

Fifth International Rhododendron Conference

An exciting event staged by:

The German Rhododendron Society, Bremen

The International Rhododendron Union

The International Society for Horticultural Science

The German Rhododendron Society is proud to invite you to the Fifth International Rhododendron Conference to Bad Zwischenahn in May 18-24, 1992.

The conference will be focussed on applied rhododendron research. Topics concerning propagation, cultivation methods, phytopathology and breeding will be presented and discussed. General botanic and systematic aspects of rhododendrons will be included.

The conference will take place in the centre of one of the largest and most famous rhododendron growing areas in the world. More than 350 tree nurseries with a growing area of more than 3000 ha. will give you an impression of the broad selection. Highly specialised nurseries for the cultivation of rhododendrons and conifers, public and private parks and interesting arboreta surround the location of the conference. The residence of the German Rhododendron Society in the middle of the famous Rhododendron Park in Bremen is as close as 50 km. to Bad Zwischenahn. All participants of the conference will enjoy the wonderful flowering season of rhododendrons at the end of May.

LOCATION

The conference will be held in the town of Bad Zwischenahn in the county named "Ammerland" at the lake "Zwischenahner Meer".

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

The scientific programme includes four sessions on two days with different topics. Each lecture session will be opened by an invited speaker, followed by contributed papers. Four days will be reserved for professional excursions. The tours will be accompanied by special guides. Besides university institutes and research centres you will visit botanical gardens, parks and tree nurseries.

PRELIMINARY CONTRIBUTIONS: PAPERS AND POSTERS

Backhaus, G. F.: Biological control of *Othiorhynchus sulcatus* by use of entomopathogenic nematodes (*Heterorhabditis*) in nurseries.

Phytophthora citricola - cause of an important shoot rot of rhododendrons and azaleas.

Cylindrocladium scorpiarium causing wilt disease in rhododendrons.

Azalea-flower blight, caused by *Ovulinia azaleae* (Poster).

Ballantyne, D.: The influence of gibberellin and photosynthetic capacity on shoot growth of hardy azaleas growing under glass.

Bojarczuk, K.: In-vitro rapid propagation of rhododendron cultivars from callus and bud cultures.

Briggs, B.: Paper and slide presentation on propagation of rhododendrons in-vitro.

Fang, M.-Y.: A study on rhododendrons of China.

Hieke, K.: Flower characters in cultivars of evergreen large-flowered rhododendrons.

Heurzel, J.: Problems and investigations on indoor azaleas (*R. simsii*).

Kron, K.: Rhododendron systematics and cpDNA.

Mertens, M.: Growth regulation of large-flowered rhododendrons (Poster).

Nielsen, D.: Control strategies for black weevil and rhododendron borer.

Obdrzalek, J.: Propagation of deciduous azaleas - practical aspects and growth regulators. (Poster).

Pradhan, K. C.: Distribution and ecological habitats of Sikkim Himalayan rhododendrons and their conservation.

Schutz, J.: Rhododendrons in South Australia.

Seithe, A.: Poster on rhododendron systematics.

Spoelberch, de P.: Large scale cultivation of rhododendrons in private collections.

Current rhododendron research at the University Hannover, Institute of Fruit and Nursery Science:

- 1 Micropropagation and adaptation of rhododendron hybrids. Stock-plant treatment; in-vitro/ex-vitro rooting and rejuvenation are evaluated.
- 2 Morphological and anatomical changes in leaves of rhododendrons transferred from in-vitro to ex-vitro.
- 3 Optimization of rhododendron cutting propagation by fog systems.
- 4 Comparison of different propagation methods using tissue culture, cuttings, graftings and "stenting". In this experiment, juvenile and conventional rootstock/scion combinations are tested using different propagation systems.
- 5 Long term growth comparison of rhododendrons from different propagation systems. The field trials are designed for a 10 years project

with 31 hybrids, 3 replications with 9 plants, for each propagation method.

- 6 Rejuvenation of old hybrids from the last century, which are difficult to propagate, and which are growing straggly. Improved cutting propagation by in-vitro cultured stockplants for a regained natural habit are objects of the investigation.
- 7 Amelioration of lime soils for rhododendron cultivation with bark additives. Testing of in-vitro plants in this substrate.
- 8 Biochemical and anatomical methods for variety identification in rhododendrons. Thin layer and HPLC chromatography were used for the identification of flower, leaf, and wood samples.
- 9 Rhododendron bibliography: More than 2500 titles are filed in a data base. All bibliography data can be searched by keywords (and keyword combinations). Abstracts are also available. Should be completed and printed before 5th IRC 1992.
- 10 N-metabolism of nursery soils and fertilizer problems in rhododendron nurseries.

Current rhododendron research at the Federal Research Institute for Horticultural Plant Breeding in Ahrensburg:

Breeding of lime tolerant rootstocks for rhododendrons. In-vitro selection of 10 lime tolerant specimens by screening nearly 3 million seedlings. Clones are being tested in limed soils and test graftings have been made with the main selection.

BRANCH NEWS

Irish Branch Annual Visit, May 1991

The annual visit of the Irish Branch took place on May 19th to two members' gardens in the Dublin area. We met at Dr. Lavery's garden in Sandyford. The garden of some 3 acres is situated on a sloping site, some 750 feet above sea level with views to the Dublin mountains and the sea. Laid out in an informal manner with shrubberies around the perimeter of the garden, island beds and rockeries were planted with rhododendrons and other shrubs. Of the dwarf rhododendrons *R. campylogynum* in its various forms, and *R. keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy' were in flower. *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* 'Roylei', *R. Salmon Trout* and *R. Lady Chamberlain* were in bloom and young foliage showed little sign of Powdery Mildew. A vivid deep pink hybrid *R. Lende* was laden with blossoms. A tender hybrid *R. Striped Lady* was also covered in white flowers which had a pink strip running through the flower. In the front garden, *R. yakushimanum* had been planted with its 'Seven Dwarf Hybrids'.

While rhododendrons were our main interest we could not but notice hedges of *Eucalyptus*, a superb plant of *Laurus nobilis*, wreathed in yellow flowers, and a deep blue flowered *Rosmarinus officinalis*. In a second area of the garden, recent plantings of large leaved rhododendrons *R. falconeri*, *R. macabeanum*, *R. sinogrande*, some home propagated, were growing well. A large pond in the second portion of the garden was home to many exotic wildfowl.

The ornithological theme was continued in the second garden we visited, but this time in the form of rhododendron hybrids. David Davison grows a range of species and hybrid rhododendrons in his suburban garden where a collection of dwarf species and hybrids *R. Egret*, *R. Pipit*, *R. Curlew*, *R. fastigiatum* and *R. trichostomum* had grown together in a raised bed to create a range of leaf colour and habit. In a shrubbery on the right hand side of the garden, *R. falconeri*, *R. May Day*, *R. edgeworthii*, *Camellia 'Donation'* and *C. Inspiration* had reached large proportions. *Rhododendron St. Beward* is a favourite in the garden and is regularly propagated. Among the tender rhododendrons, *R. fletcherianum* and *R. leucaspis* have proved successful. Azaleas were represented in the collection, with a striking combination of the vivid orange of *R. Satan*, *R. Gibraltar* and the mauve of *R. Fastuosum Flore Pleno*. *R. camtschaticum*, which is rare in Irish collections, has been in cultivation for several years.

We enjoyed our visit to the gardens and were appreciative of the refreshments offered by both families.

M.F.

South East Branch

PROPAGATION WEEKEND - JULY 1990

On July 21st and 22nd last year, an absorbing and highly instructive weekend was spent by twenty members of the group at Leonardslee Gardens Nurseries, Lower Beeding, W. Sussex.

The weekend, organised by the South East Branch, was led by Mr. Alan Clark.

It covered in detail those aspects of propagation that could easily be practised by rhododendron enthusiasts and which, (without the aid of elaborate and expensive equipment), have yielded a high success rate for Alan Clark himself.

More importantly it fully lived up to its 'Workshop' title by providing participants with invaluable 'hands on' experience under expert tuition.

The two days began with Saturday morning being devoted to the collection of propagation material; a selection process which taught the group how to take the right sort of cutting.

The afternoon was used learning how to prepare cuttings for striking under Nearing frames. Among these were the inevitable lepidotes and evergreen azaleas, but species such as *haematodes*, *griersonianum* and *beanianum* were also attempted.

At this stage we learnt that even very thin cuttings taken from Grandia sub-sect. rhododendrons stood a fair chance of rooting.

The material selected for grafting was sealed in polythene bags and placed in a refrigerator overnight in readiness for the following day.

The Sunday was devoted to learning and practising essential knife skills. First on spare wood and then, as confidence and competence grew, on genuine understocks - mainly 'Cunningham's White' or *ponticum*. These were used to support a variety of scions, which were veneer, side, cleft or saddle grafted.

Among grafts made, were *barbatum*, *yakushimanum*, *sidereum*, *thomsonii*, *rroratum*, and *rubescens*. All in all, the Branch prepared approximately 500 cuttings and made 140 grafts.

The weekend was concluded with a discussion on the aftercare of propagated material, focussing in particular on the promotion of health and vigour up to the time of planting-out and beyond.

We shall not know the success rate until this spring, when the party returns to the nursery to collect their plants for potting up.

Apart from secateurs, grafting knife and a bench chair from which to work, Alan Clark provided all other materials including understocks at a nominal price. He also provided nursery space and supervisory care of all propagated material.

In terms of the 'Workshop' idea, the weekend was initially seen as a 'pilot' event. It was so successful and enjoyable however, that there is clearly scope to repeat it or use it as a model for further propagation weekends that could be organised by Branches in other parts of the country.

Alan Clark has indicated his willingness to help, and can be contacted at the Nursery. Tel. No: 0403 891412.

B.W.

Wessex Branch

1991 started with a first class lecture by John Bond, MVO VMH on the national collections at Windsor, together with some excellent slides interposed with some early black and white slides to give a before and after situation of planting.

Our next lecture by Tony Schilling was on Wakehurst Place, which the branch was to visit on 28th April. We were told in the lecture that Wakehurst had lost some 15,000-20,000 trees and how very noticeable this was when our group visited the garden in April. Wakehurst though is certainly fighting back with new and exciting planting schemes.

After leaving Wakehurst our group went on to David Clulow's garden, Tilgates at Bletchingly, Surrey, where we were greeted at the gate by Graham Rankin and his wife Frances. With help from Frances, Graham maintains this seven acre garden, together with the large fully stocked greenhouses, to an immensely high standard. David Clulow himself kindly showed our group around and his infectious enthusiasm for his garden was certainly transmitted to all present.

So much of interest is there in the garden, that it is difficult to pick one particular plant, but perhaps *Magnolia 'Iolanthe'* should get a mention, it flowers like *M. campbellii*, but at a very early age. Another fine *Magnolia* was *M. 'Snow White'* which achieved an Award of Merit when shown by David Clulow at the RHS show two days later. A fascinating visit and our thanks to David Clulow.

The Annual Show and Sale took place at the Branch Secretary's house on May 12th, and we were again fortunate in having Mr. John Bond to judge, plus a nice day.

The winners of the cup for the best in show were Mr. and Mrs. Ted Millais with *R. 'Lem's Cameo'*, a very popular win in view of all the help and support Mr. and Mrs. Millais give to the branch.

Among other winners in a show with more entries than in preceding years were:

Mr. R. Beard *R. yakushimanum*, *R. 'Siren'*, *Fothergilla gardeni*

Lady Adam Gordon *R. rigidum*, *R. 'Ightham Yellow'*, *R. 'Purpurea Elegans'*

Mr. D. Radcliff *R. 'Hydon Dawn'*

Mr. and Mrs. Linney *R. 'Cunningham's White'*

Mr. A. George *R. vaseyi* (sub-sect. Azalea)

Mr. R. Barber Evergreen Azalea 'Alice' (*malvatica* × *kaempferi*)

H.E.

South West Branch

GARDEN VISITS

After early mist, April 13th turned out to be a lovely warm, sunny day for 50 members to visit Trehane and Trewithen in Cornwall.

David Trehane gave us a warm welcome at his peaceful, compartmented garden. Of course he had many interesting camellias to show us as well as many other fine plants and trees. A huge example of the climbing *Staunaria hexaphylla* on the south wall of the ruined Queen Anne house was about to open its perfumed, ivory flowers. We saw *M. 'Iolanthe'* in yellow flower surrounded by a tall hedge of *C. 'TipToe'* as well as the unregistered provisionally named *C. 'Contribution'* which David considers better than 'Donation', especially for smaller gardens. Other camellias which were looking well included 'Julia Hamiter' (needs sun), 'Royalty', 'Franciel', 'Senorita', 'Ave Maria' (huge demand) and the picotee, 'Margaret Davies'. We presented Rr. 'Odee Wright' and 'Katharine Fortescue' to David Trehane, thanking him for a very pleasant morning.

Trewithen is an ideal garden for the Branch to visit. Like a well-made wine it has balance, maturity and lingers in the memory. Michael Galsworthy greeted us at the head of George Johnstone's great glade. Then Nigel Holman, who wrote the authoritative booklet on the garden, showed us round. Amongst the towering magnolias we found the mother plant of all the *C. 'Donation'* in the world, in full bloom with perhaps 2,000 flowers. Nearby was the huge *R. macabeum* and several examples of the beautiful *R. 'Cornish Cross'*. Trewithen has suffered a severe loss of tree shelter but clearing and replanting after the storms is nearly complete. Head Gardener, Michael Taylor, is to be complimented on the comprehensive plant labelling. Nigel Wright presented Michael Galsworthy with *R. 'Taurus'* S.P.A. which, with its conspicuous red buds, is a fitting plant for such a fine garden. Nigel Holman was rewarded with *R. 'Tortoiseshell Orange'*. A search in the garden centre for plants to take home completed a memorable day.

On May 11th, 30 members motored to the Somerset/Dorset border to visit three totally different but complementary gardens: *Forde Abbey*, *Wayford Manor* and *Wayford Rhododendron Woods*.

Forde Abbey has been described as "the most complete Cistercian monastic building to survive as a home in all Britain". It provides a wonderful setting for the 30 acre, general interest garden which surrounds it. Mark Roper met us in the large, walled Victorian kitchen garden and then lead us through the post-war arboretum where we noted a Turkish Hazel, *Corylus colurna* with its symmetrical pyramidal form and striking, corky bark. *Pinus montezumae* was doing well. In the rockery walk we admired the leaf colour of *Mertensia asiatica* and a *Hydrangea petiolaris* of tree-like proportions. Passing the summer house made of live beech trees on the edge of the lake, we reached the bog garden with its large collection of Asiatic primulas. At the head of the long, double herbaceous borders David Quicke thanked our host for an interesting tour and presented a large specimen of *R. 'Isabel Pierce'*. Rare and interesting plants were to be found in the Abbey Nursery, where Alan Lewis was kept busy with brisk sales to our members.

The gardens at Wayford Manor were laid out in Edwardian times by Harold Peto, in somewhat Italian renaissance style, to complement the stone-built Elizabethan Manor House. There are three terraces with stone balustrades and steps, a three-arched loggia and three secret gardens interspersed with mature and mellow yew hedges. The gardens disappear down the hill towards a rural aspect of the River Axe.

Robin Goffe welcomed us and introduced us to Michael Charles, his head gardener, who took us around the gardens. Whilst the upper garden is formal the lower part is quite informal. Magnolias, rhododendrons and acers abounded. David Quicke identified *R. davidsonianum* whilst Richard Scrivener was able to label *R. 'Chevalier Felix de Sauvage'*. After tea and cakes in the courtyard, Frank Lavin presented Mr. & Mrs. Goffe with *R. 'Doc'* - one of the hardiest *yakushimanum* hybrids.

We then went down the lane to Wayford Rhododendron Woods. Here Michael and Felicity Belfield were ready to show us many mature rhododendrons in full flower. These included *Rr. fortunei*, 'Boddaertianum', 'Loder's White', *oreotropes* and 'Queen of Hearts'.

It was an entrancing scene with shafts of sunlight shining through new pale green beech leaves onto drifts of bluebells. Richard Scrivener was in his element trying to identify rhododendrons with lost labels. He found 'Albatross', its pink form, 'George Hardy', 'Madame Carvalho' with its olive flash and 'Pilgrim' characteristically layering in all directions. A heavily, corrugated leaf of another 'lost label' rhododendron was taken away for further investigation. Richard thanked our hosts, presenting *R. 'Grace Seabrook'* as a memento of a most enjoyable visit.

OTHER NEWS

We now have a list of 27 members who propagate rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias and are happy to swap plants and seedlings on a one-to-one basis. List available on application to Nigel Wright.

FORTHCOMING EVENT

Our autumn meeting will be held at The Riverside Inn, Bovey Tracey on Friday evening, 22 November. Peter Howarth will give a slide talk on the restoration of the gardens at Muncaster Castle.

N.W.

Further Branch reports will appear in the next issue.

Ed.

A Light-Hearted Note from G. Donald Waterer

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

More than thirty years have passed since the late Mrs. Hannah Gubbay and her chauffeur, on a fine autumn afternoon might have been observed in the wilder parts of the Knap Hill Nursery raiding the delicious blackberries for which that establishment was noted. With permission, I might add. They would have driven over from the farm in Trent Park in an open sports car at the maximum speed which the law would allow. One year, soon after the Chelsea Show, Mrs. Gubbay appeared with her sister, Lady Cholmondeley, a frail but high-spirited old lady. The chauffeur was driving a Daimler saloon. Mrs. Gubbay wanted to give her sister a specimen rhododendron as a birthday present and invited me to drive with them to Lowlands, an area devoted mainly to rhododendrons and azaleas. In the middle of a thicket of brambles, Mrs. Gubbay spotted one of those "Old Waterer hardy hybrids", splendidly in flower. This was the plant her sister must have. Although it was a mere formality, Lady Cholmondeley, perhaps a little short-sighted, must take a closer look. But how could this be achieved? A simple matter, Mrs. Gubbay declared. Her sister did not weigh very much and Mr. Waterer and the chauffeur would have no difficulty in carrying her to the plant. In great fear of tripping in the brambles, the chauffeur and I made a fireman's lift upon which the old lady sat, one arm firmly around each neck. The return journey safely accomplished, Lady Cholmondeley subsided into her seat in the car, quivering with laughter. Yes, that was a splendid plant and she would be delighted to accept it for her birthday.

More comments on those drought years

From G. KNOTT Upper Shepley Farmhouse, Littleheath Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcs. B60 1HT.

1989 was a disastrous year with a severe drought. It was made worse with the early imposition of a hosepipe ban. Watering some four acres with cans is a near hopeless task and losses were unavoidable. This is a sandy free draining soil. During this year it was the small leaved rhododendrons that appeared the most vulnerable. Large leaved types show stress by curling their leaves whereas the small leaved ones develop brown leaves by which time they are on their way out.

1990 was a catastrophe. It started well with the rhododendrons budded up as never before. January gave us a fine display with *Rr. 'Nobleanum'* and *sichotense* followed in February with *Rr. moupinense* and *cilpinense*. *R. fargesii* was especially fine and we even had *R. arboreum*, pink and white, unfrosted. Expectations were dashed by a 10° frost in early April. This not only blasted buds but also caused severe bark split in fully two thirds of the rhododendrons. Surprisingly this did not kill the plants although it probably made them less able to cope with the drought which followed. This year we were spared a hosepipe ban.

Losses in 1990 were worse than in 1989, possible because plants had been weakened by the previous drought. It is difficult to give a definitive opinion on relative drought resistance as every effort was made to water when bushes showed signs of stress. However, small leaved rhododendrons again

suffered and we lost some *Rr. impeditum*, *russatum*, and *scintillans* species. *R. williamsianum* proved difficult to keep alive and one large bush died. *R. 'Elizabeth'* suffered generally and several were lost. Two *R. 'Fabia Tangerine'* specimens died, also *Rr. choremia*, *decorum* and one or two *R. augustinii*. We also lost a number of azaleas. Mostly these were not watered.

It was noticeable that *R. fargesii* drooped its leaves very quickly when short of water but recovered in a few minutes when watered. *R. calophyllum* also quickly showed stress but soon recovered with water. Many other rhododendrons developed dead branches but survived in part. e.g. *R. chaetomallum* and several of *R. cinnabarinum*. After the autumn rains a number of apparently dead rhododendrons started shooting at the base, e.g. *Rr. 'Blue Tit'*, *russatum* and we now wait to see how they will fare this year. We have delayed cutting out apparently dead branches but would welcome advice on whether severe cutting back would help recovery. It seems possible that if roots have been damaged a reduction in top growth might assist recovery.

R. racemosum seems to be drought hardy as does *R. yakushimanum* and its hybrids. *R. bureavii* survived. Camellias seemed unaffected by the drought but we lost *Magnolia sprengeri diva*. *A. M. sinensis* appeared dead at the end of 1989 but has since produced one live shoot.

1990 ended with heavy snow in December which did considerable damage with Scots pines, hawthorns and prunus, etc. suffering broken branches. Fortunately the rhododendrons escaped damage.

We have now acquired a Kemp compost shredder and hope that heavy mulching will improve matters.

Notes on saving rhododendron seed

Successful propagation of rhododendrons from seed may be marred by mould development prior to the time of germination. Despite the use of copper salts, potassium permanganate or more sophisticated organically based fungicides, any seedlings developing in a mould infected medium may show little growth potential.

Without mould contamination, most rhododendron seed has protracted viability and the degree of infection is apparently related to moisture content of the seed. Harvesting and storage conditions are obviously of paramount importance and the provision of dry seed might obviate that requirement of sowing very early in the season to ensure good germination¹.

Gathered in October, if necessary when still green², capsules are best stored in paper envelopes within a dry atmosphere and a centrally heated room containing no plants seems ideal. After about eight weeks, seed may be removed from capsules and cleaned, bearing in mind the necessity to avoid any possible cross contamination, flaming sieves between batches and providing a fresh surface such as a sheet of paper for inspecting each sample.

In Europe, seed will invariably have a fairly high moisture content at the time of gathering and no delay should occur between harvesting and drying, unless sown immediately. In the wild, this may not be practical and the equipment of envelopes, a suitable sealed container and desiccant such as Silica Gel might prove useful.

Finally, utilisation of a fungicidal seed dressing such as a salicylate derivative might provide a degree of protection, but scientific trials are required on this aspect.

G.H.T.

1 The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1971, p.68.

2 Dwarf Rhododendrons - Peter A. Cox 1973, p.262.

Greetings Cards

The Group is again printing a greetings card and following the kind offer by Mrs. J. E. Jack to reproduce a water-colour by her of azalea *R. indicum*. Quality cards 8" x 6" with the azalea flowers natural size, they are priced at 5 cards for £3.00 (with envelopes) or £6.50 per 10 by post. It is hoped to have them available shortly at Branch meetings or by post from David N. Farner Esq., Corton Lodge, 7 Burntwood Avenue, Emerson Park, Hornchurch, Essex RM11 3JD. Inscribed 'With Best Wishes' the cards are ideal for seasonal greetings or use at other times.