



R. emarginatum.

THE VIREYA VENTURE

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The 1994 Pacific Region International Rhododendron Conference will be held at Burnie, Tasmania from Friday 28th to Monday 31st October inclusive.

The theme will be 'Rhododendrons in a Milder Climate' and the Speakers will be Dr George Argent, Warren Berg, Dr David de Little, Ken Gillanders, Mike Peterson, Dr John Rouse, Graham Smith, Graham Snell, Dr Noel Sullivan, Dr Peter Valder, and Dr Elizabeth Williams. There will be tours of the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden and Lapoinya Rhododendron Garden during the Conference.

Following this there will be sightseeing tours from Burnie which will conclude at Hobart on November 5th. The New Zealand Rhododendron Association annual meeting will be held after this in the Hamilton area of the North Island for those who wish to continue. This promises to be a very interesting experience, in part or in whole, and there will certainly be much to hear about Vireyas - from the history of the speakers.

Further details and registration forms may be obtained from the Convenor, Neil Jordan, P.O.Box 39, Burnie, Tasmania 7320, phone (004) 351 298.

If you are in Wollongong call in to have a look at the Rhododendron Park, Parrish Avenue, Mt. Pleasant. This will be open at weekends from April 9th until October. Also the Friends of the Wollongong Botanic Garden will have their conducted walks at 2pm on the first Sunday of each month, except May, when they have their annual plant sale.

An enquiry from a new subscriber indicated that some confusion appears to have inadvertently arisen over the relation of this newsletter to the Australian Rhododendron Society. The only connection is a common interest in Vireyas, and subscription to this newsletter has no dependance on the Society nor commitment to it - and vice versa.

The Editor, P.O.Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500.

J.Clyde Smith.

R. emarginatum

Some months ago Brian Clancy wrote to ask if I had any information on R. emarginatum, a recent introduction to Victoria which had not previously been introduced into Australia. After obtaining much help from Lyn Craven and Eric Jordan I finally had three descriptions and two illustrations.

The first description was printed in 1910 by The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in their 'Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information' (surely an intriguing title) from close examination of some Chinese rhododendrons by Messrs W.B. Helmsley and E.H. Wilson. They determined that two other Vireyas described and found near R. emarginatum were all the same species.

Later it was described in 'Rhododendrons of China' in 1974 by the Beijing Botanical Research Institute, and an English translation of this was produced in 1980 by the Am.R.S. and the Species Foundation. The third different description was published in 'Rhododendrons of Yunnan'. R. emarginatum was first found in Yunnan but it also occurs in Vietnam in Lao-Kay province and in Kweichow (Guizhou). It appears to be related to R. kawakamii of Taiwan.

Seed was brought to Australia in 1991 by Bob Cherry of Paradise Plants and some seedlings have been distributed. It will be interesting to see if it thrives here. The following description is an abbreviated version of the much more technical descriptions of this species:- A shrub 3 to 4 metres high with scabrous branchlets. The leaves are in whorls of 3 or 4 which are broad and emarginate - i.e. with a shallow notch at the end as if the tip had been removed as shown in the illustration on the first page - hence the name of the plant. The flowers are small, yellow, and campanulate about 13mm long with five lobes. They are solitary on the tips of the branches.

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Well, to get to the weather at last, the week of fires left a lot of Vireyas with badly burnt leaves and killed a few of the smaller plants. Then a few showers gave us 45mm in January and 122mm in February, both well below average. March came good with 220mm and some of the Vireyas have put on their best show ever. Triumphans, Golden Charm, and a hybrid of R. longiflorum were the most outstanding of all. Golden charm is a N.Z. unregistered cross of R. macgregoriae x Princess Alexandra.

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Some of the smaller leaved and compact growers like St. Valentine, R. gracilentum etc. need to be grown in a hanging basket to be seen at their best. But it does not have to be the usual basket, the wire frame of the basket can be unfolded by taking out the two crossed bottom wires and used to hang a pot. It may be inverted first if desired. Pots can be changed around easily and the same watering period as other pots will be retained.

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Rh. 'LAWRENCE'

From Peter Sullivan, San Francisco, California.

"In your #13 you mention the registration of Rh. 'Lawrence' (R. lochae x R. pseudonitens). I have found it to be a clone of unusual promise. When I arrived at Strybing in October of 1965, the Director, Jock Brydon, told this neophyte that a new 'issue' of the plant kingdom had started arriving in 1961 and about that time were coming in in considerable numbers. His advice and charge was that they had exceptional potential use as terrestrial plants for temperate California - they had up to that date been generally Conservatory plants.

The main advice that he gave me was that if this was to be achieved we would have to lean on a programme of hybridizationfor the primary reason of getting vigour into the more desirable epiphytes, where the greater interest lay Nothing or no cultivar better evidences this as the word of a horticultural 'prophet' than in 'Lawrence'. After nineteen years the parent plant is now eight feet tall and going. For you who know the habit of R. lochae and R. commonae (to which species I understand R. pseudonitens is synonymous) it is a demonstration almost unbelievable.

A bit more information - it has been evident to me that certain of the high elevation species have developed, for want of a better word, a tap root type system which genetically gives this cultivar a very vigorous root habit. The information in the Am.R.S. Journal #43 attests to it frost hardiness. Aside from that I have found it to be a plant, especially for a rhododendron, to present a fine 'arboreal' habit, even at times developing interesting doglegs. I don't want to oversell this cultivar because it is basically a terrestrial in genes and does not present the 'charm' of the epiphytes in flower truss arrangement."

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Rh. LOCHAE

By coincidence, a note from Dick Ottaway of Pymble, N.S.W. is of appropriate interest to the above, as well as in its own right.

"When Len Weber died about three years ago, his collection of bonsai was first offered for sale to his associates in the Azalea Bonsai Group, before being auctioned. I was fortunate to acquire his R. lochae, an advanced specimen in a 25cm (10") celadon pot. He was meticulous in his labelling and the label read R. lochae 1955. On the reverse was written "to green pot 1988". I was with him when he potted it and I obtained a couple of cuttings, one of which struck. It remained in a small pot until 1992 without making much significant growth.

Having read of the suggestion to grow Vireyas in elkhorns in a past copy of the Vireya Venture, I decided to give it a try and have been delighted with the results. The plant has doubled in size and has two trusses of 3 and 4 flowers, some, alas having

been chewed by grasshoppers. But Len's plant is flourishing and has been flowering since early January, apparently revelling in the heat of the past six weeks. (written on Feb.12th)
I've counted 28 trusses of 3/4 flowers and there are still a few more to open. If the plant is true to label it would be almost 40 years old!

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Hazelwoods' nursery of Epping, N.S.W. was very prominent in the Sydney Horticultural world, particularly for some thirty years after the war. They introduced many azaleas and camellias and other trees and shrubs. Eric Jordan worked there in their early years and tells of their growing R.lochae from seed that they obtained from a Mr J.Martin in 1947.
This seed came from Bellenden Ker and Mr Webber, who lived in that area, may well have obtained his plant from them?

Whilst on the subject of lochae it is interesting that it is the parent of many of our heat and sun tolerant hybrids as well as a parent of 'Lawrence'. But Lawrence is credited with being hardy to 25°F (-4°C) and it might be helpful to know from where the lochae parent originated.

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Powdery Mildew

An article on mildew by Fred Minch in the Am.R.S.journal Vol.48 No.1 1994 refers to powdery mildew on cold climate rhododendrons, where it is now of major concern. We have not seen it here to my knowledge on Asiatic rhododendrons but it can be too common on Vireyas so some of his suggestions may be of interest.

These are: to use a systemic fungicide on new growth, later, to use sulphur or a similar type of contact fungicide, to beware of periods of drought and nutritional deficiencies (perhaps from competing trees etc.) as these make plants susceptible. Slow release fertilisers and foliar feeding with magnesium sulphate were recommended as a preventative.

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Western Flower Thrips

Mentioned some months ago in the S.M.H. the N.S.W.Dept. of Agriculture has detailed the arrival of a new pest, the Western Flower Thrip. This is common overseas, in North America and New Zealand it is endemic and has been established for 60 years. There it is mainly a pest of greenhouse crops, but it may severely damage field crops.

It first appeared in W.A. last year, and then in Victoria and N.S.W. It will be a serious pest of greenhouse crops, sucking sap from flowers and bud tips and also spreading plant virus diseases. It has developed resistance to almost every chemical used against it. So far there has been no specific reference to its occurrence on rhododendrons.

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FLOWERING VIREYAS with RESTRICTED WATER AVAILABILITY

Dr. Geoff Atherton of Mt. Glorious, Queensland, has some interesting advice:-

"I have been growing Vireyas for four years in the area of Mt. Glorious. This is near to Brisbane and has large tracts of subtropical rainforest near our house. Our elevation is 600 metres and our usual rainfall should be about 60 inches of rain in normal years, but it has been less in the last few years. We have now planted about 200 Vireyas. I have always tried to plant them in slightly raised mounds even though our land is steeply inclined. We have always planted them into a mixture of local soil with about 5 litres of a mix of sand, peat moss, and fine pine bark mixed in with each plant.

Our main restriction has been that of water availability. Because we are on tank water we can only water once a week and sometimes less frequently. I think that two things have helped us. Our block is heavily overgrown with the exotic weed 'Wandering Jew'. At first we tried to clear it, but we soon gave up and now it is given freedom to grow all over our garden. I am now quite certain that it is more an advantage than a disadvantage. It certainly keeps the roots of the Vireyas cool and reduced, hugely, the need to water by slowing evaporation. Because it is so shallow rooting I don't believe that it significantly competes with the Vireyas. It needs to be pulled back from the small plants every 3 to 4 weeks to avoid smothering them, but this is unnecessary once the plants gain height.

More importantly, it creates a living mulch for our plants and there is always a few centimetres of decomposing wandering jew and trapped leaf litter. I am certain that I would have lost more plants through drying out without this carpet of living mulch.

We have planted many of our Vireyas under the cover of banks of tree ferns - Cyathea cooperi. These provide excellent shade in summer and I cut back their fronds severely in April/May. If the plants can tolerate full winter sun, then I remove all of the fronds of the ferns. The huge fronds make an excellent addition to the mulch around the Vireyas. Importantly, this trimming also cuts down on the water intake that would otherwise hasten the drying out that might occur during our winter. Also if particular plants are looking as though they can tolerate more sun in summer it is easy to cut off the fern fronds that are giving the Vireya its morning shade.

I have not yet seen any evidence that these tree ferns are competing for nutrition with the vireyas but if so it is very easy to interrupt the ferns fibrous roots by dividing with a shovel. So far we have lost very few plants. We still see occasional plants with iron deficiency in our soil but a single application of iron chelates has given long term correction. We fertilize with a liberal application of blood and bone every three months.

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WANDERING JEW

There are two rather similar plants in our garden that are generally called 'Wandering Jew.' Both of these are in the Commelinaceae family, one is *Tradescantia albiflora*, the true Wandering Jew from South America. It has white flowers with long stems sending out shallow roots from the nodes, and prefers shaded places. The other is a native of our coasts and adjacent plateaus, named *Commelina cyanea*. It has blue flowers and a very similar appearance and habit to Wandering Jew. It also roots from the nodes of the stems but has a much stronger and deeper root system, growing in sun and shade, a very aggressive and persistent weed.

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IRIAN JAYA

'Rhododendrons with Camellias and Magnolias 1994' from the Royal Horticultural Society has an interesting article on the collection of Vireyas in Irian Jaya by members of The Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh in September 1992. The author, Paul Smith, had been propagating and cultivating the Vireya collection at Edinburgh, for some years and was part of a team that included Dr George Argent.

The expedition was to the Baliem Valley in the Central Highlands and a number of species were seen that were not in the Edinburgh collection. These included *R.caespitosum*, *R.recurviflorum*, *R.haematophthalmum*, *R.inundatum*, *R.saxafragoides*, and *R.ciliilobum*,

R.caespitosum is of particular interest after the previous comments in the 'Vireya Venue' on the small size of *R.rubeiniflorum* as it is 'the smallest rhododendron in the world' growing epiphytically of the trunks of *Cyathea*. It has small pink flowers. It was named by Dr Sleumer and is illustrated in his book.

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In Memoriam

Dr.Herman Sleumer died last October 1st, aged 87. Dr Sleumer had followed his father into pharmacy and like many early pharmacists, as a legacy from the days when many remedies were herbal, he was interested in and studied botany, obtaining his doctorate in 1932. He then worked in Berlin and after the war, in Argentine and finally in 1956 in the Netherlands.

Here, on the staff of Foundation Flora Malesia he joined in their study of the plants found in Malesia. His 1966 excerpt from Flora Malesia - 'An Account of Rhododendron in Malesia' is still the essential handbook on Vireyas, while his expeditions into New Guinea resulted in many new species being sent to collectors in U.S.A. and Australia, as well as to Boskoop.

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