposes the air-layer has been placed in partial sun.

mildew problems. Most of the propagated material has, by request, gone to members and friends.

My back garden contains other Subsection Cinnabarina material, including *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Blanfordiiflorum Group, *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* 'Flame' form with large flowers, and *R. keysii* var. *unicolor* (KW6257); all of these were propagated at Muncaster Castle from plants raised from Kingdon Ward's expeditions. Additionally, I have the relatively rare *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* 'Sheriff's Orange', which has yet to flower although is at least seven years old. None of this material has shown any problems caused by powdery mildew, although I reside in a climate that is continually wet or damp, with the soil saturated from mid-October to March or April, but interspersed with many frosty nights, then the odd hot week in May or June,

The completed air-layer three years later, ready to be removed by making a diagonal cut 1½ inches below the bottom of the rooted section. Note that the layered branch will have doubled in size during the past three years.



followed by a few hot days in summer amidst unstable spring-like conditions. Annual rainfall has averaged around 85 inches over the last six years. This is totally at variance with the long spring droughts experienced in Argyll and sometimes elsewhere on Scotland's West Coast, or the regular tales of long hot summers in Southern England as recorded in the pages of RHS '*The Garden*'. Indeed, the RHS has little interest in reporting the weather conditions and impact of severe storms 'up north', as the recent named storms Arwen and Barra, which brought down hundreds of trees in Lancashire and devastated parts of Cumbria, clearly demonstrates.

From my perspective, the above suggests that powdery mildew over winters in the soil and can be eradicated if individual plants in containers contract the disease. After clearing the area around my two *Rhododendron* 'Ring of Fire' plants, I sprayed the plants and the soil with fungicide and the powdery mildew disappeared completely after a couple of seasons. If a badly infected plant dies in the garden, or needs to be taken out and disposed of, then after removing the plant, I would suggest the area is cleared of debris then soak the soil with well diluted 'Jeyes Fluid', as specified on the tin, and leave it fallow for a season. I have not lost any plants using diluted 'Jeyes Fluid' as a disinfectant in the garden. In the meantime, plant a replacement elsewhere in the garden.

From a propagation perspective I find that most Subsection Cinnabarina and its hybrids can be raised from cuttings. However, younger plants are particularly susceptible to dying during winter in my cold wet climate, if left outside after planting-on in containers, or if kept in a cold greenhouse over winter. They survive better if planted in the garden. From my experience, if only a couple of plants need to be propagated, it is easier to air-layer the plant, as little maintenance is required in terms of upkeep, and in three years you have good-sized well-rooted layers that grow-on fast in a large container and make strong plants that will be equivalent in size to plants raised by cuttings in a cold greenhouse. As the structure of Subsection Cinnabarina species and hybrids tend to be more compact and bushier than large-leaved species, whilst the thickness of the stems and the distance between branch nodes are both less; then it pays to reduce the length of the air-layer cylinder from 11 ins to 9ins, which in turn reduces the volume of rooting medium and weight of the air-layer; so, it is more easily supported by the plant. The air-layering propagation methodology still works fine.

Some Rhododendrons Change Genus in Oregon

Keith White

As a result of the hot weather last summer, some of the rhododendrons in our garden have changed genus. When temperatures hit 112°F on our shaded deck on June 28th, the transformation began. Within a few days the change was evident. Several that had been rhododendrons had become “Toastadendrons”. Plants that formerly looked wonderful developed burned, curled leaves that showed some or no life. I thought that I had a good watering routine going. Everybody in our rhododendron world was happy. But after this event, when examining the settings on our automatic irrigation system and really looking at where the water was falling, I found that some plants had been getting “just enough” water to keep them going. Also, I figured out that my daily 2pm sprinkling (each of 8 stations go on for 5 minutes to cause evaporative cooling) was not enough. I adjusted the sprinkling from once a day to 4 times a day, starting at 11am and going every 2 hours.

My wonderful *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* ssp *xanthocodon* (Concatanens Group) that had produced a profusion of waxy orangish yellow blossoms this spring was a remarkable transformation. I had been nurturing this plant for 20 years. It was just coming into its own. After the heat I found the leaves drooping and curled. No amount of water would revive it. It had changed genus to “Toastadendron”. The same was a nearby *R. lutescens* ‘Bag-shot Sands’ in a pot. Two great plants dead in one shot!



When inspecting the watering pattern in that zone I found that the water from one sprinkler was going over the plants, giving just a tiny shower. And the water coming from a sprinkler on the other side that used to douse these plants was being blocked by the limb of a tree that had expanded. I had

***Rhododendron cinnabarinum* ssp.
xanthocodon Concatanens Group
changed to “Toastadendron”**

**All pictures in this article by Keith
White**

***Rhododendron rex* had enough
green leaf to survive**

walked around, observing the watering patterns and adjusting the sprinklers in April. But that was not good enough for June 28th. Neglect had helped take the heat toll. Had I carefully walked around again in June, I could have corrected the issue. This was not the only water blockage instance. Elsewhere, new growth partially obstructing the water flow had taken a toll, giving some plants just enough water to survive with toasted leaves.



Some plants that had looked great with the amount of sun they were getting, even though they got plenty of water, just couldn't take that much heat along with even partial sun. My *Rhododendron rex* 'Black Bamboo' with its huge leaves, had started

to make the transition to "Toastadendron wrecked". Fortunately, it still had functioning leaves and new leaf buds are all set to grow next spring. A similar case was *R. falconeri*, growing in only early morning sun. Fortunately, soon after getting toasted, this plant sprung another flush of new felty indumented growth.



Then there is (or was) *Rhododendron thomsonii* and *R. lanatoides*. Both young plants, growing in full shade next to each other. *R. lanatoides* was completely dead and *R. thomsonii* has partly curled drooping leaves, still green, which make me think that it is

***Rhododendron falconeri* with its new
flush of growth after toasted**

Rhododendron thomsonii
on its way to becoming
“Toastadendron”



on its way to the “Toastadendron” genus. Perhaps it was the youth of these plants that doomed them. Notably, however, a *R. heatherae*, also a young plant nearby under the same conditions (supposedly a fragile species re cold tolerance) came through without a scratch.



Having learned a few lessons, I have just walked around in August. I have found leaks in pipes that decreased water pressure to sprinklers. And I have found broken and non-functioning sprinklers. I had to undertake fast repair action to save the nearby droopers.

Also, I have found some deciduous azaleas on their way to changing to genus “Muckodendron” being smothered by organic planting material that, with the help of too much water, broke down into mud. I have had to dig these up and plant them higher up in media that contains coarse sand for drainage in order to try to save them. Regarding the “too much water” issue,

I have converted two sprinklers into the one necessary to keep these plants happy. Limbing up some Douglas firs has changed the sun pattern on formerly shaded plants, now requiring more water and some artificial shade for a few.

All this has taught me again that I need to walk around in the daytime (watering system runs all stations full time at night) every couple of weeks to catch all the problems that are developing. After doing this rhody thing for many years, I am still learning (for the cost of some unfortunate plants) “The Hard Way” to keep my plants from changing to genus “Toastadendron” species “deadianum”.

The mixed blessings of rarity

Audrey Tam

Introduction: John Gault is a rhododendron propagator and has been running a nursery in Limavady, Northern Ireland since the 1960s specialising in species and hybrids that are sufficiently hardy for the North Coast. Presently Mr. Gault is the only rhododendron breeder in Northern Ireland; even at the age of 88, his nursery propagates about 1000 deciduous and evergreen azaleas, dwarf hybrids and hardy hybrids each year.

What is the worth of a plant? In a world and at a time where the emphasis is placed on measurable value, capitalistic wisdom suggests that whatever can be objectified can be monetised, leading to the belief that anything can be owned at the right price. Unlike real estate and luxury items, plants are affordable to more people, and the temptation to collect exclusive specimens is correspondingly higher – rare plant auctions are commonplace these days. But what about a specimen so rare, and the underlying relationship to the plantsman so intricate? Its worth is simply not quantifiable, and serious ethical considerations come into play regarding responsible guardianship and legacy conservation. In this article I would like to discuss one such example.

The discovery of ‘Red Max’: During the summer of 2021 I had the opportunity of assisting Mr. John Gault at his Rhododendrons and Azaleas nursery. As a first-year Cafre student of horticulture, it was an eye-opening experience and the perfect chance to discuss a wide range of botanical topics. One day we were talking about genetic mutations in plants when Mr. Gault handed me an article from the Summer 2020 issue of the Journal, American Rhododendron Society (JARS) (Hyatt, 2020). The article describes a rare mutant variety of *Rhododendron maximum* called ‘Red Max’: Contrary to the common variety that displays deep-green lanceolate leaves and white (sometimes tinged pink) corolla (Cox and Cox, 1997), ‘Red Max’ has a red sap coursing through some of the foliage, with the result that some leaves are stained dark red, bleeding from the mid rib towards the margin. The red sap also causes some buds to bloom red.

This exceedingly rare specimen was first sighted in the wild as a small cluster hidden deep in the woods near Mount Mitchell in North Carolina. Since its discovery in the 1930’s numerous excursions had been organized to inspect the cluster with the aim to preserve it and collect cuttings/seeds for propagation in cultivation. Sadly all of the wild ‘Red Max’ specimens had perished save one, and its location is now



The original ‘Red Max’ in Mr. John Gault’s Garden (photo taken in June 2016), displaying that unmistakable red tinge in the foliage. See the front cover picture for the flowers.

Pictures in this article by John Gault

a closely-guarded secret. Since it is almost impossible to root from cuttings, grafting and seeds

are the only propagation method, preventing ‘Red Max’ from being introduced to the wider horticultural community. Adding to the complication, because the origin of the red sap is still unclear and its distribution throughout each propagated specimen varies unpredictably, the red sap manifests itself in each plant in different degrees, sometimes not at all, sometimes not for several years (Hyatt, 2020). ‘Red Max’ is indeed the rarest of the rare, shrouded in mystery.

When Mr. Gault handed me the JARS article, I took it as a case in point of genetic mutation in rhododendrons. Nothing prepared me for what Mr. Gault said the next day, “I have the ‘Red Max’ in my garden.” Unable to contain my excitement and curiosity, I hurried back to the nursery to inspect the plant in question. Surely enough, a juvenile specimen of the rarity was tucked away in a corner, growing slowly but already displaying that unmistakable, tell-tale crimson red sap in some of the young foliage; the drought in July seemed to have brought out the colours in a more saturated way.

Mr. Gault reckons that he had acquired what is possibly the UK’s only ‘Red Max’ by accident. About twenty years ago, he bought a seed batch of regular *Rhododendron maximum* through the Scottish Rhododendron Society, which is affiliated with the ARS. Amongst the fifteen seedlings grown from the batch, one quickly emerged as an outlier: It grew at only half the rate but displayed a different, slightly red-tinged foliage colour. Gradually other seedlings were sold save for this one, and – fifteen years after the seeds were first sown – the plant reached flowering age. There were only two flower buds, but they opened with a red-white variegation which was extraordinary – as mentioned, the regular *R. maximum* variety displays white or pale-pink flowers.

The grafted ‘Red Max’ clone in its current stage of growth. The July drought and bright sun have brought on stronger foliage colours. Photographs taken in August 2021

During 2016 the plant flowered much more profusely, again in the same unusual colour variegation. Recognizing that he had received a rare sport, Mr. Gault tried in vain to propagate it by cuttings but succeeded in grafting a stem onto a *Rhododendron* ‘Cunningham’s White’. The timing for the graft proved fateful: During peak flowering season the following summer, the original plant died overnight, which to this day remains a mystery because environmental conditions had been normal and no other plant in its proximity had suffered in the same way. Fortunately the grafted plant grew on happily, and it is the one and only specimen that Mr. Gault has today. The recent drought of July 2021 didn’t seem to affect its health; on the contrary it is displaying even more of its signature blood-red foliage especially on the young growth. Interestingly, Mr. Gault didn’t realise what he had in his possession until the 2020 ARS article was published, when he compared photos from the article with the specimen in his garden and recognised, with a fair bit of excitement and pleasant surprise, that it is a ‘Red Max’.

So far Mr. Gault hasn’t come across any other ‘Red Max’ owner in the UK. In the interest of knowledge exchange and botanical legacy preservation he hopes to speak with other ‘Red Max’ owners, and for this reason asked me to write this article. His email address is jlandmaureen@aol.com and he welcomes anyone who is interested to reach out.



The price of rarity: Making the decision to share his story has not been easy; the

main concern is that it might attract the unwanted attention of trophy hunters misguided in the conviction that anything in this world can be bought at the right price. But how is one to price a plant that doesn't only deliver visual impact and the "wow" factor, but has the potential to further our understanding of genetic mutation in rhododendrons? What about ARS' decade-long effort to preserve it for posterity, or the anguish Mr. Gault experienced at the death of the original seedling, which took 15 years to grow to maturity? Casting aside the rarity factor, the sentimental bond a plantsman develops with a plant which he painstakingly nurses from seed, and which takes anything from five to ten years to flower, can be difficult to quantify in money terms. I am reminded of a particularly touching passage in the ARS article, when the author considered how the 'Red Max' in Mount Mitchell escaped a recent wildfire unscathed, "I could see where flames had been within a few feet of the trunk, but miraculously, I saw no sign of damage! How that fire managed to avoid this rare specimen still baffles me! All I could think of is that the spirits of past great Rhododendron leaders like Joe Gable, David Leach, Augie Kehr, Ed Collins, Bob Stelloh, and other admirers over at least the last half century must have gathered round to deflect the flames." (Hyatt, 2020)

For a plant that is so rare and presents so much scientific promise, it would be a great shame if an environmental disaster wipes it out from existence. But equally it would be a heartbreak to see it languish in the uncaring, inexperienced hands of someone who believes that, with a deep enough pocket, he or she can buy the world.

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Kingdon Ward's expeditions, *Rhododendron* collection numbers and books

Michael Thornley

Frank Kingdon Ward (1885 – 1958) undertook 18 expeditions to the eastern Himalaya over a period of 43 years, between 1913 and 1956, when he made collections of a total 790 rhododendrons. As well as field notes and numerous articles he wrote 25 books (Lyte 1989), 12 of which covered 14 expeditions where rhododendron collections are recorded. No other plant hunter can match the length of time in the field and documenting of the flora in the areas that he explored. The only expedition when a significant number of rhododendrons were collected (30) and not covered in a book was the ill-fated trip in 1950 to the Assam/Tibet border where he was refused entry to Tibet and also found himself close to the epicentre of the great Assam earthquake which had a profound effect on both Kingdon Ward and his second wife Jean Macklin.

Coming to Kingdon Ward's books for the first time, it can be difficult to imagine the landscapes he describes and what they might reveal about rhododendrons and where they grow. However, just how accurately Kingdon Ward observed the country he was passing through was demonstrated on our 2004 trek in Arunachal Pradesh, planned by Peter Cox to follow in the footsteps of Kingdon Ward and Ludlow and Sherriff (see 'The World of the Rhododendron' Yearbook No. 7 and 8, 2004 and 2005).

Kingdon Ward had written about the route over the Poshing La, which he had crossed in 1935 and 1938, in 'Assam Adventure' published in 1941. We pitched our tents in a clearing of thickets of prickly-leaved evergreen dwarf Berberis which confirmed that we were at Kingdon Ward's campsite at Dongri, and the following day toiled up the path which he reported ran in "*deep grooves along the ridge, with banks twelve to fifteen feet high overhung with trees. One may walk for half a mile through a tunnel whose roof is of pleached rhododendrons; their fallen flowers in spring crimson the ground with glowing embers. In some places our laden Yak could scarcely squeeze between the banks. The path was very rough, the water having torn stones of all shapes and sizes from their moorings in the sand; the forest in fact is built on sand*" It was all exactly as he had described, both in the closely observed details and his typically romantic allusions.

Although armed with this confidence about the accuracy of his descriptions another problem has to be overcome in order to get a full picture of his rhododendron



The camp at Dongri in 2004, regocnisable as the one described by Kingdon Ward in ‘Assam Adventure’

Picture by John Roy

collecting: that of placing his books in chronological order and cross referencing them to the expedition dates and Kingdon Ward collection numbers in

the RHS ‘Rhododendron Handbook’ (1998). To this end a schedule of expeditions and books is appended at the end of this note. It should be said that when I had just completed marrying the books, dates and collection numbers, I discovered that William Stearn had already done this work, expanding the account of Kingdon Ward’s journeys by Euan Cox in the latter’s ‘Plant Hunting in China’ (1945). It was as if half way up the mountain I had found that two much more experienced climbers had been there before. Anyone wishing to take up this type of armchair exploration would be well advised to get hold of a copy of Kingdon Ward’s posthumously published essays ‘Pilgrimage of Plants’ (1960) with its short biographical introduction by Stearn.

However, further difficulties were encountered on the upper slopes of this research. Although it comes as a relief to find that some but not all of Kingdon Ward’s books list rhododendrons that he had collected - either as an appendix or in the index - the information never matches that in the ‘Rhododendron Handbook’. For instance, ‘Plant Hunters Paradise’ published in 1937 lists 75 rhododendron collections compared with 101 in the ‘Rhododendron Handbook’. Kingdon Ward makes it clear that that his list refers to rhododendrons that were in cultivation at the time of writing, grown from seed he had collected. In this case not only from the 1931 expedition to Upper Burma and the Tibetan Frontier described in the book but also from his collections on the earlier expedition in 1926 to Burma and Assam, covered in ‘Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World’ published in 1930. This explains why he is able to state with obvious pride that KW 6903, *R. calostrotum* ssp *riparium* received an Award of Merit in 1930 (presumably 4 years after its collection in 1926).

To confuse matters further, the list of rhododendrons in ‘Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World’ includes collections from both his 1926 and 1927/28 expeditions and

also from the 1924 expedition to the Tsangpo Gorge. What also emerges is that the ‘Rhododendron Handbook’ itself is not entirely comprehensive, omitting 12 collection numbers between KW 1538 and KW 1857 from his 1914 expedition to the Htangan hills in Upper Burma to which he returned in 1919 and wrote about in ‘In Furthest Burma’ published in 1921. Kingdon Ward rarely included his own collection numbers in his text. These are only added comprehensively in Ken Cox’s editing of the re-published ‘Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges’ (2001).

One obvious problem is that Kingdon Ward was collecting rhododendrons that either he has not seen before or had not been named. In early books such as ‘In Farthest Burma’ (1921) KW 3408 is described as “*Rhododendron* sp. (*undetermined*)” which turned out to be *R. campylocarpum* ssp *caloxanthum*. On later expeditions, with a wealth of experience behind him, he is on firmer ground and his naming of species bring his descriptions to life and provide much useful information for the rhododendron enthusiast. However, there are still examples of the plant hunter coming to grips with a new rhododendron, for instance on his last major expedition in 1953, to the Triangle in Upper Burma: “*It was in full bloom, a brave sight through the curtain of rain. The foliage has a film of white on the scaly under surface and is somewhat blotched, as though the white was easily rubbed off. The flower hang in twos and threes (like R. triflorum itself) well clear of the leaves, and are so large and plentiful as almost to smother the bush. The most frequent colour is a delicate primrose yellow [...] This was certainly one of our best discoveries, and a species I had never seen before*”. The determination, and naming, of *R. zaleucum* var *flaviflorum* by Davidian was 25 years in the future.

Kingdon Ward wrote his books to publicise his collecting and to support his life as an explorer. Given his output, it is difficult to imagine how he even managed to correct his proofs, as no sooner had he returned and had written up the account of one expedition than he was departing on another. He was able to maintain this programme of writing because he kept a journal which provided the material for his books, supplemented by his photographic and map making skills. Stearn points out that keeping the journal created the discipline by which Kingdon Ward accurately recorded the country he passed through but it also helped sustain the morale of someone who often travelled by himself and was prone to periods of deep depression, with only his servants as support. This all changes when Jean Macklin accompanies him on his later expeditions, and a quite different Kingdon Ward emerges towards the end of his life which he describes so well and disarmingly in his last book ‘Return to the Irrawaddy’ (1958). By this time, he had created an epic travelogue in 12 volumes which are set out in the following schedule.

The expedition dates and locations plus the collection numbers are taken from RHS

'The Rhododendron Handbook' (1998), and the numbers of collections are for rhododendrons only.

1913: Yunnan - Tibet Frontier KW 260 - 793 (5 collections)

'The Mystery Rivers of Tibet' 1923

1919: NE Upper Burma KW 3036 – 3721A (29 collections)

'In Farthest Burma' 1921

1921: N.E. Yunnan – Sichuan Border KW 3776 – 5005 (44 collections)

'The Romance of Plant Hunting' 1924

1922: Yunnan – Sichuan – Tibet (China), N.E. Burma KW 5384 – 5607

'From China to Hkamti Long' 1924 (51 collections)

1924 – 25: Tibet and Bhutan KW 5656 – 6457A (104 collections)

'The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges' 1926

1926: Burma and Assam KW 6676 – 7642 (111 collections)

'Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World' 1930

1927 – 28: Assam and the Mishmi Hills KW 7701 – 8545 (45 collections)

'Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World' 1930

1931: Upper Burma and the Tibetan Frontier KW 9130 – 10231 (101 collections)

'Plant Hunter's Paradise' 1934

1933: Assam and Upper Burma KW 10351 -11060 (20 collections)

'A Plant Hunter in Tibet' 1934

1935: Tibet, Assam – Himalaya Frontier Tract KW 11175 – 12589 (20 collections)

'Assam Adventure' 1941

1937: N.E. Burma and Tibet KW 13017 – 14342 (61 collections)

'Burma's Icy Mountains' 1949

1938 – 39: N. Burma Vernay and Cutting 5 – 499 (48 collections)

'Burma's Icy Mountains' 1949

1946: Khasia/Jainta Hills India KW 16029 – 16060 (2 collections)

1948 : E. Manipur, (NE India) KW 17044 – 17818 (11 collections)

'Plant Hunter in Manipur' 1952

1949: Assam (NE India) KW 18540 – 19101 (9 collections)

1950: Lohit Valley, Assam/Tibet Frontier KW19244 – 20305A (30 collections)

1953: The Triangle, N. Burma KW 20601 – 21679 (69 collections)

'Return to the Irrawaddy'

1956: WC Burma KW 21768 – 22291 (8 collections)

Companion Plants: a few thoughts on new planting

Katrina Clow

When starting a new garden with a heavy emphasis on rhododendrons and woodland plants, the advice is to leave plenty of space between newly planted rhododendrons. For a keen gardener, desperate for a garden achieving some resemblance of maturity before the arrival of the grim reaper, this advice is hard to follow as one has to be prepared for bare earth for several years; unless the spaces can be filled with some ground cover or filler plants.

Fortunately, there are many good plants that enjoy similar conditions to rhododendrons and a few suggestions follow. First, bulbs, of course, snowdrops, small narcissi, cyclamen, erythroniums, winter aconites, and later, trilliums, podophyllums and sanguinaria will all multiply and eventually seed about. Members who have seen Ian Douglas's woodland garden early in the year will have drooled over carpets of snowdrops and winter aconites. Generous gardening friends are a great bonus; the gift of a large clump of snowdrops, "in the green", when divided will make masses of individual new clumps in 2-3 years.



Podophyllum hexandrum in the wild. The single flower emerges then the marbled leaves unfold

Pictures by John Roy

Cardiocrinum giganteum in the wild

Picture by John Roy



Light shade can be achieved by planting suitable trees in the spaces. Magnolias are an obvious choice. Nowadays, breeders are producing magnolias which flower at a young age but the old favourites, *M. stellata* and *M. 'Leonard Messel'* cannot be beaten for robust habit, vigorous growth and reliable flowering even on young plants. *Cornus chinensis*, varieties of *Sorbus*, cut leaved *Acer* and *Enkianthus* will add to the light shade and will give contrast, colour and fruit in autumn. The feathery foliage of *Cryptomeria* looks good with rhododendrons but of course these will become large shrubs/trees in time.

Lilies and *Meconopsis* look wonderful teamed with rhododendrons but choose good reliable cultivars e.g. *M. baileyi* and *M. grandis* which can be maintained by regular division or from seed. Lilies, if planted deep and fed regularly, may be slow to establish initially but will give many years of flowers. For real 'va-va-vroom', *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the giant Himalayan lily is a must. If successful, the flowering stems will tower over your young rhododendrons but more modest species lilies, e.g. *L. longiflorum*, *L. candidum* and *L. regale*, will be equally attractive, fragrant and cheaper!

Other suggestions for underplanting are species peonies, e.g. *P. officinalis* 'Mollis' and *P. tenuifolia*, whose flowering time may be brief but interesting foliage and autumn colour add to their charm. *Epimedium*, clumps of spiky *Libertia* and ferns are also worth considering but choose more delicate fern species such as *Polypodium* and *Polystichum*. Beware the shuttlecock fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*; once established, it can become invasive).

In established rhododendron woodland, native plants will be part of the scene. Wood sorrel, wood anemone, native bluebells, foxgloves and ferns should be welcomed and then introductions of other woodlanders will add interest e.g. *Uvularia*, *Maianthemum stellatum* (syn. *Smilacina*). *Polygonum* and *Disporum*.

Members will have their own ideas on planting with rhododendrons and the Editor and author would be pleased to hear of them.



Mixed planting at Townend

Picture by Katrina Cow



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A fantastic companion plant for Rhododendrons: The Japanese forest grass *Hakonechloa macra*

Hartwig Schepker, Bremen

If there is one grass that I would especially recommend as a companion plant for rhododendrons, it is the Japanese Forest Grass *Hakonechloa macra*. In just a few years, this plant, also known as Japan dwarf reed, Japan ribbon grass or Japanese mountain grass, has deservedly conquered its place in European gardens. The selection as “Perennial of the Year 2022” in Germany confirms the importance of *H. macra*. Like no other grass it enhances extremely well semi-shady or even shady garden sites, especially with the white and yellow variegated variants. Thus, it serves excellently as a companion to rhododendrons precisely in these situations. However, Japanese forest grass is also a fabulous design element in other parts of the garden.

The species itself originates from the Japanese main island of Honshu. The monotypic genus (i.e. the genus contains only one species) takes its name from Mount Hakone (Clarke 2010), where it grows on shady slopes and in sparse forests. Here at its natural site, the grass also meets native rhododendron species. Accordingly, it feels most comfortable in our gardens on off-sun or light-shaded sites. However, with an appropriate water supply, sunnier locations can also be considered. The green-leaved varieties usually perform in these sites better than the yellow ones, which tend to fade.

Over time the Japanese forest grass forms quite large clumps. Short runners ensure a steady spread.

On nutrient-rich soils, the clumps can certainly reach diameters of half a meter and more. The longer and more undisturbed *Hakonechloa macra* remains at the site, the more

Fig 2: *Hakonechloa macra* ‘Aureola’.



the mounds arch upwards. Depending on the variety, they then grow to different heights (see below), some can reach 1 m in height. Large single specimens with their gracefully overhanging culms form impressive and very picturesque focal points in the garden (Fig. 2). Not to be neglected in planning, however, is the competitive power of Japanese forest grass. After quite hesitant initial development, it becomes a robust and assertive player. In extreme cases it can even hold its own under highly competitive shallow-rooted trees such as the redwood.

The soil should drain well and not dry out too much. Heavy waterlogged soils, on the other hand, are not well suited. Fortunately, the overall maintenance requirement is very low. Fertilization needs to be very moderate, if at all. Too much fertilizer is rather harmful, the stability of the clone can then be limited. In times of drought, however, the plant should be watered from time to time. Otherwise, the effort is limited to cleaning out or cutting back the winter foliage in very early spring.

Such an attractive grass can be used individually as an accent, in groups or even as a ground cover. Especially in modern or formally designed gardens, *Hakonechloa macra* is used quite minimalistically, for example, as a band of grass alongside houses or paths. Naturally, it is also popular in Asian or Japanese-inspired gardens. But it also deserves its place in natural plantings in combination with perennials and grasses. It is precisely this extremely diverse range of uses that has made the grass a favourite of garden designers. If one uses *Hakonechloa* in mass, it is advisable to select appropriate shrubs etc. that in turn provide a counterpoint (Fig. 3). These can be Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* in varieties), stewartias (e.g. *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and others) or the early-flowering *Enkianthus perulatus*, which make an attractive combination, especially with their autumn colour.



In front of a group of trees, the wild form looks particularly good (Fig. 4). The mighty clumps give a lively picture throughout the

Fig. 3: A sea of Japanese forest grass surrounds a *Cornus*.

© ANNE
ESKUCHE



summer, especially when the overhanging waves sway in the wind. The species is considered more tolerant of sun and drought than variegated-leaved varieties (Clarke 2010). But great contrasts can also be achieved with large-leaved perennials such as *Hosta* or *Rodgersia* (Fig. 5). As a late starter in spring, the grass can also be combined very well with bulbous plants, which move in when the new shoots of the grass appear quite late in spring.



As a pot plant, Japanese forest grass has a long tradition in its homeland. The pot volume should be sufficiently wide (Fig. 6), and in cold regions the pot should be protected and overwintered in a cool place. In interaction with



Top: Fig. 4: *Hakonechloa macra* as a front planting of a grove.

© HARTWIG SCHEPKER

Middle: Fig. 5: *Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold' in combination with large-leaved hostas.

© BETTINA BANSE

Left: Fig. 6: *Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold' in a pot.

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Right: Fig. 7: A cascade of *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' along a stone staircase.

© HARTWIG SCHEPKER

Below: Fig. 8: Perfect border planting: *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola'.

© HARTWIG SCHEPKER

stones or rocks, further attractive garden situations can be created. The grass is just as suitable as a path border as it is for planting around the edges of stone steps (Figs. 7, 8).

Rhododendron lovers will be particularly pleased with the fantastic possibilities offered especially by the variegated forms in combination with rhododendron varieties providing an indumentum foliage. The contrast of the yellowish grass leaves, for example, with the beige, silvery, or (red) brownish foliage of cultivars such as *R.* 'Silvervelours', *R.* 'Teddybear', *R. bureavii* and others looks very handsome all summer long (Figs. 1, 9 See back cover). The narrow *Hakonechloa* foliage also combines well with narrow-leaved cultivars such as *R. stenopetalum* 'Linearifolium'.



However, Japanese forest grass is not only attractive after foliage emergence, when the broad clumps have formed with the narrow, arching leaves. Next, in late summer, delicate greenish panicles of flowers appear. But the grass makes its big show in the autumn, when it turns golden yellow (Figs. 10, 11). And even as the winter approaches, when the foliage contracts somewhat, it continues to be a pleasing sight through spring with its warm light brown discoloration as a splash of colour in the dark season.



Left: Fig. 10: *Hakonechloa macra* ‘Aureola’ in autumn colour.

© BETTINA BANSE

Below: Fig. 11: Fiery finale with *Hakonechloa*.

© BETTINA BANSE



In addition to the parent species *Hakonechloa macra*, there are a number of variegated or green-leaved cultivars, but unfortunately they are not always all equally available. Eight cultivars and the parent species were tested and evaluated in Germany as part of the 2016-19 perennial screening. These are in detail (Hertle 2020):

‘Albostriata’ **; foliage is green with creamy white longitudinal stripes, turning

ochre or orange quite late. Also occasionally listed as ‘Albovariegata’.

‘All Gold’ **; the entire leaf shows a particularly intense yellow hue, but it turns green in the shade.

‘Aureola’ ***; the oldest and certainly the most common variegated variety, which can brighten up especially semi-shaded garden situations with its colour. The foliage is green-yellow striped. Depending on the amount of light, the yellow colour turns out differently, the brighter the location, the lighter the leaf colour. The variety is considered vigorous, it grows steadily larger over the years. According to Hertle (2020), the autumn discoloration begins with a purple-violet hue on the outer leaf blades, which then gradually turn ochre to light brown. Together with the initial species and the cultivar ‘Naomi’, ‘Aureola’ was the only one to receive the highest rating.

‘Beni-kaze’ *; this variety is still yellow in the beginning, later grass-green in colour. The autumn coloration of the foliage is first brown-orange, later ochre-brown. However, this sets in only in sufficiently warm years and on light sites. The overall foliage ornamental effect is not rated as high as other cultivars.

‘Greenhills’ *; the cultivar with grass-green foliage grows more weakly than the pure

Fig. 12: *Hakonechloa macra*
‘Mulled Wine’®.
 © VITROFOLRA



species, but works just as well as a foliage ornamental plant.

‘Naomi’ ***; very similar to the cultivar ‘Aureola’ and also rated excellent. The grass-green foliage has slightly more pronounced creamy-yellow longitudinal stripes that appear lighter than in ‘Aureola’. Its autumn colour, on the other hand, is identical to ‘Aureola’.

‘Stripe it Rich’; with its 20-30 cm height, this form is classified only as a connoisseur cultivar. The reason is probably the low to moderate vigour attributed to it. The foliage is yellow-green with white longitudinal stripes.

‘Sunny Delight’ **; green foliage with narrow creamy yellow longitudinal stripes, but its colour effect is much less than that of ‘Aureola’ or ‘Naomi’.

*** Excellent

** Very good

* Good

All cultivars except ‘Stripe it Rich’ are rated at least moderate, but mostly high, for vigour. All are also considered to be good to very good at standing up to adverse conditions. The listed forms, again with the exception of ‘Stripe it Rich’, reach average heights of 50 cm; in good soils, the pure species in particular can grow taller.

Newer cultivars that have only recently come on the market and were not part of the evaluation are ‘Mulled Wine’® with reddish leaf tips (Fig. 12), ‘Nicholas’®, which turns the foliage orange to red as temperatures rise in summer, and the completely light yellow ‘Sunflare’®.

Japan forest grass should preferably be planted in the spring. Planted in the second half of the year, the grass grows poorly or even dies out. Even older clumps can be easily divided, as the grass roots quite shallowly overall. March-April are the best months for this.

Acknowledgements:

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The Sino-British Expedition to Cangshan Yunnan 1981 and its Legacy

Bob Mitchell

China has for long periods in its history been secretive and exclusive. Foreigners were not welcome. But from the mid 18th century Jesuit priests, often with difficulty, established churches. Armand David, Jean Marie Delavay, Paul Farges, Edouard Mairei and Jean Andre Soulie were prominent, sending botanical specimens back to Franchet in Paris. The Scot Robert Fortune collected plants in east China from established trading ports during this period.

Then there was a further easing of restrictions permitting plant collectors into the country allowing Ernest Wilson, George Forrest, Frank Kingdon Ward, Joseph Rock and others to collect herbarium specimens, plants and seeds until the bamboo curtain was firmly closed in 1947 when Mao Zedong established his republic.

We started to make overtures to China in 1975 and, latterly and more successfully, through the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society with considerable help from RBG Edinburgh and Kew as well as the British Embassy in Beijing, Jardine Matheson and Lady MacLehose, the Hong Kong Governor's wife. Professor Wu Chen-yih, Director of the Kunming Institute of Botany was the major player who arranged the programme.

The team comprised Dr David Chamberlain RBGE, Tony Schilling Kew (Wakehurst

Place)#, Peter Cox, Sir Peter Hutchison and Roy Lancaster. Robert Mitchell St Andrews University Botanic Garden was joint leader with Professor Feng Guomei of Kunming Institute



Cangshan, Dali

**Pictures in this article
by Bob Mitchell**

of Botany Yunnan Province.

(# Tony had to call off a week before the expedition was due to leave due to peritonitis.)

The aim of the expedition was to collect herbarium specimens (8 copies of each) for further study in China, UK and USA. Live

material was also collected for UK and Kunming.

Rhododendron was the main genus of interest for David Chamberlain, Peter Cox, Professor Feng Guomei and Ming Tianlou two of the Chinese party of 20. Hybridity in the wild was to be studied. According to Kew the orchid *Pleione* needed field study to determine its true credentials.

Additionally Peter Hutchison was studying *Primula*, Roy Lancaster the trees and shrubs, especially *Hypericum* for the British Museum, Natural History, while Bob Mitchell was researching *Paris* and *Trillium*.

Members of the Chinese botanical party were augmented by local forestry officers for they were undertaking a botanical survey of the Cangshan range with a view to designating it as a National Nature Reserve. The Cangshan is an isolated mountain



range to the east of the great rivers with widely diverse habitats from subtropical to mountain ridge at 13,600 feet. It has



**Above: Peter Cox
collecting seed**

**Left: Recording the
collection for the
day in Chinese and
English**



***Holcoglossum
sinicum*, a new
species of orchid**

several endemic species.

The expedition would spend four weeks camping with two camps in different habitats on either side of the Cangshan at an

altitude of 10,000 feet and in among the rhododendrons. This was the first European joint botanical expedition with China and has fostered strong botanical links and exchange of staff with RBGE, Kew and Kunming, as well as further collaboration between our countries.

In all 1379 herbarium numbers, 133 plants, 237 seed numbers were collected resulting in eight species new to science: two taxonomic problems solved - *Rhododendron agastum* now a hybrid of *R. decorum* and *R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi*; the true *Pleione forrestii* introduced to cultivation; and 16 new plants were introduced to cultivation.

Furthermore RBGE is now twinned with Kunming Institute of Botany and together they have built and developed a research facility in the mountains above Lijiang. Edinburgh has propagated plants from the species introduced by George Forrest from 1904 to 1932 and returned those lost in the wild as a conservation gesture.

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The Scottish Rhododendron Society Timeline

Part 5 – Starting December 92

Willie Campbell

Newsletter No 27 December 1992: Editor Brian Carter wished everybody a Christmas and a great gardening New Year.

Secretary Hubert Andrew intimated that “Davidian’s Books” were coming through from the US supplier, but prices would be increased due to the fall in the pound because of “Black Wednesday”

This year’s show was to be in the Corran Hall, Oban, on May 15th, 1993, in association with Argyll Country Festival. With talks and demonstrations. The next year’s show is to be held in the Victoria Halls, Helensburgh.

New members 7 of including some you may know: Tony Schilling and Miss Mavis Paton, at Barnhourie Mill, Dalbeattie.

Spring Meeting 1993: The meeting would be centred on Blackhill’s, Lhanbryde, Elgin. From Friday 7th to Sunday 9th May.

Wild Argyll – Jim Moran.

Described, as “A Year-round celebration of the natural world of Argyll and the Islands – Europe’s greenest region” was launched by Magnus Magnusson, the chair of Scottish Natural Heritage. (Words like “Green” and “Sustainable” and “Natural Environment” used.)

Autumn Meeting. October 9th to 11th, 1992 Maurice Jeffery writes: 20 members gathered at the Stag Hotel, Lochgilphead. Hubert Andrew welcomed the group and after dinner George Smith showed slides of least common rhododendron species.

Next morning the group visited Braevalloch Nursery. Ian Glendenning talked about the work of propagation, potting on, and dealing with plant health problem.

Powdery Mildew was avoided by spraying weekly with **Nimrod, Systhane or Tilt**. *Liverwort* was treated and controlled with **Repulse** and *weevils* with **Cudgel**. (Where are these chemicals now?) Ian was thanked for such an interesting morning at the Nursery. Next stop was the Heather nursery at Inverliever, where 150,000 plants were potted up. Next morning the group visited Barguilean nursery where the nursery concentrated on quality hybrids.

Kenneth Cox writes on the Sino-Scottish Expedition to Northern Yunnan, May 1992: Since 1989 China had opened up its richest areas to limited access to westerners. In 1990 the C.L.D. Expedition was able to get to Chungtien, rich in primula and meconopsis, along with rhododendrons. This trip led by Sir Peter Hutchinson, Peter and Kenneth Cox, David Chamberlain, and Ian Sinclair both from the RBGE. As it was a spring trip, we would see plants in flower.

The Chungtien plateau is approximately 3500 mtrs high, surrounded by spectacular

snow-covered mountains on all sides. In the moorland areas we see *Rhododendron racemosum* and *R. hipophaeoides*. In the surrounding hills we see *R. yunnanense*, *R. rubiginosum* and *R. vernicosum* in fine pink and white forms. *R. wardii* was mostly pure yellow and unblotched. We also found natural hybrids, in pale yellow or a muddy pinky yellow. Next, we found *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteam* and much favoured *R. roxieanum* var. *oreonastes* along with two superb pink *R. balfourianum* nearby.

Kingdon Ward made the journey across Bei Ma Shan on route to the Salween-Mekong divide on several occasions. As we climbed up the road to the summit of Bei Ma Shan we pass *R. oreotrephes*, *R. uvarifolium*, *R. selense* and the usual *R. decorum* until we reached a forest of *R. beesianum* and *R. phaeochrysum*. *R. beesianum* was a beautiful species, very plentiful, with perfectly formed trusses from pure white to deep pink, some with picotee edge. Further along the path, we saw *R. aganniphum* and small populations of *R. aganniphum* var. *flavorufum* which suggests this could be a natural hybrid.

Above the treeline the lepidote species began to dominate, with *R. saluenense* ssp. *chameunum* and then two subsect Lapponica species were *R. telmateum* and *R. tapetiforme* which flower in June. In sheltered areas *R. primuliflorum* with pure white daphne like flowers and attractive peeling bark. At this high altitude the sight of *R. proteoides* was our objective, especially with its very specific habitat on cliffs, but it was never found.

On the way back to Kunming, we returned to the Cangshan range, with mists lifting from the tree line, we could see a whole hillside covered in *R. selense* var. *jucundum* in pink, white and lavender. *R. cyanocarpum*, a relative of *R. thomsonii* was only found in these mountains. Higher we found the waxy red of *R. haematodes* surrounded by *Primula calliantha* and *Diapensia bulleyana* underneath. As the trees thinned, we saw the sight of *R. lacteam* with clear yellow flowers, some blotched or spotted red. Kenneth finally admits space does not permit to describe all the rhododendrons species they saw or the hundreds of other perennials, trees and shrubs the expedition encountered.

When is a Species not a Species? Peter Cox writes: Few questioned the eminent Botanists of yesteryear, but then some people dared to suggest that a certain species may be a natural hybrid. Travelling into wild rhododendron territories again, has raised many new questions and reports of natural hybrids.

Of course the Edinburgh revisions confirm that certain species are in fact natural hybrids and many others are viewed with suspicion.

Peter with ten Asiatic trips under his belt, asks “how do you know they are hybrid”? The answer being experience and a lifetime having studied species rhododendrons. Peter goes on to describe in detail his views on what and where natural hybrids occur in the wild. Listing what are almost certainly natural hybrids. A very interesting insight on rhododendron classification.

Lastly it was with regret that the Society announced the resignation of Mr Ed

Wright for personal reasons.

Newsletter Number 28 August 1992: Secretary's notes – Hubert Andrew writes: A reminder the show would take place at the Corran Halls, Oban 15th May 1993. This year's show would include a phot competition for the **“Wild Argyll Cup”**.

The Book list was suspended, due to supply issue in the USA!

Rorie Hereson was opening her garden in Bearsden under Scotland's Garden Scheme.

There were 10 new members, one was **Pam Hayward** who today publishes lots of interesting rhododendron related articles by email for the RCM group.

The Spring meeting in May 1993 next year will begin with a picnic lunch at Blackhills, near Elgin, with an overnight stay on the estate courtesy of Mr & Mrs John Christie. Then next morning to Major & Mrs Cameron's, garden at Allangrange, Munlochy. Contact Ian Stewart for details and if you intend to go.

The agenda for next Year's AGM was published, first noted on this Agenda was the **1996 Convention at Oban** was for discussion.

Peter Cox then writes an Appreciation of Ed A.T. Wright's work in helping set up the Scottish Rhododendron Society and its History to date.

This newsletter ended in two articles on rhododendron failures, J.S. Bremner explained that his rhododendrons had been attacked by frost, snow, rabbits, deer and lastly children playing football. Brian Carter agreed with these deadly hazards but added high winds and falling branches as another way to kill your rhododendrons.

Newsletter Number 29 September 1993: Editor Brian Carter talks about **upgrading the Newsletters to an A5 glossy Journal (this happened in 1997)**

The Secretary Hubert Andrew explained that he would be sending out subscription notices for 1994 and made a plea for members to return with a cheque as soon as possible.

Show next year to be held in the Victoria Halls, Helensburgh on Saturday, 7th May 1994.

The Society welcomed 12 New Members including some familiar names:

Philip Rankin (still doing committee work today)

David & Gloria Starck (our wonderful tours team, what would we do without them)

Autumn visit, Auchincruive 9th October 1993, the Scottish Agricultural College's department of Horticulture. The Society is indebted to Professor G R Dixon and David Kenyon for organising the visit. With talks on micro-propagation and powdery mildew in the morning, with garden tour in the afternoon.

Report on Spring Visit to Blackhills – Brian Carter Reports

We arrived in the afternoon and settled into our accommodation and had a sneak preview of the gardens before the meet next day.

Brian's introduction starts “Blackhills is a hauntingly beautiful garden, and with an

abundance and variety plants which delighted and eventually overwhelmed us. The hillsides resembled a titanic carpet, bold and intricate in design, by turns subtle and garish in colour, all enhanced by reflections from the glassy lakes”

“There were acres of woodlands that were rhododendron gardens in waiting to be explored” (I have never visited Blackhills, maybe someday)

Next morning, some twenty plus visitors met for a picnic lunch before setting off for a guided tour of the gardens.

John led us through narrow paths, and as usual good-natured disputes on what species the experts were looking at, other were just mesmerised by the size of some of the plants, a 5-metre high *R. roxieanum* var. *oreonastes*, close by *R. heliolepis* and a very beautiful *R. lanatum* in full bloom.

Some of Brian’s favourites were a superb *R. argyrophyllum*, a grove of towering *R. hookeri*, several fine furry *R. mallotum* and the deepest blue *R. augustinii* you could ever wish to see. Many more wonderful plants were seen, with too many to mention. In the evening John Christie treated the group to a slide show illustrating his recent visit to Tibet in search of the elusive Doker La.

Next morning the group visited the gardens of Major and Mrs. Cameron at Allangrange, Munloch.

“The Festival of the Rhododendron” was held at the Corran Halls in Oban.

The annual show was a triumph, with the benches bursting with blooms and sprays and giving the judges a hard time to choose the winners. Glendoick and Blackhills were big winners. The David Stuart trophy was won by Mary Stewart from Edinburgh.

The show was open on the Sunday with some trusses wilting, but after a brief introduction by Mervyn Kessel, Cameron Carmichael gave a pictorial history of hybrid rhododendrons with comments on his favourite plants. In the afternoon **Herb Spady from the ARS gave an illustrated talk on a recent Trek to Sikkim Himalaya.**

The 10th AGM followed with **the highlight being the presentation of the ARS Gold Medal to Peter Cox and announcement that H.H. Davidian was also to be awarded the ARS Gold Medal.**

At the end of the meeting the incoming President Mervyn Kessell emphasised the **need to recruit new younger members to the Society** (where have we heard that before)

The Newsletter finished with an article “Two Gardens of Brittany”

(Deux Jardins de Bretagne)

Jardin Botanique de Cornuaille and Kerneostic.

Kerneostic is owned by Marc Colombel, SRS member for many years.

Finally, the Society received a letter from Vicky and Tony Schilling concerning setting up a **register of CHAMPION tree rhododendrons** and asks the membership to help.

Newsletter Number 30 December 1993: Brian Carter Edits.

Secretary Hubert Andrews Reports:

ARS Convention 1996 – Both Peter Cox and John Hammond are asking for help in the run up and during the convention. We are looking for all sorts of help within the hall or as garden guides.

If you are intending to come to the conventions **contact Ian Douglas** without delay. Again, discussions on changing the format of the Newsletter along with advertisements were ongoing. (Start of process to change to today's "World of Rhododendrons and Journals")

2 new members joined the Society during the last period.

Spring Meeting 21st 22nd May 1994

This meeting was to coincide with the first "Argyll and Bute Gardens Festival" being held at Crarae Gardens. Ian Stewart was taking the bookings.

Mervyn Kessell – Reviews Peter A. Cox book on the "Cultivation of Rhododendrons" "The quality of the production is excellent with extremely clear well laid out text with good bold headings. The colour photos are some of the best I have ever seen with accurate colour balance, which is not easy to produce where plant photos are concerned. The line drawings are also clear and to the point".

Published by Batsford 288 pages Hardback Costing £35.00

Geoff Taylor writes an article on giving Garden Club Lectures, where he is filling in with his slide show on species rhododendron, when the advertised talk is on "Christmas Flowers". Questions at the end of the talk as always "**Don't you think all rhododendrons are too invasive for garden planting**" Always one!

More powdery mildew problems – Stan Harrison writes:

It appears I have a small outbreak of powdery mildew on some rhododendrons, with plants affected are under trees in both front and back gardens.

Affected badly are *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *xanthocodon* Concatenans which will be removed and burned, yet just yards away *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei is unaffected. In the rear garden *R. trichocladum* has lost some terminal leaves, as has *R. moupinense* and *R. campylogynum* 'Plum Branklyn'.

Stan is currently spraying affected plants every 10 – 14 days weather permitting alternating sprays of Nimrod T and Benlate. Also planning to spray all his rhododendrons next spring.

Some interesting endnotes:

Wanted – *Rhododendron cufteanum* cutting material urgently required for Dr E C Nelson taxonomist at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

New Members another 6 including names you will recognise David Younger of Eckford, Mike Robinson, East Sussex (co-wrote Pocket Guide to Species Rhododendron) and Bill Harper from Cumbria.

This is my 5th Timeline, please let me know if you would like further information on any of the articles.

Willie Campbell

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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the SRS committee. The committee, however, support the right to freedom of speech.

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Rhododendron 'Christmas Cheer' with a covering of snow
Picture by Mary Broadfoot

