

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 34, Number 5, February 2003



The Vancouver Rhododendron Society is a chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

2003 Executive

President: Ron Knight

Vice President: Louis Peterson

Past President: Gerry Gibbens

Treasurer: Barbara Sherman

Secretary: Bill Spohn

Membership: Carole Conlin

Newsletter: Douglas & Karen Justice

Program: Joe Ronsley

Directors:

Bill Herbst (3 years)

Todd Major (2 years)

Joanne Ronsley (1 year)

Education: Louis Peterson

Advertising: Tony Clayton

Library: Louis Peterson

Refreshments: Mary Dorsey

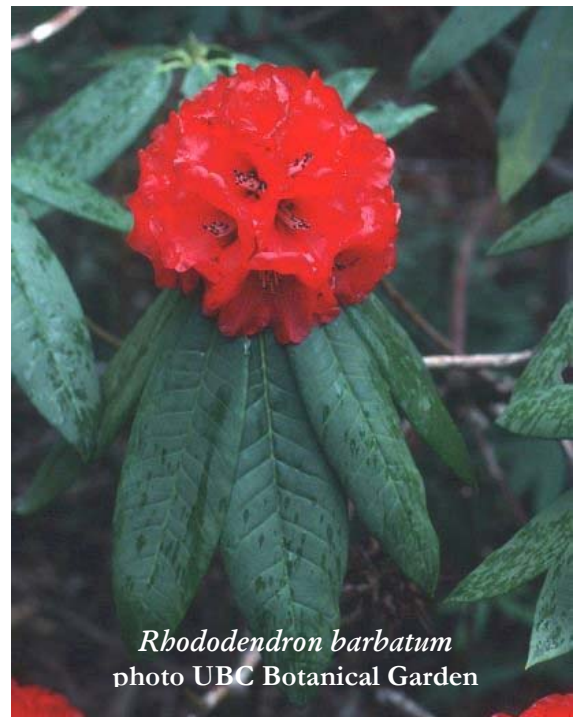
This Month's Meeting: February 20th, 7:30 pm

Program: Robert Van Pelt on 'Giant Trees in the Puget Sound and Pacific Northwest - A Global Perspective'

Education: Todd Major on 'Techniques of Pruning - When and How'

Plants in Bloom - *Rhododendron barbatum*

According to Peter Cox, author of a number of authoritative references, *Rhododendron barbatum* is "one of the finest large early flowering species." No argument here. Plants at UBC Botanical Garden never fail to impress with their early—sometimes exceptionally early—impossibly deep red, waxy flowers [apologies to black & white *Indumentum* readers]. The species evidently grows to 9m (30 feet), although the largest specimens at UBC are around 4.5m (after 30 years).



Rhododendron barbatum
photo UBC Botanical Garden

While flowering can be iffy in some years, particularly following a very good year, the species is worth admiring for other reasons. Older stems have peeling papery bark in shades of pink and burgundy atop smooth blue-grey underbark, and the substantial dark green or blue-green leaves are attractively impressed with pinnate veins. An interesting feature, and the one that gives the plant the name *barbatum* (bearded), is the presence of long, bristly hairs on the petioles, although this characteristic varies somewhat from plant to plant. Before flowering, the rounded yellow and black sticky buds stand out noticeably in dim mid-winter light.

continued on page 6

President's Message

February is an exciting time for VRS members as the first rhododendrons come into bloom [see photo, right]. It's additionally exciting for the new VRS executive as we meet for the first time and begin planning spring events. It's a pleasure to welcome **Barb Sherman** as Treasurer and **Joanne Ronsley** and **Bill Herbst** as Directors.

On behalf of the new executive, I would like to extend four huge thank yous:

- ◆ To **Gerry Gibbens** for his two years as VRS President. As Gerry leaves the position, the club is in excellent shape with an increased membership, a large financial surplus, and a team-oriented executive.
- ◆ To **Martie Irwin** for her many, many years as Treasurer. Martie not only kept our finances in superb shape, she also contributed greatly to the efficient running of the VRS in general.
- ◆ To **Jim Hall** for his fine service as a Director and for his continuing work with our raffle.
- ◆ To Mr. Persuasive, **Joe Ronsley**, for his hard work as the VRS Nominating Committee. Joe's wisdom in choosing potential executive members was affirmed by the membership at our January AGM, as all executive positions were filled by acclamation. (I was disappointed, however, that I never got a chance to use my campaign speech, posters, or buttons.)
- ◆ To the VRS membership for your confidence in the new executive. You have elected a team who are service-minded and have accepted an executive position because they genuinely want to "give something back" to an organization they keenly support. This executive has an ideal balance of skills and experience. In the group are garden professionals, educators, financial experts, and business people.

The new executive has no plans for major changes to the VRS. Rather, their focus in the next few months will be on:

1. Increasing attendance and profits at our **Show and Sale** on **May 3rd and 4th** at Park and Tilford Gardens. As of 2003, the executive has assumed the role of Show/Sale Committee with the VRS President as Show/Sale Chairman.
2. Increasing membership and services to new members. **Carole Conlin** will give you more information at our February VRS meeting.



Rhododendron 'Olive', photo by Ron Knight

3. Drafting a questionnaire that will allow you, at our April meeting, to evaluate various aspects of our club and suggest improvements.

If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns, please contact any executive member. Your ideas are always welcome and your input will be brought to the next executive meeting. Happy gardening,

Ron Knight

February Program

Robert Van Pelt, 'a laser-gun-wielding scientist who's turning the arcane world of tree-hunting upside-down', according to Charles Montgomery in the *Vancouver Sun* of 20 October 2001, will be our speaker the evening of February 20th. 'Back before Van Pelt arrived on the scene', Montgomery continues, 'tree-hunting was a competition dominated by upstarts and amateurs, men . . . driven by instinct rather than science . . . Robert Van Pelt hunts on foot, just like any other big tree man'—and there are a number of these obsessed men, from all walks of life, up and down the west coast—'but it is the way he measures prize trunks that is raising the ire of tree traditionalists. Armed with \$30,000 worth of laser technology, a sketch book and a calculator, Van Pelt has hit all the so-called champion trees with a meticulous new size test, and has turned the continent's big tree hierarchy on its ear'.

The hunt for the northwest coast's biggest trees began in the mid-'80s, according to Montgomery, when 'environmentalists were just waking up to the fact that loggers were cutting some of the last remaining stands of really big conifers on the coast. Explorer and wilderness advocate **Randy Stoltmann** launched BC's register of big trees, partly to drum up interest in the threatened giants. Stoltmann and

other tree hunters identified hundreds of significant trees and managed to save them through aggressive media campaigns, including the giant Sitka spruce groves of Carmanah Valley on Vancouver Island'. It was, then, a timely move for Robert Van Pelt, when in 1985 he moved west from his native Wisconsin, where he was interested in discovering the largest pines, to become a cook at a lodge in Washington's Olympic Mountains. But there he met a certain tree, and evidently fell in love. Unfortunately the object of his



Old stems of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), photo by Bob Herger, from *Giants: The Colossal Trees of Pacific North America* by Audrey Grescoe, Raincoast Books, 1997.

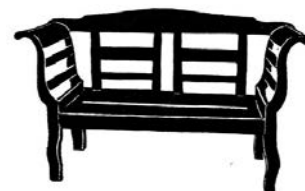
new love affair was 'beautiful, but long dead'. It was, according to records, the world champion grand fir, located only a short distance from Robert's kitchen, 'only now it was a moss-draped log sinking into the forest floor'. Robert was fascinated by the fact that nobody noticed that no one was keeping track of such things, and that a 'big-tree program coordinator' was needed. 'Moreover, there were records waiting to be broken! Van Pelt was the man. He nominated a new champion grand fir within two years, and followed with 34 other national champion trees in the years since'.

Robert left his kitchen to become a research associate in forest ecology at the University of Washington and, aside from coming up with a new, more accurate way of measuring trees, has since published several books about big trees, including *Champion Trees of Washington State* and *Forest Giants of the Pacific Coast*. He insists that competition among tree hunters is not of interest to him, but the size numbers do count. In Canada, for that matter, competition is less strident than in the United States, and the reference to 'champions' virtually does not exist. As Robert said to Montgomery, 'I love my almanacs and my *Guinness Book of World Records*. And trees, well, they are my obsession, there's just no other way of putting it. We are talking about the biggest, the oldest, the tallest things on earth'.

The new, expensive, more accurate measuring equipment which he has introduced into the field has caused many trees to be lowered in the size rankings, but it has determined that the largest known Douglas fir in the world is one on the west coast of Vancouver Island near Port Renfrew. Called the Red Creek fir, it contains 349 square metres of wood. A few kilometres north of it is the second largest Red Cedar in the world—the largest, by a fraction, being one in Washington. The two largest known yellow cedars are north of Campbell river, not up on Cypress Mountain, alas. The largest amabilis fir, however, 'grows in a rocky gully on Black Mountain, near the ski lifts of Cypress Bowl'.

Robert now lives in Seattle and has been Director of the Washington State Big Tree Program since he started it back in 1986. It was at this time that he also became the state coordinator of the National Big Tree Program. He received his PhD in 1995 from the University of Washington, and indicates his main research interests to be old-growth ecology, canopy structure and its control of the understory environment, spatial patterns in old-growth forests, and tree plant geography. He is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Washington and Evergreen State College, where he is engaged in canopy research in Douglas fir and redwood forests. He teaches several field classes on Pacific Northwest old-growth and forestry issues. The father of four, he shares his love for trees with his wife Kathy, who is the Urban Forester for the Metro Parks in Tacoma.

No one who likes big trees – and remember, many rhododendrons are trees, though we would have to travel some distance to find the largest ones – will want to miss Robert Van Pelt's lecture the evening of February 20th, '**Giant Trees in the Puget Sound and Pacific Northwest – A Global Perspective**'.



Joe Ronsley

Education: February

Our hands-on workshop “experiment” in November was a great success, and many valuable comments were received from participants. The general theme was *Propagation*. **Garth Wedemire** dealt with the preparation and rooting of rhododendron cuttings, while **Todd Major** provided useful insights on growing companion plants from seed.

We are now planning another workshop, to be held on **20th February and starting at 7:00 pm**, on proper Techniques of Pruning—When and How—as it applies to rhodos and other shrubs and trees.

Todd Major will enlighten us on this important topic and, as with the previous workshop, we would like participants to register their interest (a group of about 20 would be ideal) by e-mailing or telephoning me.

As an aside, it would be helpful to receive suggestions from members re other desirable educational or workshop topics—and even volunteers to give short presentations on topics of common interest.

Louis Peterson
Tel: 604 921 7260
lpeterso@sfu.ca

Membership

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS who have joined us since November 2002:

James Elley, NZ; Denis & Margaret Hughes, NZ; Elaine Stevens, Vancouver; Andy Hill & Andrea Seale, Vancouver.

The following former long time Associate Members have switched and became full VRS/ARS Members of our Chapter in 2003: **Mike & Patti Bale** (members since 1984); **Garth & Avril Wedemire** (members since 1998).

THANK YOU to all the members who have renewed. Check your receipts and 2003 Membership cards. Contact me to renew if you don't have yours.

INFORMATION ON THE **ARS 58th International Convention April 30-May 4, 2003** at Olympia, WA is advertised in the Winter 2003 ARS Journal which ARS members received in mid-January. For VRS members, you can pick up a copy of the meeting information and registration at the VRS February 20th meeting from me at the Membership table, or from the VRS Website:

<http://www.rhodo.citymax.com>.

WE'VE GOT SOME NEW LOOKS!

1) The ARS RHODO LOGO has been added to the name tags of new members who have joined the VRS since the annual show and sale in May 2002. Look for the thirty people who will be wearing the ARS rhodo logo and help me in welcoming them.

2) RAFFLE Tickets have moved to the same table as Membership. You can now find **Jim Hall's** friendly face and tickets right next to me at Membership. You can purchase your raffle ticket (\$1 each) at the same time you pick up your name tags.

I look forward to seeing you at the February 20th meeting.

Carole Conlin, VRS Membership Chair

Tel: 604 921 7260

conlin@sfu.ca

- ◆ **Contributions to the Raffle Table** help offset the rental of the Floral Hall. Plants, books, ceramic pots, etc. are always welcome!
- ◆ **For the Refreshment Table**, donations of cookies, cakes, cheese, and other snacks are greatly appreciated.



Subscription Rates

VRS + ARS Membership (US & Overseas)	\$50.00 \$US 28.00
VRS Membership (no ARS Quarterly Journal)	\$25.00
Associate Membership (member of another ARS Chapter in Canada)	\$10.00
Associate Membership (member of another ARS Chapter outside of Canada)	\$US 10.00

Advertising Rates

	1 month	3 months	8 months
Business card	\$10.00	\$25.00	\$50.00
$\frac{1}{4}$ page	\$25.00	\$67.50	\$160.00
$\frac{1}{2}$ page	\$40.00	\$108.00	\$256.00
full page	\$70.00	\$189.00	\$448.00

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact **Tony Clayton**
Tel: 604 921 7947 Email: tclayton@telus.net

News and Notes

Regarding last month's exposé on the ever-popular *Rhododendron* 'Elizabeth', long-time VRS member **Alleyne Cook** has provided something to add to our story. Readers should know that Alleyne is originally a New Zealander who worked at the famous Sunningdale Nursery in England in the early 1950s, before coming to settle in Canada.

"At Sunningdale, I couldn't get one to ship to New Zealand, yet they were in the United States. So I went to Bodnant, arriving at their railway station on a local branch line at 6:00 a.m. The porter took pity on me and invited me into the warm office. When the train returned and he went out to the platform, I examined the dispatch book. I had three goes at that book and the only nursery that I could see that obtained plants from Bodnant was Reathes.

"At Wisley that spring, I photographed their Bodnant 'Elizabeth'—a poor thing it was. Aberconway [Lord Aberconway, the owner of Bodnant and breeder of 'Elizabeth'] never gave his award plants to anyone, not even the RHS, of which he was president. After 'doing' Battleston Hill, I wandered over to the top of the rock garden, and looking down, saw a brilliant, dwarf red rhodo—the real "Elizabeth' FCC—planted in the open where no one could 'borrow' cuttings.

"Then I came to Vancouver in '55 and saw the junk being sold as 'Elizabeth'. I sent to Hilliers, and imported six 'Elizabeth' FCC and six 'Elizabeth Jenny' ['Jenny']. Those plants were the beginnings of what you see today: one went to Eugene, one is on 4th Avenue, the Greigs got two and Len Living, two. The Greigs' plants came back to Stanley Park [the Ted and Mary Greig *Rhododendron* Collection], although one was borrowed by a gent who lived on 11th Avenue. The remaining plant is in the Azalea Walk. It has never been pruned for cuttings in its 49 years, and is a perfect dome. It has never been crowded, so shows exactly how 'Elizabeth' grows in the best conditions."

SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2003

I am sure it is obvious to everyone that determining dates for the Species Study Days cannot be arranged to meet everybody's needs. An attempt has been made to avoid the major ARS activities, including the ARS national meeting at Olympia May 1-4; the Vancouver and Victoria truss shows and the planned coach garden tour to Portland, May long weekend (May 17 – 19). **Steve Hootman** also has many commitments already scheduled for next year.

We can now confirm that the Species Study Days will be held on the following days: **March 8th, March 29th, April 19th** (Easter weekend) and **May 31st** (all Saturdays).

The format will be similar to the programme established last year and consist of several hours of instruction and review in the classroom, followed by the balance of each session examining the study material in the garden.

The sessions will start at 10:00 a.m. and finish about 4:00 p.m. The fee for the programme will be \$140.00 CDN and the proceeds will be used to provide an honorarium for Steve Hootman and a donation to the RSF.

Preference will be given to individuals who are able to commit for the entire four sessions, but it should be possible to accommodate those who are able to attend only some of the sessions. Last year we were able to accommodate all participants and provide refunds for those unable to attend sessions because of ill health.

If the programme is not fully subscribed by February 15th, an invitation will be extended to other Districts in order to fill the void. Arrangements for carpooling will be organized prior to each session.

continued next page.

Species Study Days from page 5...

Participants from Vancouver Island are especially welcome to attend. In order to defray the additional costs that Island members would incur, we are very optimistic that arrangements can be made with a local member to provide overnight accommodation for the Friday evening prior to the study sessions.

Please confirm ASAP and forward a cheque to:

Mike Bale

33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford, BC, V2S 1S2
Tel: 604 853 8839

lu_zhu@telus.net

Dear Friends of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society,

We are an international conservation organisation working in an area in Eastern Nepal called the Tinjure Milke Jaljale for rhododendron conservation through community involvement. This area has 25 recorded species of rhododendron—the highest natural rhododendron species diversity recorded in any area of Nepal. We are curious to know if it could be one of the highest species diversities for the world, as well. I wonder if any of your members might be able to help us find this out?

We are also interested to seek partnership with other organisations to establish a rhododendron park in the area. I would be grateful if you could help us find potential collaborating agencies (for research, community development or even just to promote eco-tourism in the area).

If you would like more information about our work, please do visit our website at www.iucnnepal.org

Sincerely,

Sameer Karki

IUCN Nepal
P.O. Box 3923,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Raffle Gabble

You will see one minor change at our February VRS meeting. On a trial basis, raffle tickets will be sold at the membership table between 7:00 and 7:30 only. **Jim Hall** and our membership team will ask you to purchase tickets when you enter the building and pick up your name tag. Please respond positively because the revenue from raffle ticket sales helps defray the cost of the Floral Hall rental.

And a reminder to all members: Please bring items each month for the raffle table. We especially depend on those of you who propagate rhododendrons or other perennials.

However, any items will be gratefully accepted. How about donating a gardening book, preserves, a bouquet, a framed plant print, garden crafts, a package of seeds, an 8 × 10 photo of yourself (just kidding)? Be creative!

If you can't find anything for the raffle table, your help would be appreciated in supplying a plate of goodies for the refreshments table.

Ron Knight



Rhododendron barbatum, a native of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and S. Tibet, 2700 – 3700 m elev

Rhododendron barbatum from page 1...

Winter flowering plants often have an extremely long blooming period in the Vancouver area, as the weather is often moist and cool (not cold), with little wind for several weeks at a time. These conditions tend to slow down physiological processes and also prevent tissues, such as flowers, from desiccating. In some years at UBC, *R. barbatum* individuals have been known to open their flowers over more than two months, the oldest trusses still looking spectacular through weeks of alternating drizzly rain and light frosts. Opening later, as they sometimes do, trusses expand more in the warmth (but are also quicker to deflate), and the translucent, cherry red ribbon-like bud scales are a more prominent feature.

Douglas Justice