



The NEW ZEALAND
Rhododendron

FOREWORDS

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 New Zealand Rhododendron
Association

Last night as I posted a picture of *R.* 'Mrs GW Leak' on the NZRA Facebook page, I remembered that this was the first rhododendron that I was aware of, as a small child. It bloomed in a shady corner of my Gardiner grandparents' garden in Christchurch. The scene was set for a lifetime of rhododendron experiences!

In the garden at our home on the farm at 'Woodchester', *R.* 'Christmas Cheer' bloomed in winter beside the oak tree, and *R.* 'Roseum Elegans' flourished just outside the kitchen window. Shortly after my mother was freed from home schooling us, she started to plant a range of rhododendrons under the gum trees beside the house. As her enthusiasm grew, the garden expanded onto the north face of the scrub covered hill behind the house, with my father moving the fence line out in stages. A key memory is my mother setting us tasks in the garden; rhododendrons from 'Cross Hills'



R. 'Sapho', at Pukeiti

had to be planted - and later shifted! Downhill was generally OK, uphill more difficult, say my two brothers. In my first year of University I attended a workshop on propagation led by Ron Coker, and this opened the floodgates to the provision of new plants for 'Woodchester', some from scions gifted by Ron. Mother joined me in England, before I returned from my post-doctoral experience in Germany and we visited many, many superb gardens, with 'Exbury' featuring prominently in my memories.

After I moved to work in Palmerston North and started developing 'Omahuri' with my husband Lindsay, propagation increased, as our new property on a 10 acre section of a former tree and shrub nursery fortuitously included a propagation house! Rhododendrons

travelled to and fro across Cook Strait at Christmas time and our interest in species increased. Seed was sown – what excitement! We started attending NZRA conferences and made new friends. Our first visit to Pukeiti as members was in pouring rain, but this did not hold us back. Mother of course, needed an escort to ARS meetings, an opportunity I seized! The ARS seed exchange has been a treasure house, providing plants for both 'Omahuri' and 'Woodchester'.

Trips organized by Pukeiti followed and Lindsay and I have been lucky to have made several visits to China. Our favourite memory is a steep climb up the Cang Shan, where the swirling mists parted to reveal swathes of colour, including *R. lacteum*. We have Professor Guan Kaiyun to

thank for organizing this guided Yunnan trip just for the two of us.

So now as NZRA President, a Pukeiti Trust Board member, as well as a member of the Board of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, I can reflect on how my favourite plant enriches my life and has allowed me to make many friends both in New Zealand and internationally. This volume of 'The Rhododendron' provides an opportunity for all to share the experience of a number of writers who are similarly passionate about rhododendrons and their companion plants. Let's all celebrate the rhododendron on the 10th anniversary of 'The Rhododendron'!

Dr Sue Davies – *President New Zealand Rhododendron Association Inc.*

Last year marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Pukeiti by Douglas Cook and an enlightened group of rhododendron enthusiasts we now refer to as the Founders. What great vision these founders had to develop a Rhododendron Garden in a rainforest. Many people over those 70 years have contributed to the garden we have today.

- The *ex-situ* Rhododendron Conservation Strategy remains a major focus for the Board and continues to make progress.
- The Board continues to support the Massey University PhD student who is undertaking research on the DNA make up of *Maddenia* rhododendrons. Early results are starting to emerge, and these will be published in due course.
- As part of the Board's 5-year Rhododendron Conservation Plan, partner gardens have been identified at other locations outside Taranaki. These partner gardens have agreed to grow *ex-situ* rhododendron species that don't grow well at Pukeiti. This means we can broaden the range of rhododendrons that can be conserved through the *ex-situ* strategy.

- We are now into our fourth year of working with the TRC in supporting the work of the Collections Officer. Through a set of KPIs, many collections of endangered species rhododendrons have been identified and been the source of willingly provided plant material for growing on as part of the Board's *ex-situ* conservation strategy. The Board has also agreed to extend its financial support for this work for a further three years.

The Board held a successful strategy day in January 2022 to map out a forward programme for the Trust for the next ten years. The Board is to look at all areas of its operation and is progressing improvements which we will share with members when appropriate.

With support from the Board and a lot of personal hard work, Marion MacKay has managed to add a significant number of *vireya* rhododendron species to the MPI data base. These plants had been or are still growing in some collections within the country but for some reason were missed off the original list developed by MPI in the mid-1990s. Well done, Marion, and believe it or not Marion is now working on adding more to

the list over the next year or so. This work supports our *ex-situ* conservation project by verifying a legitimate list of plants, many still in cultivation, that have been in the country in the past, so aren't in MPI speak "a new organism".

Pukeiti has further developed its Facebook page so please become a friend and share it with others who are also interested in rhododendrons. We now have an accurate handle on membership numbers but unfortunately, as with most similar organisations numbers are continuing to head downwards.

TRC Gardens Manager Greg Rine retired mid-way through the year. Greg has been instrumental in improving the infrastructure and garden makeover since our partnership with the TRC commenced over 10 years ago. During that time many a robust discussion has been held over the continued improvement and investment in the garden by both the TRC and the Trust. I think you will agree that these have resulted in a substantially improved garden for all to visit. The Board looks forward to working with the new Gardens Manager Stuart Robinson and his team.

Gordon Bailey - *Chairman Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust*

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R. 'Ilam Cream' photo by Martin Wilkie

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The NEW ZEALAND Rhododendron

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The NZRA Council and the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Board are pleased to make material in this publication available for reprinting, with acknowledgement, in other horticultural publications. Credit must be given to both the author and this journal. Financial assistance has been provided by the Taranaki Regional Council through the partnership agreement with the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust. Thanks are extended to all the contributors, authors and those who have provided photographs and advice.

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INTRODUCTION

NEW ZEALAND HYBRID RHODODENDRONS

Lynn Bublitz

This edition of The New Zealand Rhododendron Journal features hybrid rhododendrons raised in New Zealand. It does not however include azaleas and vireyas.

Over the years many hybrids have been raised and much work has been done to record these. The International Register of Rhododendrons was established in 1958 by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and a number of New Zealand raised hybrids including 'Marquis of Lothian', raised in 1880 and 'Lovellock', raised in the 1950s were registered with the RHS by the Dunedin Rhododendron Group, although not until 1977. The registration process was a real hurdle. Graham Smith, then Director of Pukeiti, understanding this, and with the approval of the RHS, introduced a New Zealand Register in 1980. He was the first Registrar and was followed by Michael Cullinane; a position now filled by Brian Coker.

There are hundreds of named New Zealand raised hybrids, some resulting from a chance cross, others by a well thought out deliberate cross seeking defined forms and colours. The best of resulting hybrids that took the eye of the owner were named, often to reflect the plant's character, or honour a family member. Graham Smith's task was to encourage the registration of these plants – a time consuming project. There are now over 390 plants registered, including both hybrids and clones of species; but only about a third are propagated and available for purchase. A number of unregistered plants are also sold. This is a pity, because it is important that they are formally registered, particularly if commercially attractive, as they could subsequently be registered by a person other than the original grower or sold under a different name.

The process of registration requires colours to be checked, necessary forms to be completed, and once these forms are received by the RHS the name and details of the plant to be checked to ensure that the same name is not given to different plants. The name is then added to the international register.

Collating information about known New Zealand raised rhododendrons involved substantial work to produce the handbook called 'Crossing the Rubicon' which was edited by Kathryn Millar, Brian Coker and Joy Talbot and published by the Canterbury Rhododendron Group in 1998. This important work included all the registrations at that time and also listed many unregistered New

Zealand raised rhododendrons. The editors, in the introduction to 'Crossing the Rubicon' were "only too aware that this (publication) is a beginning rather than a definitive document".

Many hybrids have been raised since the book's publication and a number named and registered. The NZRA is working on compiling a list of these newer hybrids. Many are grown at Heritage Park, Orton Bradley, Tannock Glen and Pukeiti where they are being trialled so that their garden worth in different geographical areas can be ascertained.

Prior to this the NZRA and Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust had appointed assessors to consider plants which were registered, had been in cultivation for at least five years and growing in at least two distinct climatic districts for an Award of Distinction (AD). Plants receiving the award include 'Ilam Cream', 'Irene Stead', 'Kaponga', 'Lemon Lodge', 'Charisma', 'College Pink', 'Ilam Cerise', 'Lalique',

'Rubicon', 'Ivan D Wood' and 'September Snow'. The award has been discontinued but with all the new hybrids available it is time to consider its reintroduction.

It is interesting to note that three NZ rhododendrons, 'Ilam Violet', 'Ilam Cream', and 'Irene Stead' have received the RHS Award of Merit (AM) and 'Rubicon' the Award of Garden Merit (AGM). The latter is the best-known New Zealand rhododendron overseas.

This edition of the Journal highlights many of the better known, sometimes newer hybrids. We are certainly blessed.



R. 'Ina Hair'



MANY GREAT NEW ZEALAND HYBRID RHODODENDRONS

Joy O'Keefe

R. 'Gonda'

Despite thousands of hybrid rhododendrons having been developed around the world over the years, New Zealand hybridisers have continued striving to create a rhododendron that is even better than what is already out there. Many have achieved their goal whether it be with improved flower form, colour and fragrance, more attractive foliage, improved plant growth habit, ease of propagating and in some cases greater disease resistance.

New Zealand has 390 registered rhododendron hybrids and named selected species. It is known that there are several very good unregistered hybrids that have been sold through nurseries. Of those registered there have been a few that have not stood

the test of time, but the majority have proved to be worthwhile plants for the garden with some excelling. From our experience selling rhododendrons for 30 years, we would put the following NZ hybrids at the top of our list for popularity: *R. 'Lemon Lodge'*, *R. 'Rubicon'*, *R. 'Kaponga'*, *R. 'Ivan D. Wood'*, *R. 'Floral Dance'*, *R. 'Mary Tasker'*, *R. 'Ilam Cream'* and *R. 'Gwyneth Masters'*. Others very near to the top of the list: *R. 'Canary Song'*, *R. 'Petticoat Lane'*, *R. 'Ina Hair'*, *R. 'Holmeslee Pearl'*, *R. 'Kiwi Magic'*, *R. 'Alpine Meadow'*, *R. 'Plum Duff'*, *R. 'Bumble Bee'*, *R. 'High Society'*, *R. 'William King'*, and *R. 'Orchard Road'*. These are the NZ hybrids that have sold well in our nursery 'Woodbury Rhododendrons' but wholesalers and retailers in other areas of NZ I am sure would come up with a different list.

It has been noticeable that

rhododendrons raised locally can be more popular in that region. Maybe gardeners know that the plant will do well in their climate. For others there could be family connections. For several years now we have supplied rhododendrons for the Dunedin group's plant list. Dunedin members are certainly very loyal to their hybridisers, consistently ordering *R. 'Lovelock'*, *R. 'Robert Balch'*, *R. 'augustinii' 'Medlicott'* (not a registered hybrid), *R. 'Marquis of Lothian'*, *R. 'Mrs 'Percy McLaren'*, and *R. 'Blue Mist'* when we have them available.

Within our own region there have been several enthusiastic, successful rhododendron breeders. We have been approached, often by those with connections to the family of the hybridiser or to a property that is being sold, asking if we could take cuttings of their treasured hybrids. Often

there is an awareness that there are only one or two plants of a particular hybrid in existence so to ensure its survival it needs to be propagated.

One example is the group of Grant hybrids. Some twenty years ago Lachie Grant called to ask us if we would be prepared to propagate his late wife Gwen's hybrids that were growing in the orchard on their farm 'Kapunatiki' at the mouth of the Rangitata River. One of Gwen's hybrids had died that year and it suddenly struck Lachie that "that one has gone for good as I haven't had it propagated". This prompted him to realise that others should be propagated, hence his request. We were more than happy to give it a go, however taking cuttings in February in a drought-stricken area is not a good recipe for success. Out of approximately 30 varieties only 5 took root in the first year. After taking cuttings over a period of several years we managed to reproduce nearly all of the Grant hybrids, most of which had to be grafted. Difficulty of propagation is very often the reason for some rhododendrons not being readily available. I am aware that Blue Mountain Nurseries didn't persevere with growing the Grant hybrids for commercial production as they found them to be prone to mildew. This has not been a problem with the ones we have in our garden. The blooms are beautiful, several in the pale yellow/cream colour range. From the records we hold, Gwen used three main crosses, *R.* 'Crest' x 'Honey Glow', 'Honey Glow' x *wardii*, and 'Pacific Queen' x *wardii*. This last cross would have produced those with pink in them, *R.* 'Orchard Road' and *R.* 'Olwen's Dream'. *Rhododendron* 'Glenfiddick' and *R.* 'Kapunitiki' are of the same cross but are buff/green/yellow. Others that were registered, *R.* 'Gwen Grant' and *R.* 'Orchard Gold' are more yellow. All the Grant hybrids have beautiful flowers held in large compact trusses, some florets with a crumpled texture. Several years ago when I took Tom Garbutt to view the 'Kapunatiki' garden he was overwhelmed. On entering the orchard he stood with his mouth wide open. After having looked at those in flower, his comment was "some they haven't registered are better than some they have registered". It must have been



R. 'Kiwi Magic'



R. 'Glenfiddick'



R. 'Dan Carter'

very difficult deciding which ones to register. I know Phillipa Grigg thought the plant numbered E2 should be registered. It is usually when people see rhododendrons flowering in our garden that they ask for them, it isn't because they are well known.

In our region the Garbutt hybrids have been popular. Out of the 12 registered, R. 'Nance Garbutt' and R. 'Sheila McLeod' have been the most sort after. The popularity of R. 'Winnie Hayes' has waned due to several gardeners finding it difficult to grow. All of Tom's hybrids have been named after his associates. We really thought R. 'Dan Carter' would be a winner but not so. *Rhododendron* 'Alice Hennessy' (*griffithianum* x 'Irene Stead') was one of Tom's early

registrations and he went on to use this hybrid in several of his later crosses, namely R. 'Daphne Pearl', R. 'Jean Leggett', R. 'Sheila McLeod', R. 'Tom Garbutt' and R. 'Dan Carter'.

Mid Canterbury rhododendron enthusiast Herb Tasker bred several beautiful hybrids, the creamy peach pink R. 'Mary Tasker' being the best known. Roger and Beverley Tasker have a wide range of Herb's hybrids growing in their garden at Ruapuna and are very generous with cutting material. Most have been named after family members, the majority not having been registered, R. 'Julia Tasker', R. 'Roger Tasker', R. 'Hayden Tasker', R. 'Herb Tasker' to name a few. The lovely deep yellow R. 'Beverley Tasker' has been

registered, and R. 'Lester McKee' is an unregistered Tasker hybrid that is much admired in our garden.

Penny Thomas, a Grigg family member, thought there should be a plant of R. 'Gonda' growing in the garden at Longbeach, the original Grigg family home. This plant was hybridized by Mrs JH Grigg (Gonda) who gave a spoonful of tiny seedlings to Mrs A Pinney of Peel Forest. Mrs Pinney raised them, and later registered one as R. 'Gonda'. The only plant Penny knew of was in the ex- Pinney garden, she thought about halfway up the driveway. Bernie and I decided we would need to visit the garden during flowering to identify the plant. The only photo we could find of the flower was in the Margaret

Tapley book 'Rhododendrons in New Zealand' published in 1989. On obtaining permission from the owner at the time, we set off on a treasure hunt armed with the Tapley book. We were at the point of giving up when I suddenly spotted reaching to the sky, the rhododendron we had been looking for, both flower and leaf fitting the description. We tied a label to 'the tree' and returned the next February to take cuttings. Bernie grafted the cuttings and three were successful. There is now a plant of *R. 'Gonda'* at Longbeach, Surrey Hills (also a Grigg family property) and in our own garden. And so *R. 'Gonda'* was saved from possible extinction.

Soon after the Canterbury earthquakes we received a message from Louise Deans of Homebush asking if we could take cuttings of the rhododendrons there. She was keen for Deans family members to have some of the Homebush rhododendrons in their own gardens. Despite many not being named we still took cuttings. The standout plant was *R. 'Lillian Deans'* (*grande x protistum*) a massive, bushy plant, the cuttings of which had to be grafted. Several Deans family members now have *R. 'Lillian Deans'*, and *R. 'James Deans'* in their gardens along with other Homebush



R. 'Grant'

rhododendrons, reminding them of their times spent at Homebush in their younger days. Of more recent years we supplied Homebush rhododendrons to Riccarton Bush in Christchurch where the grounds around the original Deans

homestead were being refurbished.

Rhododendron 'Joy Bells' (*macabeanum* x *'Fortune'*) is a Waimate-raised and registered hybrid well worth growing but not easy to propagate.

Mr and Mrs AG Holmes of Holmeslee, Rakaia, hybridized, raised and registered several very attractive rhododendrons through the 1970s and 80s. We have found *R. 'Holmeslee Pearl'*, *R. 'Holmeslee Opal'* and *R. 'Lalique'* to be popular, especially with those who have large gardens.

Jeff Elliott's *R. 'Kiwi Magic'* is always in demand, and *R. 'Kiwi Pearl'*, *R. 'Kiwi Flash'* and *R. 'Kiwi Mum'* also sell well. An unregistered hybrid *R. 'Peach Ball'* which Jeff gave us a few years ago attracts a lot of attention in our garden and would be deserving of registration.

The late Barry Sligh hybridized and registered several rhododendrons, 23 to my knowledge, maybe more. We consider *R. 'Petticoat Lane'* to be one of his best, and *R. 'White Linen'* sells well as does *R. 'Smoked Salmon'* and *R. 'Cameo Pearl'*. A name can very often sell a plant, *R. 'Forever Young'* being a good example. This one does have the added attraction of compactness and dark green glossy foliage.

I am aware Mr and Mrs RJ Coker



R. 'Beach Ball'



R. 'Ivan D Wood'



R. 'Sheila McLeod'

registered several very good hybrids' R.'Ivan D Wood' being the standout. The colouring of R. 'Pacific Queen' appeals to customers. These are the only two Coker rhododendrons we have had available to sell but I am sure several of the others would be popular if they were more readily available.

Mr Edgar Stead was responsible for several of the early NZ rhododendron registrations. Many of the Stead rhododendrons have stood the test of time, for example we never have enough R. 'Ilam Cream' to satisfy customer demand. This plant was raised by Mr Edgar Stead before 1950 and was registered by Mr Roland Stead in 1980. *Rhododendron* 'Ilam Orange' and R. 'Ilam Violet' have sold well for us. We have had available some of the bigger growing reds, R. 'Ilam Red Glow', R. 'Scarlet King', R. 'Ilam Alarm' and R. 'Ilam Cerise', all beautiful reds, but because they don't keep a nice compact growth habit in planter bags we found they didn't sell well.

Rhododendron 'High Society' and R. 'Superman', both hybridised by Mrs Boswell of Christchurch, appeal mainly because of their attractive foliage and silvery white tomentum on the new growth. *Rhododendron* 'High Society' was subsequently raised and registered by Mrs June Keeley of Timaru.

Another Timaru rhododendron enthusiast, Ken Burns, selected several species that he felt had standout features. One, *R. russatum* 'KB' has sold well for us, probably because of its depth of colour, as has R. 'Waddersbill KB', a maddenii with a particularly large floret. *Rhododendron* 'Ken Burns', possibly an *R.johnstoneanum* seedling, is more buff coloured than the usual *johnstoneanum*, making it popular.

It is known that Ken Jordan, now of Geraldine, has hybridized several excellent rhododendrons over the years. With encouragement and assistance from the NZRA Registrar Brian Coker, work is underway to register the best of them. Blue Mountain Nurseries have had available one of Ken's hybrids R. 'Most Admired' which we have found to sell well.

Bernie, my husband has gained much pleasure from hybridizing rhododendrons. Two of his hybrids were registered in 2020, R. 'The Beacon' a coral red with a calyx, and R. 'Something Special'. A lesson has been learnt however - don't register a plant until its longevity and ease of propagating have been proven. We lost the parent plant of R. 'Something Special' but fortunately have another plant of it grown from a cutting. It has been saved but it will be years before any quantity will be available.

Hybridising can be a fun activity, although there can be disappointments as well. It is a long term process from making the cross to registering the final product. Artistic skill, analytical skill and a great deal of patience are required. Our NZ hybridists have done excellent work producing magnificent rhododendrons, several of which are grown in other parts of the world. We hope we have rhododendron enthusiasts in NZ who will continue to strive to produce ever finer varieties through hybridisation.

Joy O'Keefe



R. 'Joy Bells'



THE STEAD BLOCK AT PUKEITI

Introduction

Edgar Stead was the first president of the NZRA and renowned for his work hybridising rhododendrons, using a consignment of plants including deciduous azaleas, sent from noted English gardeners including Lionel de Rothschild and Lord Wakehurst. Many have been registered.

His work with deciduous azaleas was furthered by Dr John Yeates who expanded Stead's hybridisation programme to produce the well-known Melford hybrids. Planted with Stead's

hybrids they produce beautiful, scented displays at the Christchurch and Dunedin Botanical Gardens, Ilam University, which focuses on the Stead or Ilam hybrids, Crosshills and Pukekura Park. A collection of Stead's hybrids was also planted by John Goodwin in a defined area at the old Richardson Entrance at Pukeiti and on a north facing slope leading from the main lawn. They did not thrive in the wet climate and at the Richardson Entrance were over-grown by the regenerating bush. They like full sun. (Interestingly my first visit to Pukeiti in 1955, with the Fairbrothers, was on a working bee to clear this area).

Many of Edgar Stead's other hybrid rhododendrons are featured in the Stead Block at Pukeiti. This was formed after the track was laid through the cutting extending from the hybrid block and named on the recommendation of Roland Stead, his son, who served at that stage on the Pukeiti Board and funded much of the work. He envisaged that the Stead Block would feature New Zealand hybrids so not surprisingly the Stead hybrids provide the framework of the plantings.

Roland passed away aged 98 earlier this year.

A WALK THROUGH THE STEAD BLOCK

HIGHLIGHTING NEW ZEALAND RHODODENDRON HYBRIDS

Lara Coxhead

As you explore Pukeiti, it may not be obvious that there are themes behind a lot of the plantings. The theme of the Stead Walk, which starts at the Cook Walk and goes up the hill to the Keiller Garden, is New Zealand rhododendron hybrids. Although there are no rhododendrons native to our country, they do very well here, particularly the New Zealand bred hybrids. There are around 50 different New Zealand rhododendron hybrids to be found along the Stead Walk. Often the spring flowering in this area is the best in the garden because these plants have been selected for New Zealand conditions. The following are some of my favourites, with a slight bias towards those with a Taranaki connection.

The first NZ hybrid you'll come across, at the start of the Stead Walk, near the end of the Williamson Walk, is *R.* 'Petticoat Lane' bred by Barry Sligh from Canterbury, with its stunning frilly peach and yellow flowers.



R. 'Petticoat Lane'

Go past the White Walk and over the stream towards the clearing with the seat, then look out for the young *R.* 'Stead's Best' on the left hand side. This is a beautiful hybrid between *nuttallii* and *lindleyi* with attractive foliage and large white fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers with a gold eye in the throat. It was bred by Edgar Stead, the father of Ron, who the Stead Walk was named after.



R. 'Stead's Best'

Head further up the hill and you'll see *R.* 'Kaponga' on the left. It flowers early in the season and glows with large trusses of cherry red flowers contrasted against rich green foliage. Bernie Hollard of Hollard Gardens created this well-known hybrid by crossing *R.* *arboreum* 'Kermesinum' and *R.* 'Ivery's Scarlet' in the early 1950s.



R. 'Kaponga'

Continue under the Loderi hybrids and you'll come to *R.* 'Coconut Ice' on both sides of the grass path to your right. This is a compact slow growing shrub to 1.2m tall, grown from open pollinated seed at Pukeiti and registered by Graham Smith in 1984. It's very floriferous and showy every spring, flowering from a young age. The flowers are rose in bud and open white with rose margins and red spots.



R. 'Coconut Ice'

Above the *R.* 'Coconut Ice', in the centre bed, is the stunning red *R.* 'Homestead' (bred by Edgar Stead) and, up the left hand path, next to the 'Coconut Ice', is the beautiful *Rhododendron* 'Ken Burns'. This is a compact grower with deep champagne buds early in the season.



R. 'Ken Burns'

They open to slightly scented creamy coloured flowers with a deep gold blotch and reddish orange flare and they completely smother the plant. It was found growing in Ken Burn's Timaru garden and its origin is unknown.

Further up, on the left, you'll come to a group of *R.* 'Rubicon', bred by Ron Gordon of Taihape. This is one of the best small red flowering rhododendrons and is sold all over the world. It's a wonderful compact hybrid, with excellent dark glossy green foliage. These plants have layered from the first one which was planted there in the mid-1980s. They have been cut back hard many times and they always regrow beautifully. It's very floriferous and the stunning red flowers can be present from early October to mid-November.

A little further up is *R.* 'Katie', which was bred by Felix Jury using a yellow form of *R. polyandrum* to obtain bright coloured Maddenia hybrids that do well in the warmer climates. 'Katie' is a vigorous shrub which produces orange-red buds which open to scented apricot yellow flowers in November.



R. 'Katie'

Head up about 10m past the intersection with the grass path and you'll find a beautifully healthy *R.* 'Floral Sun' on the right hand side, almost under the corner of the treehouse. This gorgeous hybrid was bred by Mark Jury and released from his Waitara nursery in 1997. It's a compact upright shrub with fragrant butter yellow flowers in November.



R. 'Rubicon'

After checking out the Keiller Garden, head back down the grass path to the left. About half way down the centre bed you'll find a young R. 'Lemon Lodge'. This is one of the best lemon coloured rhododendrons and flowers in the middle of the season. It was named by Graham Smith at Pukeiti after the lemon colour of the flowers and the nearby Lodge. The original plant is still thriving on the edge of the lawn near the Lodge.

Continue down and you'll find a mass of beautiful R. 'Floral Gift' on the left hand side, just past R. 'Loderi King George'. It was bred by Mark Jury from Tikorangi and the flowers are white with pink flush and a yellow throat.

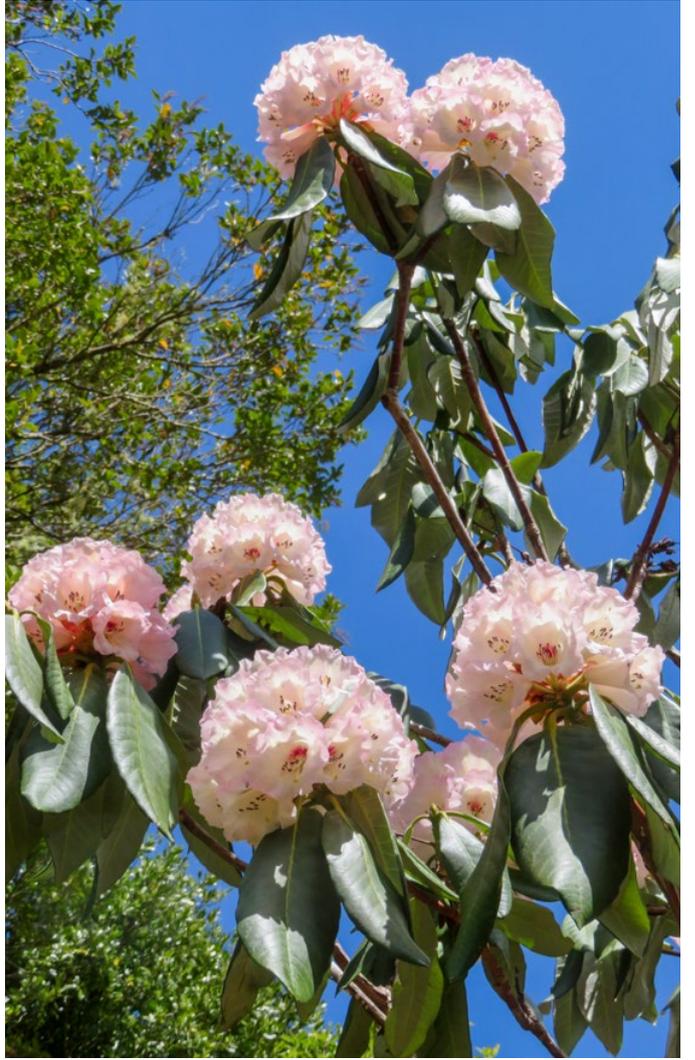
Next time you can make it to Pukeiti during the spring, take a moment to appreciate all the efforts of New Zealand rhododendron breeders as you admire the stunning display along the Stead Walk.



R. 'Floral Sun'



R. 'Lemon Lodge'



R. 'Milton Hollard'



R. 'Floral Gift'





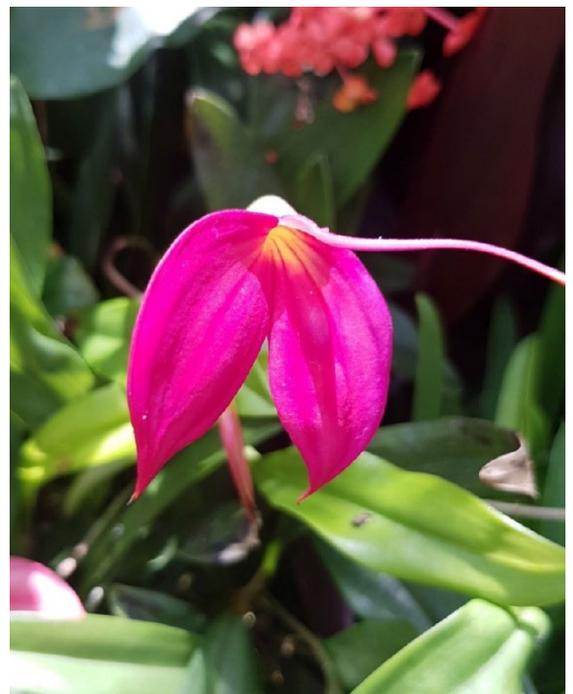
PUKEITI'S ORCHIDS

Lara Coxhead

Pleione bulbocodioides

At Pukeiti, the keen observer will find many different types of orchids, both native and exotic. The orchid family (Orchidaceae) is the second largest family of flowering plants, meaning there are more different types of orchids than almost any other type of flower. Worldwide, about 28,000 different species have been described. Their beautiful and often colourful, fragrant blooms mean they have many enthusiasts.

Orchid flowers have a unique structure with the reproductive parts having a distinctive arrangement. The flowers are monosymmetrical (have just one line of symmetry) and they have three sepals (these look like an outer circle of flower petals) and three petals (inner circle of flower petals). One of the petals is very different from the other two and forms a landing pad for pollinators.



Masdevallia sp.



Cypripedium formosum



Calanthe arisanensis



Dactylorhiza maculata

Orchids from around the world

At Pukeiti, all the exotic orchids can be found in the Vireya Walk and the Kokopu House. There are about 23 different types representing 9 different genera – *Calanthe*, *Coelogyne*, *Cymbidium*, *Cypripedium*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Dendrobium*, *Epidendrum*, *Masdevallia*, *Oncidium* and *Pleione*.

Some of these are very rare such as *Cypripedium formosum* (Formosan Lady's slipper orchid). This has interesting large fan-shaped leaves

and lovely pendulous white or pinkish flowers speckled and striped with purplish red. It dies down completely in the winter and needs protection from too much water during this time so it fits well with the vireyas. It grows naturally in the mountains of Taiwan about 2000-2500m above sea level but is uncommon in the wild due to over-enthusiastic orchid hunters.

Some of these are very rare, but one of my favourites is quite common. Not only does it have a name reminiscent of a dinosaur, it is beautiful, easy

to grow and flowers for months.

Dactylorhiza maculata particularly loves growing in the Vireya Walk. Its cousin, *Dactylorhiza elata* was imported by Pukeiti in the 1960s from Savill Garden in the United Kingdom and it also thrives in the Vireya Walk.

You can use the Pukeiti Plant Hunters Station website to help you locate any plants at Pukeiti. This can be accessed from your computer, the Plant Hunters Station in the Rimu Room at Pukeiti, or from your phone.



Singularybas oblongus



Pterostylis sp.

Aotearoa's orchids

There are around 160 species of orchid native to New Zealand. Native orchids have small, delicate, exquisite flowers which come in a vast array of colours and forms. They can be found from the coastline to the alpine herb-fields. Most are difficult to spot although there is one which is almost a weed.

Maikaika (common onion orchid - *Microtis unifolia*) grows in the Pukeiti rainforest and also in urban lawns and roadside banks all around Aotearoa. It's only noticeable when its flower spikes pop up above the height of the grass. Unfortunately the flowers are small and green and you have to look very closely to be able to see any resemblance to its more attractive cousins.

At Pukeiti, 20 species of native orchids have been found so far, representing 10 different genera: *Drymoanthus*, *Earina*, *Ichthyostomum* (was *Bulbophyllum*), *Microtis*, *Nematoceras* (was *Corybas*), *Orthoceras*, *Pterostylis*, *Singularybas* (was *Corybas*), *Thelymitra* and *Winika* (was *Dendrobium*).

The *Singularybas* are commonly called spider orchids and they flower

in the spring. A good spot to hunt for them is near the start of the Stead Walk. Once you've passed the White Walk, look very closely amongst the moss on the bank on the lefthand side. The leaves are a mottled green and the flowers are a dark burgundy colour.

The orchids which are the most common and easiest to find at Pukeiti are *Earina* (three species) and *Winika cunninghamii*. These are all epiphytic and can be found in trees throughout the garden and rainforest - they hang from the branches of trees and have

long stems and narrow leaves, at first glance often resembling a hanging grass. All four species have very attractive flowers - in *Earina* they are borne in long racemes whereas in *Winika* they're more often singular.

At Pukeiti, look around on the sides of the paths and you might spot greenhood orchids (*Pterostylis*) or the beautiful *Thelymitra*. Keep all these treasures in mind as you're exploring - they're often hiding but well worth taking the time to spot.

All photos taken at Pukeiti by the author.



Winika cunninghamii

NATIVE PLANTS— WHERE TO FROM HERE.

Glyn Church

From a talk given at the Pukeiti Mid-winter Lunch

You may think native plants are native plants and that's an end to it. But currently there's a lot going on in the native plant world. And no, I don't mean name changes, though there has been a host of those. Beech are now three separate genera, and podocarps have been split into multiple genera.

I came to the country in 1976 and back then it was a niche thing to plant natives, and very few people thought about planting them in their gardens. At the time I worked with a group of apprentices at New Plymouth Parks, and they were the first generation to actively promote and use natives. People like Muriel Fisher and JT Salmon with their splendid native plant books, and nurseryman Graeme Platt led the charge.

They were also the generation to fight native logging and the practice of 'selective logging' which was a posh name for total destruction under disguise. They successfully campaigned to save West Coast beech forest, Pureora near Benneydale and the world's best podocarp forest at Whirinaki, north of Rotorua.

RIPARIAN PLANTING

Nowadays people and politicians talk about native plants to do this and do that as if they are going to be the saviours of the planet – well at least New Zealand's bit of the planet. It started with 'Riparian Planting' which seems to be exclusively of natives, though I'm not sure why only natives, other than political correctness. I'm thoroughly in favour of fencing off and planting the stream-sides and river edges. It's working for the most part, though weeds can be a real problem

as the strips are usually narrow, allowing light loving weeds such as flannel weed and clematis to romp.

BILLION TREES

The next big thing regarding native plants is the Billion Trees policy of our current government. This received a lot of press until Covid came along and now we hardly hear anything about it. The idea is for New Zealand to plant a billion trees by 2028.

This is to offset carbon usage by the country and so put us on track regarding global warming. I think the idea is that we plant trees on all the steep unproductive land. So much of NZ was deforested or cleared for one more sheep. In old civilizations like China, such steep land often retains much of the original native forest. And the USA for all its industry and big population has vast areas of uplands covered in native forest. Every time I visit the Appalachians I think, "Kiwi farmers would have this forest down in a jiff, and replace it all with sheep".

While I think the Billion Trees is a fine idea, it's not so easy in practice. The planners have a real challenge on their hands because the nursery business is not like a nuts and bolts factory – you can't magically grow half a billion native trees. It's incredibly time consuming to collect rimu, totara, or kauri seed, some of which only have one good fruiting year in 3, 4 or 5 years. Beech trees are even worse, fruiting well one year in 6 or 7.

And even if we produce these trees and grow them, then what? The plan seems to be to leave some forever and ever, with the landowner getting paid for the carbon credits each year. If we want totara and kauri trees for harvesting one day we need to give some thought to the best clones for timber. Clones are good forms, like Gala is a very good apple clone.

Apparently, it costs ten times as much to plant a native forest as it does to plant exotic pines. Plus, there's the ongoing cost of 'releasing' the natives from weeds. Because pines grow much faster, they suppress the weeds much quicker.

The idea of planting native trees is a good one in theory, but hugely challenging in practice. For one thing most of the natives need to be grown in some kind of container, and this can mean the roots circle around and so the tree may die or fall over in a storm because the roots are not fanning outwards.

The easiest way to create a native forest is with the assistance of exotics such as *Tagasaste* or tall poplars, or dare I say it - gorse. *Tagasaste* or Tree Lucerne is a fairly dull broom plant with white flowers, but it feeds the soil, and is a fodder plant for livestock. The bush is short lived, with a typically ten years lifespan. But our native pigeons, kereru, absolutely love them and gorge themselves on the flowers and foliage. Pigeons then poop out the native seed they've swallowed and hey presto a self-sown native forest. Blackbirds would help the cause, being the second most important berry eater, and they would drop peppers, whiteywood, coprosma and a host of other native tree seeds.

Poplar poles are another possibility for assisting the establishment of native forests as they're the easiest tree on earth to grow. You can take 2m poles or branches and drop them in a hole, or even simpler, cut 30cm stems about thumb thickness and press them into the soil. They grow amazingly fast; I planted a group of 5 beside a stream and 25 years later we cut them down. The tallest was 100 feet high (excuse my imperial measurements, but it makes the maths easier) 100 divided by 25

equals a growth rate of 4 feet a year.

Poplars are not long lived, especially when they have grown that fast, and so as they die the native seedlings establish below (kindly deposited by the kereru and blackbirds over the years). The other wondrous thing about poplars is that their roots open up the soil and eventually rot, thus aerating the ground, plus the timber rots down to create open friable soil.

As for gorse, it has several marvelous qualities. It will grow on barren clay hillsides – think of the hills in Lower Hutt. Being a legume, the bush makes its own nitrogen, thus feeding the soil and any subsequent plants. Gorse is extremely wind hardy and thus provides great protection for native seedlings. The thorny nature keeps predators at bay and so skinks and birds can live in peace.

Hutt Council used to have regular burn-offs and this just set a new crop of gorse seedlings on their way, and killed off any young native seedlings. Eventually the ‘penny dropped’ and they tried to prevent fires, so the old gorse would age and die, to be replaced by native bush. It’s working very well as every year the natives emerge and cover more and more of the once barren hillsides.

To give an idea of how slow it can be to regenerate native bush, I’ll use an example close to my home. Our garden is only 500m from the boundary of the National Park surrounding Mount Taranaki. A portion of the parkland on the edge of the park was planted in exotics, mostly pines and gums, back in the 1930s. In the 1960s the pines were logged and the land left bare to let the natives regenerate. Sixty years later it’s mostly covered in mamaku tree ferns and there are very few native trees established even after 60 years.

ECO-SOURCING

Then we have the issue of the eco-sourcing of native plants, meaning that ideally any kowhai growing in Taupo, should be grown from seed from a Taupo tree. Kowhai vary considerably from region to region, so this makes some sense. But sometimes I think we take this too far, as is the case of Somes Island in the middle of

Wellington Harbour. Back in the early 1980s my wife Gail & I lived in Lower Hutt, and as part of the local branch of Forest & Bird we were invited to revegetate Somes Island. I was asked to do a recce of the island and choose what to plant where. I had the help of my good friend Graham Harris who was a mine of information on natives and also on the history of Somes.

We needed a mixture of natives, preferably wind hardy ones. Of course many members were already growing natives, and so we had a mix of plants available. We pestered the local parks departments for natives, mostly karaka, karo and pohutukawa. Graham and I figured that these three are the most wind hardy of all our natives and Somes is incredibly windy, nearly all of the time. Over the years this group of volunteers has expanded the area until nearly all of Somes Island is now a forest, rather than windswept grass.

Then along came the eco-sourcers who decreed that these three native plants were not native to Wellington, and therefore had no place on Somes. So they are gradually removing all these tried and tested wind hardy plants. As you know many Taranaki Maori left their homelands for Wellington. If only they’d taken a few karaka and pohutukawa with them, no-one would be any the wiser that these trees were not native to the Wellington region. And frankly who cares if these three native trees are native to Wellington or not?

SNA SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS

Then we have the curly question of SNAs (Significant Natural Areas). I first read about this in the farming papers, but it’s received very little press. A few years back NPDC took on some Massey students for summer work, as they usually do. Two of them were asked to look at aerial maps and find SNAs. That should have been the end of it, but Forest & Bird took the Council to court to make these SNAs officially designated preserved areas, without any consultation with the landowner. F&B won the court case!

I saw an advert in the farming papers, inviting Taranaki landowners

to a court meeting. I attended three meetings with a judge at the courthouse. What I did see during the three court cases was a host of angry farmers, some of whom had already fenced their bush remnants, or even preserved them via the Queen Elizabeth Trust. “QE2 is not enough protection” say F&B, “you still need an SNA”. Some of these farmers were threatening to destroy their bush, and it was a classic case of the need to get landowners onside first. Farmers are hoping SNAs will count as carbon sequestration, so farmers will get a ‘payoff’ for any areas of bush which they fence and protect. Hopefully they get some recompense for the fencing of the bush, as fencing is hugely expensive these days. Remember a lot of these farmers have already paid to fence off their streams and rivers, but apparently these existing fences do not meet SNA standards.

NATIVE BIRDS

My final topic is native plants for native birds. Birds need a safe environment, somewhere with food, shelter and protection. Just look at any public garden to see that a mixture of trees, gardens and grass is ideal for many birds. When we talk about plants for feeding birds, we often mean tui and bellbirds, the nectar feeding birds. The exotic birds like blackbirds, thrushes and starlings will find you anyway if you have a few shrubs and a patch of lawn.

All the environmental websites I look at suggest we plant native plants for native birds. But nearly all of those suggested are trees or very large shrubs. Unless you have a very substantial garden, where you can grow mahoe and pittosporums, this simply isn’t viable for most of us.

This winter I took special note of the flowers the tui and bellbird were feeding on. I was looking for small plants which they visit regularly for nectar – *Knifophia* or red hot poker; *Isoplexis*; dwarf bottlebrush ‘Little John’; dwarf exotic pohutukawa such as ‘Tahiti’. All of us could find somewhere to fit these four exotics into our garden. I realise the ‘Tahiti’ is frost tender, but we could all find room



Tui feeding on *R. spinuliferum*

for a clump of red hot pokers. Tui and bellbirds are like us, they like variety, eating Italian one night and Chinese the next. At home, we've made a real effort to provide food throughout the year and now we have three or more pairs of both tui and bellbirds nesting in our garden, sometimes just a few steps away from our house.

Clones or named forms of native trees such as the 'Vibrance' pohutukawa or kowhai clones are bad for birds because they all flower at the same time, shortening the flower season. Clones are fine for your garden

or high profile areas in town, but if it's around a sports field, then seedlings offer more variety and extend the flowering season, some flowering early, some late, although I would make one exception and grow *Sophora* 'Dragons Gold' which hails from Stevens Island in Cook Strait. Native pigeons love to gorge on kowhai foliage, and they can kill a tree by constantly stripping its leaves. 'Dragons Gold' has an arching weeping habit, and the kereru are too fat to reach the extremities and thus the tree keeps some foliage and survives even if the centre of the bush is stripped bare.

Other plants for nectar birds include a host of camellias, especially the winter flowering species, but they also like the big blousy *Camellia reticulata* types like 'Terrell Weaver'. The native climber *Tecomanthe speciosa* is another favourite for tui. Gardeners tell me it's hard to get this vine to flower, but all you need to do is train it horizontally. This is true of so many plants, especially fruit trees. Train a portion of the bush horizontally and it will flower and fruit for you.

In general these birds do not seem interested in rhododendrons

though I have seen tui feeding in *R. arboreum* and *R. spinuliferum* (Rose Hollard's favourite rhodo).

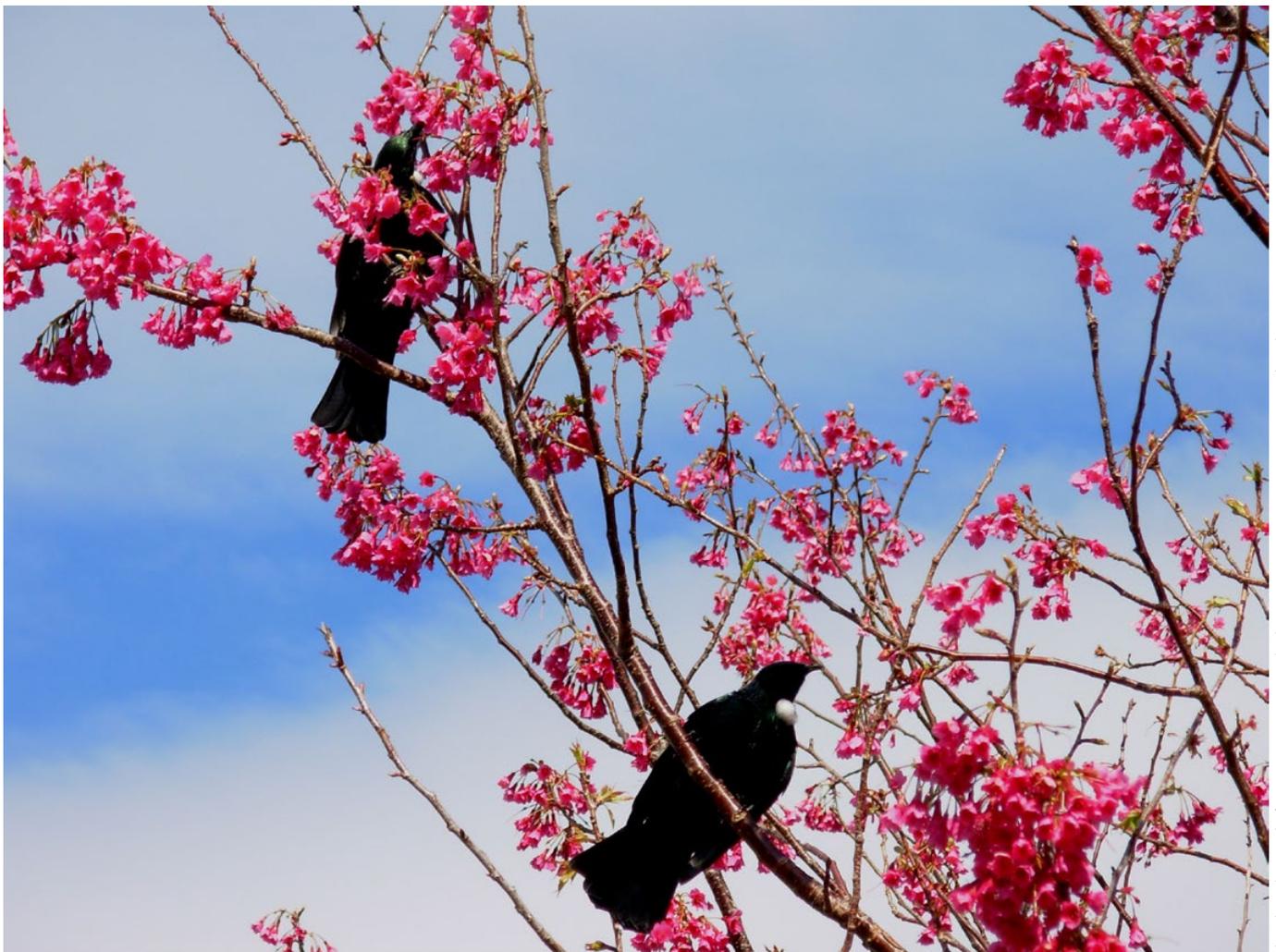
We have two big patches of *Chasmanthe floribunda*, an orange flowered South African bulb. It's not the most exciting flower you ever saw, but the bellbirds love it, and the tui don't seem to be interested. That's a bonus as far as I'm concerned because the tui often boss the bellbirds away. We've overcome this problem in our large garden by planting food sources all over the garden. The tui simply can't guard every food source and cease to be so territorial.

Last spring we had a pair of kaka frolicking in our garden and the tui certainly couldn't boss them away. They stayed for two months feeding on two exotic *Telopea* species and Carmine Cherry. Which brings me to

another point of political correctness, namely 'native good - exotic bad'. Try to see the world from the point of view of a tui. Before anyone came to NZ, the tui enjoyed over 80% of NZ covered in native bush. Along came the humans and chopped it all down and turned it into grass. Not much food or shelter for Mr & Mrs Tui, not even many hedges to duck under for cover. What did the nice humans bring us to eat in recompense for taking our forests? Well - the big *Banksia integrifolia* and the Carmine Cherry *Prunus campanulata*. But now various regional councils around the country want to ban and eliminate both of these species. Tell me, how terrible is it if our roadsides and gullies are home to these handsome trees which provide such an abundance of nectar over a long period of time?

Authorities want to eliminate exotic weeds, and I approve (mostly).

But the truth is no exotic plants can 'out muscle' our natives over the long term. If every person left NZ and we let nature take its course for a few hundred years, very very few exotic plants would survive, maybe *Tradescantia* and Californian Redwoods. The gorse would be long gone - shaded out. European and American oaks and ash wouldn't stand a chance long term. The *Pinus radiata* would have grown too fast and died, and been replaced by the longer lasting totara and rimu. This whole weed problem is a myth we've invented to match the grassy environment we've created. The only time it's a problem is when the taller wilding pines takeover from tussock grasses or alpine regions.



Tui feeding in *Prunus campanulata*

Photo by Walter Rumsby from Queenstown, New Zealand, CC BY-SA 2.0 www.creativecommons.org, Wikimedia Commons



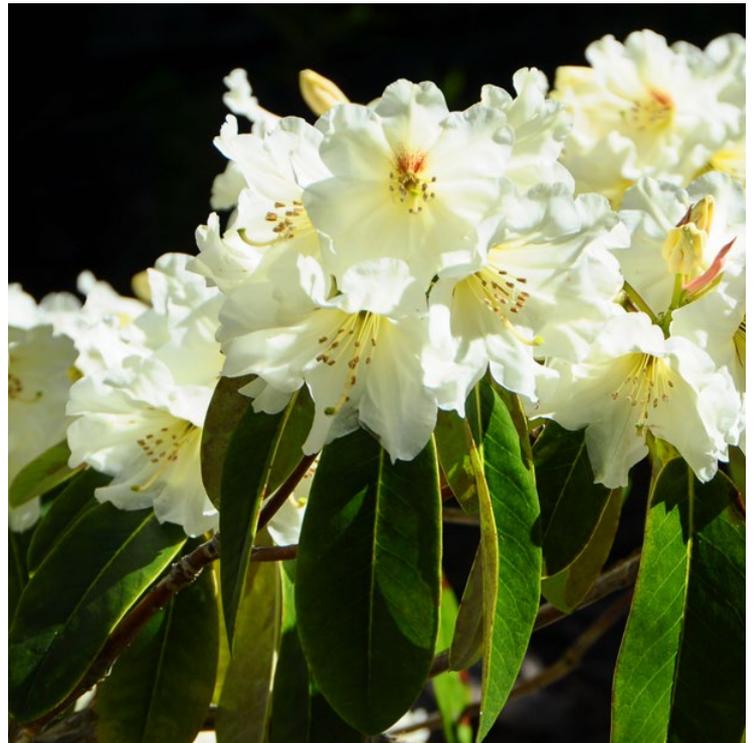


Rhododendron 'Stead's Best' [*nuttallii* x *lindleyi*], private Christchurch garden, late October/early November

LEGACY CIRCLE - THE FINEST RHODODENDRON HYBRIDS FROM



Rhododendron 'Irene Stead' [Loderi g. (*fortunei* ssp. *fortunei* x *griffithianum*) selfed] (Syn. 'IMS'), private Halswell garden, mid-October



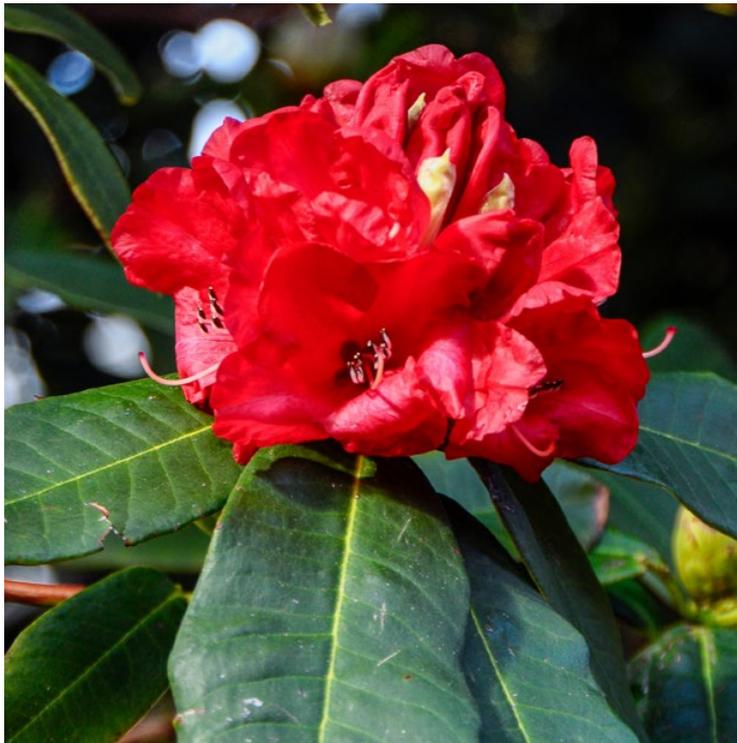
Rhododendron 'Illum Canary' raised by crossing a cream *R. campylocarpum* x *discolor* (an Exbury plant) with a lemon Loderi hybrid. Tannock Glen, late October.



Rhododendron 'Ilam Cream' (Loderi g. seedling), private Christchurch garden, mid-October

MR EDGAR STEAD ARE STILL IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

Martin Wilkie



Rhododendron 'Stead's Best' [nuttallii x lindleyi], private Christchurch garden, late October/early November



Rhododendron degronianum ssp. *yakushimanum* x 'Ilam Orange', private Christchurch garden, early November

BEHIND THE WOODEN FENCE

A SUBURBAN VIREYA GARDEN

Lynn Bublitz

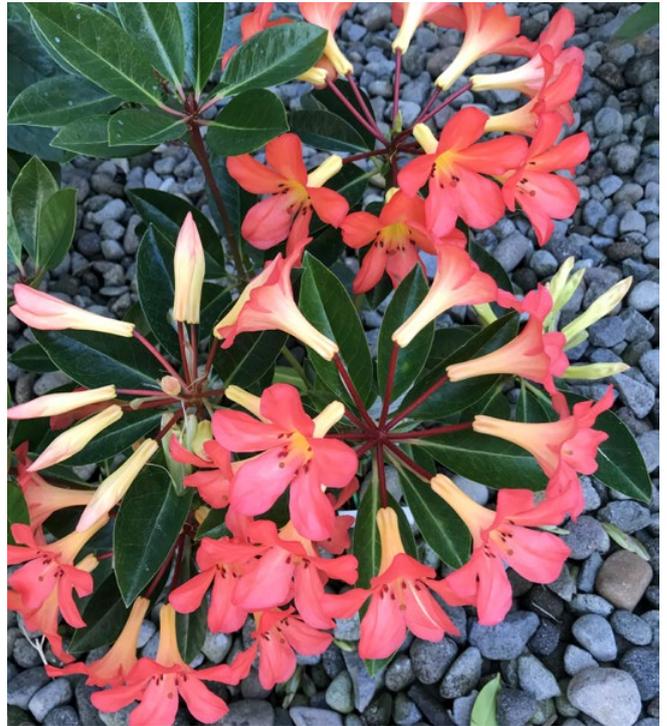


R. 'Red Mountain'

I'd passed up and down our street and taken little notice of the house and garden hidden behind a green painted wooden fence. One day, a glance down the sloping common drive, also accessing a property behind, revealed a good specimen of R. 'Saxon Glow' in full bloom. Curiosity spiked, a closer view was necessary and revealed that the fence hid an amazing collection of vireyas. In fact, the only other shrub was the pink-flowered *Luculia gratissima* in full bloom.



R. 'Kisses'



R. 'Coral Seas'

Don Mackenzie and his partner Jackie had bought the house 17 years before, when the garden, if that is what it could be called, was unkempt. It was cleared, lawns re-laid, and has been immaculately kept ever since. Don had little interest in shrub and garden plants, so pebbles were laid on the sloping area behind the fence at the front of the property which borders the street.

One time when he was feeling a bit down, Don bought a flowering vireya, brightened by its tropical colour. And so the 'bug' was caught and Don's obsession with these plants began.

In a small garden down the drive 'Saxon Glow' was planted and in the garden by the front door the yellow 'Gilded Sunrise', pink 'Pendance', and lolly-pink and cream 'Kisses' joined the family. More were bought, particularly from Eddie Lyon who had a stall at the Saturday market where he sold plants he had propagated, including a number of his own hybrids.

But for Don, space was now an issue, so the bank behind the fence was reshaped, and pebbles re-laid providing a well-lit and drained site which these plants enjoy. Added to the collection and planted there were 'Simbu Sunset', 'Red Mountain', 'Red Socks' and 'Bob's Crowning Glory', Don's favourite.

Later, Don visited a family friend Phil Mayhead, who



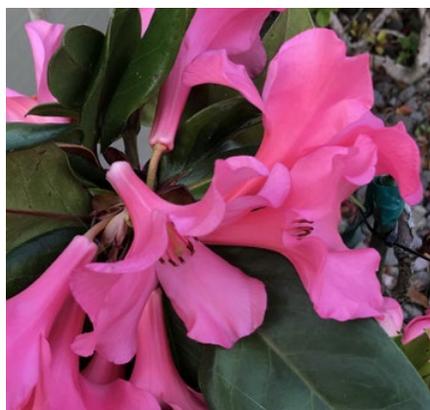
R. "Gilded Sunrise"

not to be separated from his once extensive collection of vireyas, had taken a number of them to his new retirement village home. And so Don's enthusiasm got no rest! Still more were bought and the Durham Ave collection which continues to grow now numbers over 80.

Some of the new plants include recently registered hybrids by Eddie Lyon; 'Water Melon Dream', and a number from David and Pauline Brown's nursery. And - no surprise - still more room was needed, and the section at the back of the house was redeveloped. The large immaculate lawn is now surrounded by a border of vireyas.

In the beginning it was the great variation in the flower colour and its 'tropical' range which was the attraction, (particularly for Jackie, who is not a gardener, with the names and their origins easily forgotten). Don's good friend, Phil Mayhead, who still retains his passion for these rhododendrons now focuses his attention on Don's ever-expanding collection and has named and catalogued the plants, mapping their location, offering encouragement, and providing advice on their care. He is a regular visitor, and names and origins are no longer forgotten!

The plants are loved and pampered, fed and kept healthy and have become a veritable delight to other gardeners and have even inspired Don's mother



R. 'Watermelon Dream'



R. 'Jack West'

Nan, a friend of Phil's, to assist in dead-heading the spent blooms.

Each day on returning from work Don gets pleasure from his collection as there is not a month of the year when there are no flowers to brighten the day. The garden has been named the Donphilly Garden which recognises the partnership which has established this remarkable collection of vireyas in a home garden setting .

So you never know what might be found behind a wooden fence!



Top: Don Mackenzie, L-R: Phil Mayhead and Nan Mackenzie and Gus the neighbour's visiting cat.



DUNEDIN RHODODENDRONS

Mark Joel

Rhododendron 'Marquis of Lothian'

In 1848 a Scot, William Martin, arrived here on the ship Philip Laing as part of the first organised settlement of Dunedin by the Free Church of Scotland. Martin started a nursery, Fairfield, to the south of the town. He was well connected with botanists, particularly those of mainland Europe and 3 of them visited him in Dunedin. In 1880 the *Rhododendron 'Marquis of Lothian'* appeared in his nursery catalogue. The cross was of *R.thomsonii* x *griffithianum*. Both of these parent plants were first introduced by JD Hooker in 1850, ie only 2 years after Martin's arrival in New Zealand, although the latter was then called *R. aucklandii*, a label of which I once found on a dead plant close to another old Dunedin nursery, Sontags. Both parents are superb in their own right and their features including smooth bark (both) and campanulate flowers with large calyx (*thomsonii*) flow to the child. The flesh of the flower

is thick and what I would call watermelon-pink. This plant is propagated by grafting.

For some unknown reason there does not appear to be further cultivars in Dunedin until the 1950s when Maurice Skipworth of the Dunedin Botanic Garden (DBG) selected a chance seedling of *Rhododendron chrysodoron* which was named 'Lovelock', after Lovelock Ave which runs beside the Rhododendron Dell. Although

the parent is said to be tender this is not so with 'Lovelock' which will flower well through July, August and September with a splash of yellow on a bush as wide as it is high with most attractive burnished branches as it matures. Plants, however, need to not only be hybridised or selected but also promoted and introduced to the public through propagation and in this case it was done by nurseryman Heaton Rutland about 1970. Also



R. 'Lovelock'

important is registration of the name with the international authority The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) which The Dunedin Rhododendron Group (DRG) did in 1977.

In about 1954 we have 2 plants of the same parentage (*R. edgeworthii* x *R. burmanicum*) produced at Dunedin Botanic Garden. *R.* 'Maurice Skipworth' is a pale cream with a knock out scent and was registered

with the RHS by DRG in 1977 while *R.* 'Stonelaw' is white flushed rose with a yellow centre and for a long time was informally called 'Pink bulatum' until the name; 'Stonelaw' was registered with the RHS by DRG in 1990. The name 'Stonelaw' records the Terrace in Dunedin where nurseryman Chas McLaughlin and his wife Bess lived; Chas having promoted this plant. In my view 'Stonelaw' is one of the best of the *R. edgeworthii* hybrids. Both of

these plants have bullate leaves but not in a straggly form like some. They are impossible to tell apart out of flower.

Also from the DBG in the 1950s is *R.* 'Spicil' (*R. spiciferum* x 'Cilipinense') a dwarf spreading plant with light green hairy, crinkled leaves, the new growth of which is bronze with reddish stems. Flowers, in August, are small deep pink fading to rose. This plant has outlasted lots of other



R. 'Stonelaw'



R. 'Spicil'



R. 'Robert Balch'

dwarfs at Tannock Glen so that's one for hybrid vigour. It was introduced by Heaton Rutland in 1959 and registered by the DRG with RHS in 1980.

In 1960 *R.* 'Robert Balch' was created by crossing *R. zelanicum* (or *R.* 'Noyo Chief') with *R. elliottii* KW 19083 at DBG. This plant has large shiny dark green leaves and campanulate flowers, deep red with darker spotting in the throat. Registered by DRG with the RHS in 1977.

Rhododendron 'Blue Mist' (*R. maddenii* x *R. augustinii*) is another Balch hybrid from the DBG in the 1950s. Delightfully scented flowers with slight blue flush appear twice, first in June and then again in October, a pleasing trait that neither parent has.



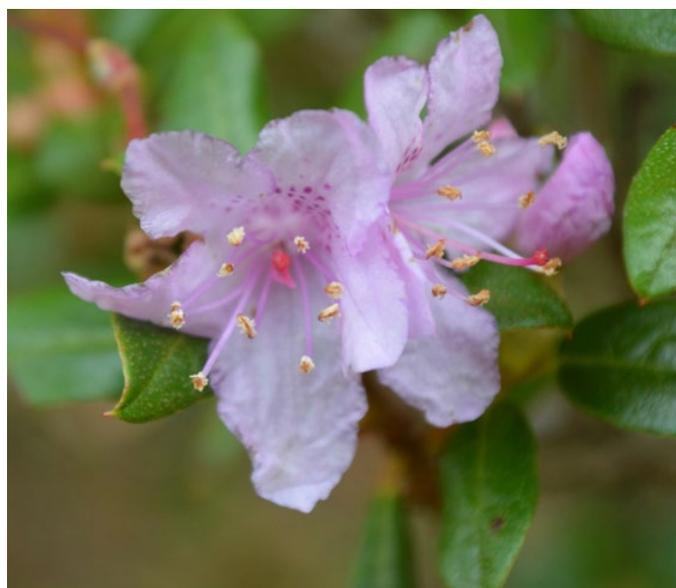
R. 'September Snow'



R. 'Blue Mist'



R. 'Moth'



R. 'Dalkeith'

A rangy form with dark longish shiny leaves, it is well adapted to drier sites.

In 1962 *R. 'September Snow'* was bred by hybridist Bruce Campbell by crossing *R. leucaspis* with *R. edgeworthii* to get a rather unusual scented dwarf with warm white flowers.

Rhododendron 'Dalkeith' appeared about 1966 as a Uniform Series seedling in the nursery of Carl Teschner in the street of that name. It is a dwarf with small deep green leaves. Flowering is prolific in trusses of 10 to 17 covering the whole bush in October and sometimes in June also, in soft rosy lavender flowers. Carl Teschner was the Rock Garden King in his time and involved in



R. 'Kotuku'

the creation of many gardens in that style. I was sent on my bike as a child to spend time at his nursery.

Rhododendron 'Kotuku' dates from around 1966 as a selected form of *R. maddenii* ssp. *maddenii* from the DBG, Once called, informally, *maddenii* 'Virginale' it has pure white trumpet shaped strongly scented flowers which come in October. Leaves are dark green and shiny. Tolerates some dry. Registered with the RHS by DRG in 1991.

Rhododendron 'Tolcarne', 1968, was an *R. boothii* seedling found in a local garden by Heaton Rutland. It has broadly campanulate yellow

green flowers on a small plant with leaves with hairy margins. Although desirable it was difficult to grow, so perhaps the hybrid 'Moth', *R. megeratum* x *R. boothii* is a better bet.

In 1968 the same cross was made between the same species (but not the same plants) to produce 2 quite distinct cultivars.

First is, *R.* 'Little Glendoe' (*R. forrestii* var. *repens* x *R. delavayi*). Miss Ethel Jonstone provided the pollen to Les Jury in New Plymouth and got this plant back. It has shiny dark green leaves, slightly bullate and recurved. Stems are angular and rough. Flowers are deepest wax red

and campanulate in June and July when snow can be on the ground. The original plant, now at Tannock Glen is 2m x 2m.

Secondly, *R.* 'Birchfield' is the same cross as the above, and was carried out by nurseryman Chas McLaughlin, but produced the very dwarf form of the pollen parent for a creeping plant no more than 200mm high in its life time. The slightly larger flowers are produced in October, not July.

Bruce Campbell selected an *R. ciliicalyx* seedling in 1971 and this was named 'Rothesay'. The warm white flowers normally appear in October and look best in light shade.



R. 'Little Glendoe'



R. 'Birchfield'



R. 'Rothesay'



R. 'Mrs Percy McLaren'



R. 'Ed Hillary'



R. 'Ember Elf'



Unnamed Heaton Rutland hybrid



R. 'Ken Burns' x 'Parisiennne'

Rhododendron 'Mrs Percy McLaren' appears in 1976 as a possible Loderi seedling in the garden of Reg and Nan Medlicott, but where the distinctive frilly edge of the pink flowers comes from is another mystery.

R. 'Ember Elf' in 1983 was another Bruce Campbell cross (*R. xanthostephanum* x *R. campylogynum*) and produced a compact dwarf with orange thimble like flowers.

Registered in 2008 another hybrid from Bruce was R. 'Ed Hillary' (*R. grande* x *R. williamsianum*) which is now quite a large plant with oval/orbicular leaves, campanulate flowers pink fading to ivory with a dark blotch and a pique edge.

Possible plants worth naming are a Heaton Rutland hybrid in the Fitchett garden and a garden hybrid of 'Ken Burns' x 'Parisiennne'.

WAIPAHIHI BOTANICAL RESERVE TAUPO

Lynn Bublitz

Lake Taupo from the Reserve

The visit by members of the New Zealand Camellia Society, arranged as part of the programme of the 2022 Camellia Convention held in Taupo in August, allowed a new insight into the Waipahihi Reserve.

The concept of a botanical reserve on 100 acres of crown land at Waipahihi was first discussed in 1962. A group of enthusiasts formed a society to pursue the dream. Consultation and deputations led to 74 acres of the land being set aside by the Minister for Crown Lands, free of charge for a botanical reserve to be managed by a society “appointed to control and manage” it. In 1966 the Waipahihi Botanical Society (Inc) was established.

Further land has been added since, in part the result of an anonymous contribution originally set aside for residential growth, with more through bequests. The total area is now 86 acres (35 hectares).

The volunteer work began in earnest in 1967, and continues. The outer areas are still being developed. Most of the reserve was covered in scrub, bracken fern, blackberry and broom and rogue

pinus. It had to be cleared section by section, planted, with roads and tracks laid as time, money and volunteer effort allowed. Plantings of rimu, totara, miro, pittosporum and beech have been successful. A drive through the garden now is seemingly one through a natural forest with a shrub and fern understory. The restoration of the native forest has earned several conservation awards over the years. But Waipahihi is more than an arboretum, a forest of native plants. The objects of the Society called also for ornamental species such as azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons, cherries and magnolias to be planted in bays along the road to promote visitor interest.

It was the camellias that were the focus of the August day visit. The major collection is located in an area dedicated to Richard Clere, who was the driving force behind the establishment of the reserve. Through this area four interlacing walks totalling 460m and along which the collection is displayed, have been formed. There are over 600 different species, all named and catalogued. In 2015 Harvey Howard, a New Zealand expert in camellias, noted that the collection was the largest in New Zealand and a number of specimens



Camellia ‘Sir Robert Muldoon’

were rare. These were a special attraction to the visitors that day. Catching their attention were many *reticulata* hybrids including ‘Robert Muldoon’ and ‘Lasca Beauty’, and japonicas ‘Twilight’ and ‘Midnight’.

Early rhododendrons are planted at the gates and along the road. Large bushes of *R. ‘Christmas Cheer’*, ‘Kaponga’ and ‘Cornubia’ and carpets of petals under ‘Sir Robert Peel’ are just a taste of the extensive collection which later in the spring is the foremost attraction of Waipahihi. As well as in groups along the road there are two main rhododendron areas: in one, through which a 350m walk traverses there are 150 different

varieties. Azaleas are also featured on a bank in the Tree Fern Dell.

Most of the trees and shrubs displayed, both native and exotic, have over the years been gifted, including a collection of rhododendrons from Pukeiti.

There are many other tracks through the reserve which are very popular with the locals who are allowed to walk their dogs on leashes. Plans are proposed to ring-fence the property which will enhance pest control, a continual battle.

Volunteers, a committed bunch, still undertake all the work required in keeping this place a wonderful Taupo attraction. Financial support and gifts of plants and equipment have enabled its ongoing development. The Waipahihi Botanical Society Endowment Trust Fund has been established and provides income for ongoing maintenance and operations, enabling projects to be planned and implemented. It deserves support.

Waipahihi is a great place to visit when in Taupo.



Camellia 'Guilio Nuccio'



Carpet of *R.* 'Sir Robert Peel' petals



Rhododendron 'Kaponga', Mount Tauhara in the background

PUKEITI PROPAGATION – COLLECTION GROWTH AND CONSERVATION

Andrew Brooker

When working with conservation collections, regardless of the genera, the key to success is ongoing propagation. The nursery in essence becomes the beating heart of the collection and to this end the rhododendron collection at Pukeiti is no exception.

Plants, cuttings and packets of seed have made their way through the propagation process enabling us to build up what we now have. Whilst the main focus has always been species, the collection of what were the latest in hybrids from around New Zealand and the world grew steadily alongside, as did the nursery!

Propagation methods have improved overtime and since I started working at Pukeiti in 1989 many changes have been brought about to ensure that we meet our objectives – key being collection management through conservation.

For the last 18 months we have been using the services of a local grower to process the bulk of the cutting material, the resulting young propagules of which are grown on at Pukeiti in the small nursery for the various end purposes envisaged. This is proving to be a success and the ongoing relationship has had other benefits. Our potting media are now sourced through the contractor, giving us access to a specialist mix developed for acid loving plants – our rhododendrons. It is also easier now to keep abreast of the latest developments in nursery practices and we have gained a valuable mentor. Some vegetative propagation still takes place at Pukeiti as it is not always convenient nor logical to take small numbers of cuttings off site. We also manage any



Rouse propagation unit purchased and donated by the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust

grafting or layering on site as these two methods do take time and again the numbers involved are small.

Seed from reliable sources has always been an easy, but slower, method of acquiring new accessions for the collection and even for this seemingly simple task we have improved processes and facilities at Pukeiti. Over the last two years we have had a local engineering firm, MECO, engaged to construct for us a dedicated propagation unit for seed germination. It is in essence a large humidity chamber which keeps an ambient temperature by way of a heated water tank. This is supplemented by a grow light which gives us extended day length to stimulate the seed. Whilst this may sound very fanciful and modern the methodology and equipment have been around for decades – we just have one of the more modern iterations.

And now for the why. Just why do we, with an established collection,

need to keep growing more plants.

Successful propagation of collection material is important for two key reasons. One, it ensures that as the existing plants age and deteriorate, some gracefully some not so, we still maintain a representation in the collection.

A good example is *Rhododendron protistum* 'Pukeiti'. This was grown from seed acquired in the fifties and stood proudly for decades in the large-leaf area, flowering, growing and being admired by all for decades. It was becoming obvious by the early part of this century that things weren't looking good but by this time steps had been taken to correct this. In 1993 a graft had been carried out successfully to create the replacement that is now situated on the Goudie Walk, and in the late nineties a series of layers were put down by Keith Adams, one of which now flowers happily on the Larcom Walk. There are now plants growing in other parts

of New Zealand thus ensuring the survival of this great rhododendron.

Secondly, in this time of climate change it has become necessary to ensure that all of our rhododendron eggs are not in one basket. The Pukeiti environment has changed slowly but surely over the last seven decades and these changes are made more obvious by the range of rhododendrons we can no longer grow than by the ones we grow well. To this end we are engaging host gardens in other parts of the country and for this to be successful we need plant material to disseminate. The Pukeiti Plants for Members scheme also plays a part in this.

With continuing improvement to the way we grow our young plants the future of propagation at Pukeiti is sound. The objectives remain firmly entrenched and the results speak for themselves.



Andrew Brooker and Allan Jellyman germinating seed in the Rouse propagator



Root ball of young rhododendron and new mix



Propagation house at Pukeiti



R. 'Spicers Pink' at Stead Block, Pukeiti



R. 'Lalique' raised by Graham Holmes from a seedling given to him by Mollie Coker.

ON GIANTS' SHOULDERS: BRIAN AND HELEN COKER'S LIFETIME ASSOCIATION WITH RHODODENDRONS

Martin Wilkie

We are inevitably influenced, encouraged and informed by people we share the same interests with, and particularly so in the fields of horticulture, gardening and landscape. These combine elements of both art and science, plus a strong practical component. Brian and Helen have always been generous with their time, and happy to share their knowledge and hands-on experience of rhododendrons; learning from them and like-minded people is a great way to expand our own perspective. Sir Isaac Newton's quote about standing on the shoulders of giants to see further was a well-known English proverb in the 17th century, and it has lost none of its relevance to New Zealand's modern 'communities of interest'—in our case a focus on the genus *Rhododendron*, and the Cokers' ongoing commitment over four decades to date.

Provenance

The couple both have fine gardeners in their extended families, with Brian's dad and Helen's mum being the closest influences when they were growing up. Working with someone who's confident handling plants and soil naturally sparks an interest especially if there's one to begin with, and the practical skills become settled and familiar over time. Brian's family has had perhaps a more formal association with the gardening world: his great-grandfather was a professional gardener at one of

the grand Canterbury estates in the 19th century, and Ron (Brian's uncle) and Mollie Coker were notable Christchurch plantspeople over four decades from the 1950s, known particularly for their love of rhododendrons and respected for the first class results of their hybridising and selection.

In his early years Ron was associated with the Beautifying Society in Oamaru, and married Mollie in 1972—a second marriage for them both for 15 years until Mollie's death; Ron passed away in 1998.

Mollie had moved to 129 Ilam Road in Christchurch in the 1940s with her first husband Ivan Wood and their children— a large property of 2.8 hectares/seven acres (room enough for them to have a horse) opposite Ilam Gardens over the playing fields; there was no existing garden. Mollie had known the internationally recognised plantsman and rhododendron hybridiser Edgar Stead and his Ilam Gardens since she was a child, 'and when in 1950 she started growing rhododendrons and azaleas from seed, permission was given to collect seed



from Edgar's plants. This was taken from what Mollie considered the most beautiful of hundreds of plants, mostly ...from [the Loderi Group]. [She] also raised and registered plants from USA seed [including] 'Ivan D Wood' named after her late husband'. (*Crossing the Rubicon*)

Nearly half of the property was eventually planted as a garden; it is 'now the site of buildings on the campus of the University of Canterbury' (*Crossing the Rubicon*); in 1988 prior to the University development, many special plants



Soft pink tree peonies in a raised timber planter, beside the kitchen windows and sunny courtyard.

including rhododendrons were relocated to Ron's new home in Greer's Road. Brian Coker believes there might still be survivors of Mollie's original plantings along part of the streamside boundary at Ilam, including venerable old rhododendrons.

Mollie had been keen on growing and hybridising rhododendrons since her early association with Edgar Stead; she was the catalyst for Ron taking more of an interest in rhododendrons generally, and beginning his own hybridising efforts in due course. He served on local committees, including the Canterbury Rhododendron Society (CRS) and at national level; Brian thinks it likely that Mollie may have been involved in committee work in the early days too.

Ron's obituary in the *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society (JARS)* noted many rhododendrons 'that are products of Mollie's and Ron's efforts: 'Mollie Coker', 'Ivan D Wood', 'Coker's Choice', 'Coker's Misty Dawn' [registered after Ron's death], 'Coker's Pink', 'Coral Queen', 'Pacific Princess', 'Gilded Gown', 'Olivia Coker', 'Pacific Queen', 'Phantom', 'The Dream', 'Touch of Class', 'Whipped Cream', and 'White Sails'. Other hybrids associated with the Cokers' endeavours are: 'Ambergris', 'Dainty Lass', 'Highfield Cream', 'Ilam Pink Splendour', 'Marshmallow', 'Ron Coker' and 'Sarita Coker'. Some of 'these plants, in turn, have been used by other hybridizers to

create additional generations'. (Web 1)

Dr Ronald Ayling, president of the CRS at the time, noted that: '[Ron Coker] was one of our great ambassadors, liked and respected wherever he travelled and equally welcoming to visitors from all over the globe. It did not matter if people arrived singly or by the bus load, he and Mollie received them and entertained them with equal kindness, courtesy and unflagging interest. He gave willingly of his time and knowledge in talking to garden groups and in lecturing and judging in New Zealand and overseas. No request for his help was ever refused or considered too trivial.' (Web 1)

With these generous plantspeople in both their families, it's perhaps not surprising that Brian and Helen chose to continue with the good work in a similar fashion, and this steady and ongoing commitment is a great credit to them.

St Alban's garden, Orton Bradley Park rhododendrons

Soon after they were married in 1982, Brian and Helen started developing a garden together at their new home, initially on nearly a quarter-acre/1012 square metres; and then a subsequent 720 square metre garden in St Albans, one of Christchurch's older residential suburbs with many tall established trees. Due to their long association with Ron

and Mollie, they were able to put into practice a good deal of information specific to rhododendrons, including Ron teaching Helen some successful grafting techniques. Then, as now, the couple shared an appreciation of a softer naturalistic style of planting, carefully placing trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and bulbs to provide good combinations of conditions for the plants to thrive. The garden had the advantage of deep fertile soil, and gradually developed rich layers of intensive planting: deciduous trees including maples, magnolias and dogwoods formed a canopy over a marvellous collection of camellias, rhododendrons, viburnums, hellebores, hostas, trilliums, peonies and spring flowering bulbs.

In 1983, at the same time Brian and Helen's own garden was getting under way, Ron Coker and local plantsman Hamish Deans first discussed the prospect of establishing a rhododendron collection within Orton Bradley Park, at the head of Lyttelton Harbour. In 1985 Brian and Helen were part of the team at the earliest stages of the project, when Periodic Detention workers were helping to clear away scrub and weeds prior to the first plantings. The couple have continued to be steady supporters of the collection for nearly 40 years, closely involved with working bees, committee work, planning of different areas, development, and planting design.

The rhododendron collection at Orton Bradley Park has a planting style which is very much in tune with Brian and Helen's philosophy. As noted in *The New Zealand Rhododendron* (2021): 'The overall effect is casual, as if the plants had seeded themselves into natural associations of pleasing forms and texture. This is a style which is very tricky to do well—an art form attempting to be artless. If the control is too firm the effect is forced; too weak a grip and it looks overgrown'. (MW)

Early memberships

The couple both became involved with committee work in various rhododendron organisations soon after they were married, and this

input was maintained while their children Olivia and Jonathan were still young. Helen remembers manoeuvring pushchairs up steps to committee rooms on many different occasions. They joined the CRS as its youngest members at the time; as Helen points out, they're still its youngest members over 40 years later! They could not easily attend the New Zealand Rhododendron Association (NZRA) national conferences while the children were young, so membership of the NZRA came along later. Helen was the Canterbury representative to the NZRA for around six years when colleague Kathryn Millar retired from the national level, and maintains that it's good to bring in 'fresh blood' and new ideas on a regular basis; she's not a believer in staying on committees for too long.

Work and family were the usual focus while the children were growing up; it's remarkable how Brian and Helen were able so consistently to keep up their commitments in the rhododendron world while at the same time maintaining careers in financial planning and nursing respectively.

Editors, writer, and registrar

Helen is a past Secretary, Treasurer/ Membership position holder, and CRS Bulletin editor. Brian is also past editor of the CRS Bulletin, and past Secretary and President of the CRS; he has continued to write regularly

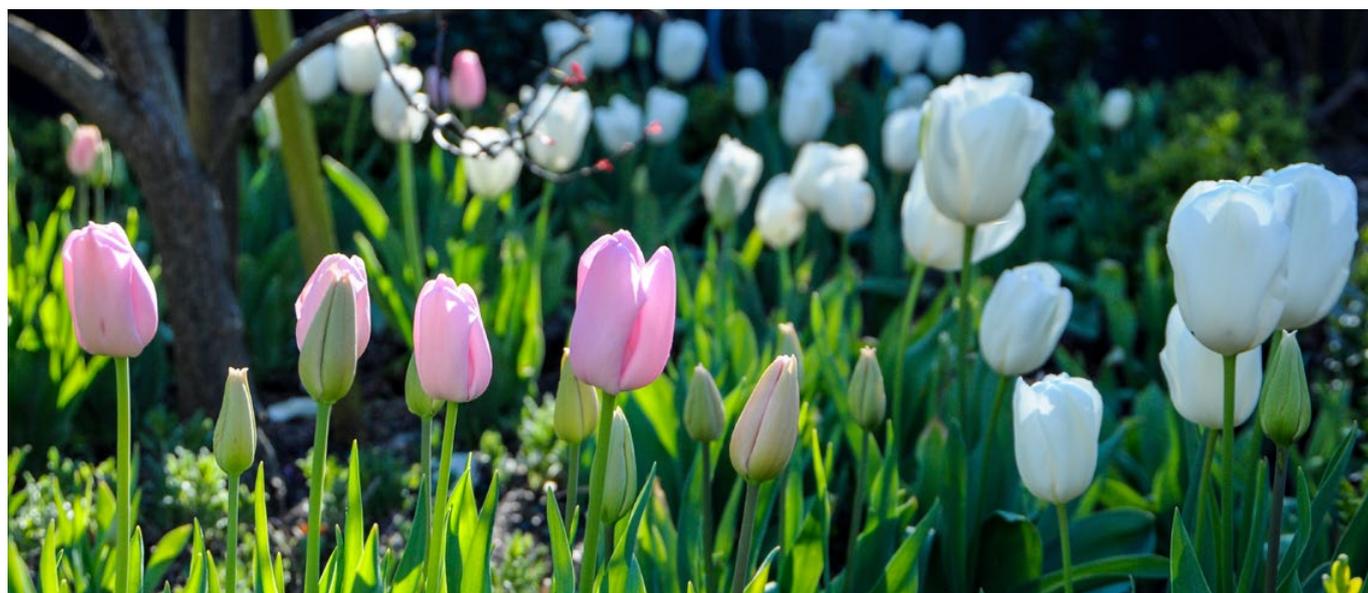
for the NZRA Bulletin (now *The New Zealand Rhododendron*). A major project in the 1990s was co-editing along with Kathryn Millar and Joy Talbot the first edition of *Crossing the Rubicon: a handbook of New Zealand Raised Rhododendrons*, published by the CRS in 1998. Brian was also closely involved with collating information for the handbook. Twenty-four years later the publication remains an immensely valuable compilation of detailed information. My own copies are well thumbed and worn from regular use. There have been many recent introductions and registrations in the years since publication of course, and inevitable changes to nurseries, propagators and suppliers.

The handbook includes a section listing nurseries and growers which at the time of printing specialised in, propagated, and/or could supply a significant range of rhododendron species and hybrids. Specialist plant nurseries which can also hybridise, select and propagate their speciality—whether this is alpine plants, herbaceous perennials, indigenous species or rhododendrons—have always been a valuable resource and store of knowledge, and unfortunately are becoming rarer. Brian tells me that around two thirds of specialist rhododendron nurseries noted in the handbook have closed since 1998. The prospect of increasing numbers of wild rhododendron

species becoming extinct in their natural range is becoming more likely under pressure from climate change and human disruption of their supporting ecosystem. Propagation in other countries with temperate climates is one way to help to protect them, which makes undertakings such as the New Zealand *ex-situ* Rhododendron Conservation Project a vital part of this conservation work.

Brian became Registrar in 1998, which involves him acting as a facilitator for New Zealand's rhododendron enthusiasts to register proposed new cultivars with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). Individuals can certainly apply directly to the RHS themselves; however it can be a tricky process. Brian and Helen can help with the paperwork, and are able to reserve proposed names for the future. They also have a wider perspective on what cultivar names may already be taken, to avoid duplication. For example, Denis Hughes's superb deciduous rhododendron cultivar 'Pavlova' unfortunately cannot be registered with the RHS under that name, because another rhododendron with that name was registered first.

Writing in *The New Zealand Rhododendron* (2016), Brian noted that 'The New Zealand Rhododendron Register was commenced in 1975 with the first entry being R. 'Irene Bain', documented—by the first New



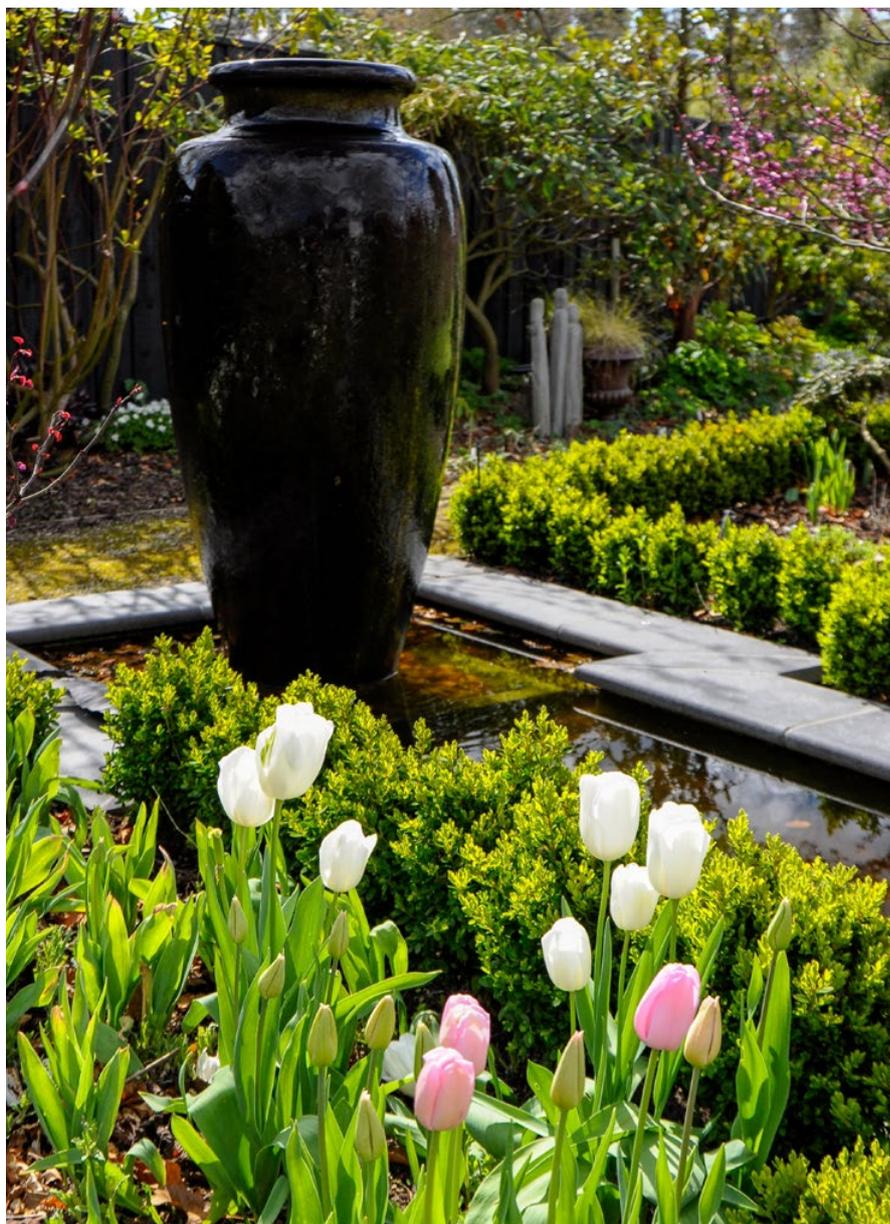
Tulips near the water feature on the west side of the house; 'Pink Diamond' and 'Snowboard'.

Zealand Registrar, Graham Smith. Over the past 42 years there have been a total of 377 cultivars added to the New Zealand Register'. A registration form is completed and sent to the New Zealand Registrar, which is then 'submitted to the International Registrar- who undertakes this role for the RHS as the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for the genus *Rhododendron*'. (BC) There have been other New Zealand cultivars registered directly with the International Registrar, additional to those 377 on the New Zealand Register.

The New Zealand Register 'shows a list of hybridisers which is a veritable 'who's who' of the New Zealand rhododendron scene over the last 50 years. Early hybridisers such as Edgar Stead and Dr JS Yeates were followed by Mollie Coker, Gwen and Lachie Grant, Mr AG Holmes, Ron Gordon, the Jury family, the King family, George Huthnance, and Graham Smith on behalf of the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust. Later hybridisers have included Barry Sligh and Tom Garbutt, and of course in regard to vireyas, Os Blumhardt and Michael Cullinane registered many cultivars. Formal registration is important as it becomes an official record of the details of the cultivar, including parentage (if known), details of the hybridiser, grower, introducer and registrant, and specific details of the cultivar such as plant habit, leaf and flower'. (BC)

In 1998 Brian had the pleasure of facilitating the registration of 'Coker's Misty Dawn' (*degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* x 'Edith Carey') hybridised by Mollie Coker and registered by Ron Coker; a few years earlier Ron had hybridised 'Ivan D. Wood' x 'Coker's Pink', selected the cross, and raised and registered a cultivar named for Brian and Helen's daughter 'Olivia Coker' in 1993. Their son Jonathan also has a fine registered cultivar with his name: 'Jonathan Coker' is a 'Lemon Lodge' hybrid.

This next generation of Cokers is also interested in gardens and green spaces, but not as keen on the style of their parents' garden, or rhododendrons. Olivia is more focused on edibles and productive gardening, and Jonathan and his



Water gently overflows this massive ceramic vase into the water feature on the west side of the house; tulips are 'Pink Diamond' and 'Snowboard'.



R. 'Jonathan Coker'

partner Elyse have been developing a four hectare/10 acre block they purchased about two years ago. Much of the area is grazed, however Elyse is keen to learn more about gardening, and Helen was able to help her with rose pruning this last winter. She was nervous about making a mistake, but in the event made a great job and is feeling far more confident about approaching the roses next season.

A new home

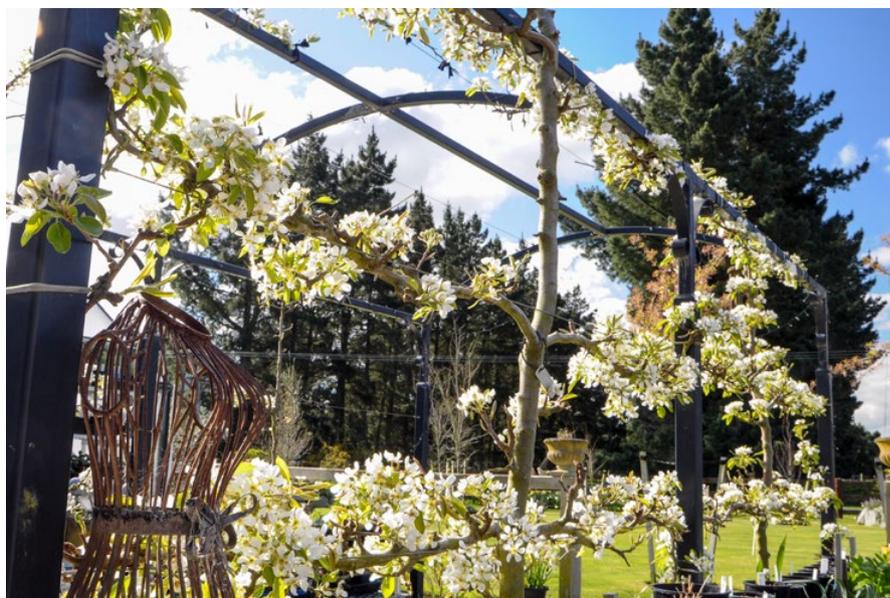
The series of earthquakes and aftershocks beginning in September 2010 was life-changing for Cantabrians, and particularly so for Brian, Helen and their extended families. It was a turning point in their lives, and led to the creation of a new home and garden at West Melton, 25km inland from Christchurch, a labour of love begun in 2014. The couple had considered moving to a larger property at different times, but enjoyed the local community in St Albans, and the easy walking distance to Merivale cafes and shops.

In the Christchurch earthquake on February 22, 2011 Brian was trapped when the Pyne Gould Corporation building collapsed, and the team of four rescuers who freed him— two doctors, a firefighter and a police officer— had to amputate both his legs just above the knee. It was many months before the couple could return home to St Albans— the relatively small rooms and changes of level were now an obstacle course for both a wheelchair and artificial limbs. Under the circumstances, a purpose-built house and larger section became the logical choice, and a great opportunity.

The couple had clear ideas of what they wanted in their new home, plus practical advice from an occupational therapist about the generous spaces Brian would need to move around freely, allowing him to make best use of desktops and working areas in the kitchen and office. The resulting building was and is an elegant and uncluttered single level home, ideal for hosting family, larger groups of gardening friends, and other visitors. Before furniture and furnishing arrived Helen wondered how they'd fill the spaces, but with good proportions and careful placement, it



This metal windmill was brought back from a trip to North America; the feijoa tree has grown up in recent years and the windmill will soon be moved to a more open spot.



The metal arches were made in Christchurch, and support grapes 'Albany Surprise' and 'Candice'; pears 'Conference', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Williams' bon Chrétien' and 'Beurre Bosc'; and apples 'Initial', 'Captain Kidd Kay', 'Peasgood Nonsuch' and 'Baujade'.



This lightly scented rhododendron is 'Milton Holland', a New Zealand raised *R. macabeanum* hybrid from Taranaki in 1978.



Aubretia, tufts of paler pink thrift *Armeria*, and *Geranium* foliage along a low stone wall; the smooth rocks are comfortable to rest on, and were brought from Kaikoura.

all works beautifully. A free-standing annex is easily accessed, and Helen's parents live in a self-contained modern family flat on site, linked to sunny north-facing courtyards.

Stoneycrop garden

The new property was over five times larger than their St Albans' section: 3,600 square metres/0.9 acres of bare land as part of a new subdivision. Arriving at the same time as their neighbours naturally fostered a sense of community and shared focus, and creating the new garden became an extension of this process. Helen had put her nursing career on hold to care for Brian during his rehabilitation; she continued for some years to volunteer at the Canterbury Charity Hospital. Taking into account the changes in their lives, she wanted to create a garden which as keen gardeners they could enjoy together and work in as before. They commented to me recently that the garden has developed very much as they'd hoped: a true 'couple's garden' which they enjoy as a partnership—'I do the lawns and spadework!' laughs Helen. There's a lot of give and take. New ideas can take some years to be fully realised while they work through the options together for a solution they're both happy with. A proposed gravel garden is a good recent example. Both are keen on the idea of a shingly area with curved forms relating to Canterbury's braided rivers; the trick is where to place it so it

becomes a destination and a surprise, rather than a dominant feature visible from the house all year round.

The original local soil at West Melton was categorised as a Templeton silt loam; however this light fine-textured topsoil had been stripped off during development of the site, and after building work what soil remained was compacted and full of sizable river stones. The couple call their home Stoneycrop for good reason! Clearing the soil of stones is an ongoing process: rather than being dumped off site, they're placed at the base of the boundary fences, where they help to keep the soil

off the palings and have become a characterful feature in themselves.

With dozens of plants from their St Albans garden heeled in and waiting for a home, Helen began the demanding process of building up the soil structure with endless bags of horse manure and piles of pea straw, moving rocks to define raised beds, and planting hedges and shelterbelts. The couple asked Christchurch landscape architect Robert Watson for help with ideas for how the basic layout could best be formed—extending views and sight lines from inside the house, and creating a sequence of lawns around the property. Smooth pathways, low stone and timber walls for seating, and level access points into the garden would ensure Brian could be fully involved with creating and maintaining the garden as it grew.

Helen had help with the heaviest physical tasks from local landscape contractor Shaun McMahon, who sourced larger rocks from Kaikoura and positioned them around the raised beds, laid pathways and paving, built raised planters and courtyards, and prepared and sowed the lawns. Helen's parents were a great help too, weeding and preparing the soil in the new beds. The garden has the most expansive curving shapes to the north and west of the house, with more compact and sheltered formal courtyards and a



Brian and Helen's plant stall on Halkett Road; well-grown treasures from their garden for sale.



A plain wooden seat and terracotta planter makes an attractive feature next to the forecourt.



Bright red 'London' tulips bloom in front of the reddish new foliage of herbaceous peonies growing on in pots.

water feature to the west and south. These lead on to the entrance forecourt and garaging on the south side of the house. Brian's propagation greenhouse, barbeque, raised vegetable garden (including tree peonies) and espaliered fruit trees on metal arches are directly outside the sunny open plan kitchen, dining and living areas to the north, with easy access through wide doors.

Naturalistic style

Viewed from inside the house, the main garden seems deceptively simple—however a stroll with Brian and Helen soon discovers a natural perimeter route which winds among the raised beds and on through unexpected spaces which are hidden from the house. Many of the larger plants such as dogwoods, rhododendrons and

maples were transplanted from the sheltered conditions of St Albans, and not surprisingly looked somewhat thoughtful for a year or two in their new, more exposed home. There are still a few compacted spots Helen is working on, however after eight years the trees are settling in very well, and after an extraordinarily wet July this year 2022 (over 300 mm rainfall, nearly half Christchurch's annual average), spring growth at the time of writing is looking very promising. Gardening acquaintance Ian Fryer, who helped with the initial transplanting process, took great care to minimise stress on the plants. The intention has always been to establish an English-style woodland garden, with shade from deciduous trees sheltering a rich understory planting of rhododendrons and other

flowering shrubs, with a similar feel to the St Albans garden but at a larger scale, and suited to Brian's mobility.

Such was the success of the new garden after 18 months of hard work, and to show his appreciation of her commitment, Brian nominated Helen for the 2015 Gardena Gardener of the Year competition—and she was the well-deserved winner. In the December issue of NZ Gardener that year, she commented 'I thought [the other nominees] were really strong and it's such an honour to win. When we were named as a finalist, our local parish asked if we could open our garden for spring visits, and we met so many lovely local people through that who said they voted for us. That's one of the reasons why I agreed to enter—to help us integrate into the community'.



Crisp green and white 'Spring Green' tulips in the driveway garden; Hollywood juniper 'Kaizuka' is planted at intervals for permanent evergreen structure.



These tasty broad beans with attractive rose-pink flowers are called 'Huey'; selected by plantsman Dennis Hughes in Tapanui, Southland, they offer welcome colour in the cooler months.



Bright blue timber obelisks support large-flowered clematis next to the forecourt.

Peonies and propagation

The tree peonies at Stoneycrop warrant a special mention. Growing in raised planters near the house their flowers are otherworldly—great pleated and ruffled creatures in pale pink and rose red over 30cm across, living examples of Oscar Wilde's maxim that 'moderation is fatal; nothing succeeds like excess'. Brian propagated about 30 of these plants as seedlings, and when I first visited in October 2019 he and Helen were looking forward to all the possibilities of colour and form in this first flowering 'within the next few weeks, which will be quite exciting... and of course the rhododendrons are starting to come out now with peak flowering most probably three to four weeks away'. The tree peony seeds (and a good butter-yellow form of herbaceous *Paeonia mlokosewitschii*) came from venerable plants originally in Ron and Mollie Coker's Ilam garden. Their tree peonies had arrived many years earlier from England, so this third generation

of plants have a fine pedigree.

Brian and Helen's vision of welcoming people to the garden and reaching out to the community has continued. Brian has always enjoyed the focus and satisfaction of propagating plants, and continues to take cuttings and collect seed (such as the tree peonies) to increase the number of species in the garden, and supply their roadside plant stall on Halkett Road. Brian's propagation house is well set up for good results, and it means a lot to them both to successfully grow and nurture quality plants for sale which have so many personal associations. 'The plant stall is great, but I'd equally like to be spending the time working in the garden! I'd also like to get into hybridising more—however it does need a lot of space to do it properly: facilities and shade houses to accommodate upwards of 100 or more seedlings growing on to select from.'

After eight years Stoneycrop is still a relatively young garden, and is gradually developing a sense of

enclosure as the larger trees and shrubs fill out. Low curving steel edges define the garden beds and shingle pathways, and there are well over 200 individual rhododendrons, which will become more prominent and add their long-season colour and scent to the garden's distinctive character as they mature. Brian updates an orderly spreadsheet which keeps track of identification and ongoing changes. The rhododendron collection is impressive—and the other 1000-odd individual plants (and counting!) even more so, from Persian Ironbark *Parrotia persica* to butter-yellow *Pleione* ground orchids. A detailed timeline of occasional casualties, new arrivals and transplanting trips around the property is vital to maintaining a clear overall picture of the garden as it develops.

Contemporary changes

I was interested to hear Brian and Helen's thoughts about the influence of the internet and other factors on familiar structures and networks such as garden clubs,

and by extension the local and national elements of New Zealand's rhododendron 'community of interest'.

Greater speed of communication and the ability to share enormous amounts of information has removed barriers locally and in our ability to connect with the rest of the world. This process certainly democratises information, making it far more accessible. The effects of this technology on society have already been profound and will continue to have unexpected consequences. With so much information available to nearly everyone, there's arguably now less need to join formal organisations, or to be part of groups which not so long ago functioned as both source and gatekeeper of relatively specialist knowledge—in some cases membership by invitation only, or with a sponsor. Much of this is now at one's fingertips on the internet—from papers published online exploring the cutting edge of rhododendron genetic diversity down to the resolution of individual proteins, to practical videos detailing the delicate shifts of temperature and moisture required for successful seed stratification. These are relatively extreme examples, however the finer practical points of growing some tricky rhododendron species were specialist skills until relatively recently, and those familiar organisations and their publications were for the time an effective and popular way of spreading this knowledge to large numbers of people.

I understand from Brian and Helen that a few decades ago membership of the CRS approached 600 people, and it was an easy task to fill three or four busloads for local trips and garden visits, which also served as effective social gatherings. Gardens are now much more accessible to everyone due to regular garden festivals and open days—with details easily accessed online—where one can 'pay as you go'. This is an alternative to maintaining memberships of garden clubs, horticultural societies or other groups to have access *en masse* to private gardens, as often used to be the case. Stoneycrop itself is a member of the New Zealand Gardens' Trust—a great example; and I'm reminded of another from April this year when three gardens near

Culverden opened for people to visit over a weekend, enjoy the autumn colours and explore the work of local artists. Access to gardens and gardeners by individuals can be just as effective and successful as larger more formal groups, and organisations.

Fuel prices, a blurring of the line between paid work and private life, the Covid pandemic, increasing numbers of people working from home, and shifting patterns of weekend sport and leisure have all contributed to these sometimes sudden and unforeseen changes—forging and maintaining links with other people has never been more important.

Seeing Further

Helen has recently completed a number of years' service on the NZRA Council, with Lisa Williams from local specialist nursery Rhododirect stepping in to the role. Brian and Helen also have links with the New Zealand Alpine Garden Society (NZAGS) whose brief fits neatly into their broader horticultural aims: '...to promote and extend the growth, preservation and cultivation of both native endemic New Zealand alpine plants and exotic plants suitable for small gardens'. Stoneycrop is a registered four-star garden with the New Zealand Gardens' Trust (NZGT). In addition to their already busy lives, Brian and Helen continue to give willingly of their time and knowledge, and we are so fortunate to have this remarkable couple as

long term and enthusiastic members of the New Zealand rhododendron and horticultural community.

Notes

Special thanks to Brian and Helen Coker for the opportunity to meet them again during the preparation of this article, for generously taking the time to review and approve the draft text, and for the pleasure of seeing Stoneycrop in their company.

Part of the information sourced for this article was first published in an earlier article about the Cokers: 'Moving West—A New Frontier', in Latitude magazine Issue 68, December 2019 - January 2020, and is used with kind permission of the Editor.

All photographs by Martin Wilkie except for photo of Brian and Helen Coker and rhododendrons 'Tom Garbutt' 'Jonathan Coker'.

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Soft pink tree peonies in a raised timber planter, beside the kitchen windows and sunny courtyard.



HYBRIDS AT ORTON BRADLEY PARK

Contributed by Michael Summerfield, John McLaughlin and Kathryn Millar

Discussing rhododendrons with the authors

The Canterbury Rhododendron Garden is within Orton Bradley Park, Charteris Bay, Banks Peninsula. The Park is governed by its own Board. At the time of the development of the garden, a designer advising the Park Board approved rhododendrons but they were to be limited to white or cream flowered varieties such as *johnstoneanum*, 'Dora Amateus', *dalhousiae*, *maddenii* and *ciliicalyx* types. The reason given for this was a sensitivity towards the native plants of the area. The plants were not to be named and detailed plans were not made. Over time the planting has evolved, overriding the original instructions and the hybrids have been chosen with a strong local bias.

Regarding the category 'New Zealand Hybrids' we take a broad view. While a number of our hybrids come from seed that was the result of pollination on a plant growing in NZ, some are the result of seed that came from overseas and in this case it is the relationship with the local grower that leads to the plant being included in the grouping.

In giving an account of the planting at Orton Bradley Park we do not intend making suggestions about suitable plants for other locations or garden situations. Compared to most gardens we have a lot of room and a relatively sheltered position. A number of rhododendrons have died in the garden over the years and while most of our present plants are thriving there are a number that insist on protesting about something or other.

Michael Summerfield.

John McLaughlin continues ...

Thinking of rhododendron hybrids and Canterbury, it is hard to go past the influence and achievements of Edgar Stead. He began experiments in rhododendron breeding in 1918 and rapidly gained skill and knowledge. Recognising his expertise, the titled owners of the great rhododendron gardens of Britain invited him to act as judge at the Chelsea Flower Show and provided him with some of their best plants and most recent hybrids, of which 490 were planted on the Ilam estate. From this rich material he made many inspired hybridisations. Three of Stead's plants received Awards of Merit from the RHS. Of the 17 registered Edgar Stead

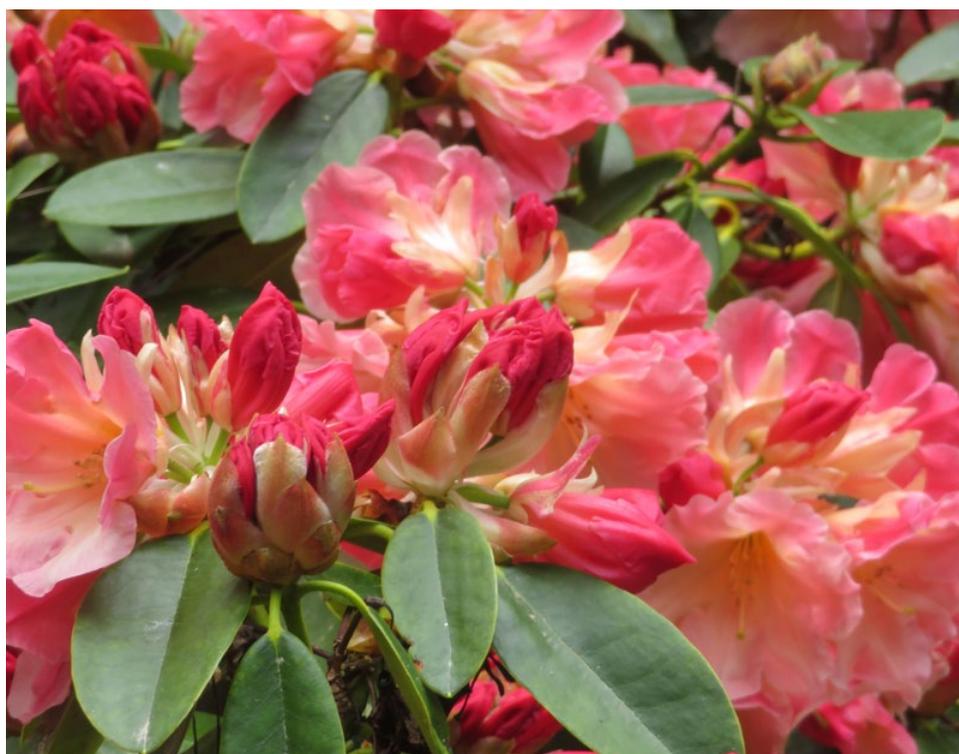
hybrids, 9 were registered by Stead himself, and 8 by others after his retirement, impressed by plants which had come to them in one way or another. These 'others' include Roland Stead, Graham Smith, Mollie Coker, and the Dunedin Rhododendron Group, all quite capable of recognising a notable rhododendron. The CRS Garden contains 13 Stead hybrids.

Two of our Stead hybrids have the 'Ilam' forename, 'Ilam Cornubia' and 'Ilam Cream'. 'Ilam Cornubia' is named after the earlier UK hybrid, 'Cornubia', which had *arboreum* (blood red form) x 'Shilsonii' as parents. ('Shilsonii' is *thomsonii* x *barbatum*), however Stead used 'Shilsonii' x *zeylanicum* to give similar flowers but better trusses and a more compact growth habit. 'Ilam Cream' ('Loderi' x unknown) follows the usual practice of naming Ilam rhododendrons by using the colour of the flower; but this has obvious limitations when another rhododendron with the same colour is in need of a name.

For example, if a series of red flowering plants are produced, they cannot all be called 'Ilam Red'. In the CRS Garden, the five red hybrids in the Scarlet King group ('Homestead', 'Kaka', 'Pines', 'Orchard' and 'Scarlet King') are not only present but growing reasonably closely together. There seems good evidence that four of these were named after where they grew on the Ilam estate. Also included in the non-'Ilam' name category are the lovely pink 'Irene Stead', the strawberry red 'Edgar Stead' with its large trusses, and the



R. 'Ambergis'



R. 'Kiwi Magic'

yellow-throated, white 'Stead's Best'.

Roland Stead recalled that his father "used to raise a batch of, say, 15 or so seedlings from one crossing, keep the best two for the garden, give or sell another two, and destroy the rest". So, what happened to the seedlings given away?

For clarity, those who received these seedlings can be divided into 'Rhododendron Experts' and 'Great Gardeners'. Some of the second group moved into the first group with time and experience.

The 'Rhododendron Experts' included Phillip Barling of Glenfalloch, Dunedin; Sir Russell Matthews of Tupare Garden, New Plymouth; Sir Victor Davies of Duncan and Davies, New Plymouth; James Deans of Homebush, Canterbury; and Dr John Yeates of Massey University, Palmerston North. This group shared a great deal of rhododendron material, although from the sheer scale of his activities Stead may have contributed the most. *Rhododendron* 'Tupare' was hybridised by Stead but named and registered by Sir Russell.

Stead was also generous in promising seedlings for the 'Great Gardeners'. Mollie Coker, who lived next door to Ilam Homestead, was

the greatest beneficiary with not only the gift of plants but also an invitation to collect seed from the garden. She, of course, went on to become an internationally recognised rhododendron expert. Those living further away from Ilam included the Douglasses and Irelands of Wainakarua, the Dennistouns of Peel Forest, and the Hayes of Waimate. Stead would occasionally visit with a car boot full of teenage seedlings looking for a home. It has been said his visits were a mixed blessing. On the one hand the gift of beautiful plants and the association with fame were entirely positive, on the other hand the gentleman from Ilam with the huge car required a top notch lunch and a guided walk around the garden, where he would point out preferred sites for his gifts and outline the extra care they would require. Thus, many Canterbury properties contain Stead hybrids, not registered, maybe not even named, but dearly loved. The driveway of the Hayes property of Centrewood was lined with unnamed Stead hybrids, the very best of which was registered as 'Wesley Hayes'. In more recent times, Dr Melva Philipson selected a pure white Stead seedling of unknown parentage, and named it 'Southern Alps'.

(All rhododendrons mentioned

by name are in the CRS Garden at Orton Bradley Park).

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Joanna Martin (née Dennistoun), pers. comm. 'On Tour' 2002.

Kathryn continues...

The Te Wharau stream tumbles down from the hills which surround the paddocks and campsite of Orton Bradley Park. Nestled between creek bank and the steep rock faces of Dunmallet Hill are the plantings of the Canterbury Rhododendron Society; the site has more shade than we would wish, however removal of natives has remained minimal, and an area known as the front bank serves us well, with the aid of an extensive and expensive irrigation system.

During the establishment period we were fortunate to have many nurserymen supplying NZ hybrids. Our committee aimed at a full



R. 'Maurice Skipworth'



R. 'Southern Alps'

collection and to some extent success was ours; some hybrids were 'one only' and unattainable. Over the years as Michael notes, some plants have died and often the replacement too, teaching us more than a little of such things as susceptibility to rhododendron powdery mildew.

Thirty years ago, flowers of soft apricot cream hues were popular in gardens, a favourite at that time being 'Ivan D Wood', a leggy plant with blooms of soft apricot/cream shades. Our plant is at least 15ft high and not likely to survive down size pruning. Continuing that colour palette, the collection includes 'Jennifer Anne' (a strong growing plant), and 'Ambergris', slow growing and inclined to be miffy. 'Nancy Borthwick' did not survive, however that may have been location rather than the plant. Others are 'Rachel', 'Joan Elder', 'Olwen's Dream', 'Bernice', and 'Apricot Road'.

Walking to the far end of the garden, a track winds over the hill ending in a planting of a mini forest of *macabeanum*, some crossed *grande*; back dropped by a flying fox and a hill side where Ngati Mamoe grew vegetables at the time of Henry 8th.

Cream and shadings to yellow blend well with the native bush and the landscape seen as a whole. The yellow of 'Lovelock' heralds the proximity of spring: three plants in different locations – two pruned, the original permitted to clamber through its host plant; yearly cutting of blooms to share promotes abundant flower. The creamy green of 'Apple Pie' with a double calyx was raised from ARS seed by the late Allen Harris – this is one I love, another favourite being 'Maurice Skipworth', frilled chartreuse in bud opening to fragrant creamy white to soft yellow flowers with a touch of frilling on long stems making it a good cutting flower. 'Waireka', with frilly primrose flowers set off by cinnamon bark, is early season and rarely seen; conservation has prompted us to commission propagation by cuttings and while this has been successful these are not available for distribution as yet. From the Jury breeding of Felix and Mark Jury we appreciate



Tony Fitchett and Granddaughter Daisy inspecting a rhododendron named for her.



R. augustinii



R. 'Stead's Best'



R. 'Kiwi Dad'

'Moon Orchid', 'Barbara Jury', 'Felicity Fair', 'Floral Dance' and others.

From Ilam we enjoy 'Ilam Cream', and the more recently named Loderi type 'Sublime'. Also from Ilam, where the original plant exists, the OBP plantings of 'Tupare', and 'Stead's Best' [both being *nutallii x lindleyi*] in abundance have delighted the public; in a 2001 'Gardener' cutting I read an observation from Abby Jury noting that 'Stead's Best' does not mind if you miss deadheading, whereas 'Tupare' sets copious amounts of seed and can eventually die from the effort.

'White Waves' may be the rhododendron most loved and admired by visitors, though 'Daisy Fitchett' looks likely to eventually take the 'most loved' prize: continuing white and cream are 'Eric's Triumph', 'Spiced Honey', Azalea 'Pavlova', 'Yvonne Scott', 'Danella', 'Love Song', 'Floral Gift' and 'Floral Dance'; 'Durham Light', 'Lady Dorothy Ella', 'Southern Alps'; 'Rothesay' and 'Stonelaw' give us shrubby plants adding to the landscape. Completing the season are 'Te Harinui', two Rongoiti maddenias hybrids, 'Matilda' and

the summer tough 'Kiwi Pearl'.

The Grant hybrids have been difficult; the flowers are exquisite; Princess Diana's wedding dress, or a glass of the finest whisky spring to mind, but in our climate leggy growth and a tendency to RPM is a disadvantage. 'Pukeiti Anniversary' offers similar shadings.

Pinks continue the palette with Azaleas 'Pink Chiffon', 'Pania', 'Daniel Carter' (a bit too pink for an All Black and not sufficiently resilient for east coast NZ Climate), 'Pelican'; and the divine Loderi type 'Mrs Percy McLaren' (named for Bron Medlicott-Fitchett's grandmother) which prefers light – initially we shaded her. 'Herb Tasker' is equally lovely.

John above, has acknowledged the Ilam reds; suffice for me to note: 'Birchfield', 'Little Glendoe', 'Queen of Nepal', 'Ed Hillary', 'John Britten', named for a motor bike now in Te Papa, and Barbara's late Canterbury red.

As gardeners face climate change, I readily acknowledge that at this time I would be opposed to any suggestion of a rhododendron garden within a park noted for its superb native vegetation. However, there it is and for 35 years it has given great pleasure to visitors. The garden committee see our future being with maddenias hybrids and species – to a significant extent such bloodlines will cope well with climate change and the two associated problems seemingly associated with a warming climate; those being thrips and Rhododendron Powdery Mildew. Who knows: by the time I am 90 we may be growing vireyas at Orton Bradley Park.

The garden has a Data Base, and from our records John compiled the list below; there are however further NZ Hybrids in the collection...the list continues.

New Zealand Hybrids in the CRS Garden at Orton Bradley Park

Azalea 'Pavlova'	R. 'Felicity Fair'	R. 'Kit Collier'	R. 'Platinum Ice'
Azalea Rangitata Red	R. 'Floral Dance'	R. 'Kiwi Flash'	R. 'Posy'
R. 'Abigail Jury'	R. 'Floral Fete'	R. 'Kiwi Magic'	R. 'Prue White'
R. 'Alec Holmes'	R. 'Floral Sun'	R. 'Kiwi Pearl'	R. 'Pukeiti Anniversary'
R. 'Alpine Meadow'	R. 'Glenfalloch Blue'	R. 'Kotuku'	R. 'Queen of Nepal'
R. 'Ambergris'	R. 'Glenfiddick'	R. 'Lady Dorothy Ella'	R. 'Quik Flik'
R. 'Apple Pie'	R. 'Glennie Hybrids'	R. 'Lady Galway'	R. 'Rachel'
R. 'Apricot Road'	R. 'Gonda'	R. 'Lalique'	R. 'Red Felix'
R. 'augustinii Glenfalloch form'	R. 'Gordon Valley Supreme'	R. 'Leighton Tasker'	R. 'Riverwood Cream Riverwood Regency'
R. 'augustinii Medicott form'	R. 'Graeme Hughes'	R. 'Lemon Lodge'	R. 'Robert Balch'
R. 'Barbara Jury'	R. 'Graham Holmes'	R. 'Lillian Deans'	R. 'Ron Coker'
R. 'Barnsdale'	R. 'Gwen Grant'	R. 'Lily No. 7'	R. 'Rongoiti maddenian hybrid'
R. 'Bernice'	R. 'Gwyneth Masters'	R. 'Little Glendoe'	R. 'Rothesay'
R. 'Beverly Tasker'	R. 'Herb Tasker'	R. 'Love Song'	R. 'Rowallan Surprise'
R. 'Birchfield'	R. 'High Society'	R. 'Lovelock'	R. 'Rubicon'
R. 'Blue Mist'	R. 'Hollard No. 9'	R. 'Lyn's Memory'	R. 'Scarlet King'
R. 'Bruce Campbell'	R. 'Holmeslee '	R. 'Manapouri Sunrise'	R. 'Southern Alps'
R. 'Bumblebee'	R. 'Homestead'	R. 'Marquis of Lothian'	R. 'Spiced Honey'
R. 'Cameo Pearl'	R. 'Ilam Cornubia'	R. 'Marshmallow'	R. 'Spicers Pink'
R. 'Catherine Collier'	R. 'Ilam Cream'	R. 'Mary Tasker'	R. 'Steads Best'
R. 'Catherine Trott'	R. 'Ina Hair'	R. 'Matilda'	R. 'Stonelaw'
R. 'Charisma'	R. 'Irene Bain'	R. 'Maurice Skipworth'	R. 'Sunset Queen'
R. 'City of Dunedin'	R. 'Irene Stead'	R. 'Mollie Coker'	R. 'Te Harinui'
R. 'Coker's Choice'	R. 'Ivan D. Wood'	R. 'Mollies Gift'	R. 'Tupare'
R. 'Coker's Misty Dawn'	R. 'James Deans'	R. 'Moon Orchid'	R. 'Waddersbill'
R. 'Coker's Pink'	R. 'Jennifer Anne'	R. 'Most Admired'	R. 'Waireka'
R. 'College Pink'	R. 'Joan Elder'	R. 'Mrs George Huthnance'	R. 'Wesley Hayes'
R. 'Coral Queen'	R. 'John Britten'	R. 'Mrs Percy McLaren'	R. 'White Doves'
R. 'Cream Delight'	R. 'John's Memory'	R. 'Mystique'	R. 'White Mice'
R. 'Dainty Lass'	R. 'Joy Bells'	R. 'Nance Garbutt'	R. 'White Sails'
R. 'Daisy Fitchett'	R. 'Julia Tasker'	R. 'Norrie King'	R. 'White Waves'
R. 'Dalkeith'	R. 'Kaka'	R. 'Olivia Coker'	R. 'Winnie Hayes'
R. 'Dame Cecily Pickerill'	R. 'Kaponga'	R. 'Olwens Dream'	R. 'Wynne Rayner'
R. 'Danella'	R. 'Kapunatiki'	R. 'Orchard Gold'	R. 'Yvonne Scott'
R. 'Daniel Carter'	R. 'Katie'	R. 'Orchard Road'	
R. 'Donald Palmer'	R. 'Ken Burns'	R. 'Orton Bradley'	
R. 'Durham Light'	R. 'Kings Buff'	R. 'Pacific Princess'	
R. 'Ed Hillary'	R. 'Kings Milkmaid'	R. 'Pania'	
R. 'Edgar Stead'	R. 'Kings Party Dress'	R. 'Persian Lady'	
R. 'Eric's Triumph'	R. 'Kings Pink Glow'	R. 'Pines'	

THE NEW ZEALAND *EX-SITU* RHODODENDRON CONSERVATION PROJECT: REPORT TO THE END OF OCTOBER 2022

Dr Marion Mackay

The New Zealand *ex-situ* project has been going for several years now, so what is the current state of progress and what are the new developments?

In the early stages the focus was on ‘finding’, ‘identifying’ and ‘propagating’ as the team discovered, visited and recorded a series of collections throughout New Zealand. We now have a dataset from some 25 collections throughout New Zealand, covering about 667 species. These comprise 538 species that are presently extant, plus another 129 species that have been in New Zealand in the past but which are presently ‘missing in action’ (we hope that some of these missing species will one day be found in the back of

someone’s garden). To the collections data I add my data on current and previous offerings of species in the nursery trade (drawn from my current and historical collection of some 250 catalogues). From these data we can prioritise for propagation any species that are on the global Red Lists of threatened species, or which are present on few sites in New Zealand.

A crucial part of this first phase is the ‘identifying’ aspect. In many instances plants are encountered which are not the usual common species, but which are not labelled, or which are tricky to identify – one has only to watch Sue Davies, Andrew Brooker, Doug Thomson and Mark Joel debating the identity of unusual

plants in the Leonie Day collection in Dunedin to see that this is not an easy task. **Sue would also attest to many hours spent studying the pictures from Dunedin to try and confirm the identity of each plant.** This activity is essential. Because a Red List species might be morphologically similar to a common species, we need to accurately determine one from the other (and thereafter allocate our propagation resources wisely).

Over time the ‘finding’ aspect reduces somewhat (as there are fewer ‘new’ collections to find). However, the team has some ‘mysteries’ to look forward to in a couple of older collections which in the past contained unusual species but which today are



R. barbartum ‘Meteor’ seen at Cross Hills. This is one of the threatened species presently being propagated.



R. chamaethomsonii, seen here at Edinburgh is one of the threatened species presently being propagated.

not labelled and the current owners need some help to understand what is present. At the same time, 'propagating' continues in a similar fashion as before, with Andrew Brooker and Sue Davies grafting and making cuttings each season. It takes a while to multiply up some of these species (and some take several tries to get them going) but eventually species will be offered for sale in the members plant lists. Some of the Red List species presently in the propagation process (from cuttings or seed) are *R. barbatum* (Vulnerable), *R. chamaethomsonii* (Vulnerable), *R. formosum* (Critically Endangered), and *R. hunnewellianum* (Vulnerable).

A task that will be tackled this year is to examine the nursery at Pukeiti. There have been several debates about what is needed at that nursery; however, we have much debate but not much conclusion! The underlying problem is that we do not have good data on the capacity of each part of

the nursery (mist bench, tube area, shade house, standing area, and so on), and therefore what throughput it can handle. Gordon Bailey and I figured that we would want about 10 plants of each species that was propagated (some each for Pukeiti, partner collections, and sales to members) and that it might take 3-4 years for material to pass through the nursery. On that basis we should be able to work backwards and figure out how much material can be propagated each year – Andrew Brooker has the fun task of doing the measuring and calculating for this exercise!

Meanwhile, as some of the early propagations come through the system, in this last season or so 'distribution' has begun as we send propagated material to partner sites around New Zealand. A particular goal for this part of the project was development of a network of collections, and it is really pleasing to see this network coming into being, primarily through

the efforts of Andrew Brooker but also with assistance from other team members. In this last year or so we are delighted to have been joined in the network by the Gore Parks Department, Eden Garden in Auckland, Robin Booth's Wharepuke gardens in Kerikeri, and Whangarei Quarry Gardens in Whangarei. There are now 42 taxa held at Gore including *R. auritum* (Critically Endangered), *R. bureavii* (Least Concern), *R. niveum* (Vulnerable) and *R. pseudochrysanthum* (Vulnerable). There are 50 vireya taxa held across the three Northland sites, including *R. armittii*, *R. baenitzianum*, and *R. fallacinum* (even though these species are Least Concern, i.e. they do not have a current conservation issue, they are a high priority for us because they are vireya species and they are on very few sites in New Zealand).

This work with partner gardens achieves two important objectives: finding sites for species that are not



R. formosum is one of the threatened species presently being propagated. This is the 'Ten Tashi' form at Pukeiti.



R. hunnewellianum, seen here at Pukeiti, is one of the threatened species being propagated.

successful at Pukeiti and developing duplicate collections. One of the great weaknesses of *ex-situ* conservation collections globally, particularly for vireya species, is the lack of duplicate sites. If, for example, there was a catastrophe at Edinburgh, much of the world *ex-situ* collection of vireyas would be lost (while some of the Edinburgh material is held on duplicate sites, much of it is not). The Pukeiti Vireya Collection is about the third largest globally and it is important that we mitigate the risk of having it all on one site; hence the development of partnerships with the above mentioned sites. (Temperate species are much better placed as globally they are held on many more sites.)

Meanwhile, while Andrew and Sue have been busy with the network and propagating, I continue with the

Section 26 work. As those of you who get the NZRA newsletter will know, 6 May this year was a momentous day, because on that day I received notification that the first set of 40 vireya species that were submitted to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) as a Section 26 application under the HSNO Act were declared 'not new' in New Zealand. (HSNO is the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996, which is a key controlling legislation for biosecurity in New Zealand.) This statutory declaration is a major advance in our quest to have these species, which have been in New Zealand for years, properly recognised. The Section 26 work has been conducted as a collaboration with the project 'Taking Stock: Solving New Zealand's Cultivated Plants

Problem', which is a project run by the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (RNZIH) with funding from the Sustainable Farming Futures Fund of the Ministry of Primary Industries. Murray Dawson of the RNZIH is manager of that project and I (via Massey University) am a subcontractor to the project.

A second application, covering 44 vireya taxa is presently under review by the EPA and a third application (30 temperate taxa) is in preparation. You may wonder why the vireyas have been tackled first. There are two key reasons: (i) the work that Sue and I have done which shows that globally the vireya subgenus is the most urgent for *ex-situ* conservation, and (ii) New Zealand has a significant vireya collection which should have a useful *ex-situ*

Table 1: 40 vireya rhododendron species that have been declared 'not new' under the New Zealand HSNO Act 1996 (gazetted 12 July 2022)

<i>Rhododendron archboldianum</i> Sleumer (1960)	<i>Rhododendron maius</i> (J.J.Sm.) Sleumer (1960)
<i>Rhododendron bagobonum</i> H.F.Copel. (1929)	<i>Rhododendron malayanum</i> Jack (1822)
<i>Rhododendron blackii</i> Sleumer (1973)	<i>Rhododendron maxwellii</i> Gibbs (1914)
<i>Rhododendron burttii</i> P.Woods (1978)	<i>Rhododendron micromalayanum</i> Sleumer (1973)
<i>Rhododendron christiana</i> e Sleumer (1960)	<i>Rhododendron orbiculatum</i> Ridl. (1912)
<i>Rhododendron dianthosmum</i> Sleumer (1963)	<i>Rhododendron pauciflorum</i> King & Gamble (1905)
<i>Rhododendron ericoides</i> H.Low ex Hook.f. (1852)	<i>Rhododendron rarum</i> Schltr. (1918)
<i>Rhododendron fallacinum</i> Sleumer (1960)	<i>Rhododendron retivenium</i> Sleumer (1960)
<i>Rhododendron gracilentum</i> F.Muell. (1889)	<i>Rhododendron rhodopus</i> Sleumer (1960)
<i>Rhododendron herzogii</i> Warb. (1892)	<i>Rhododendron rubineiflorum</i> Craven (1980)
<i>Rhododendron himantodes</i> Sleumer (1940)	<i>Rhododendron rugosum</i> H.Low ex Hook.f. (1852)
<i>Rhododendron hyacinthosmum</i> Sleumer (1973)	<i>Rhododendron santapau</i> i Sastry et al. (1969)
<i>Rhododendron inconspicuum</i> J.J.Sm. (1915)	<i>Rhododendron searleanum</i> Sleumer (1973)
<i>Rhododendron intranervatum</i> Sleumer (1961)	<i>Rhododendron solitarium</i> Sleumer (1963)
<i>Rhododendron kawakamii</i> Hayata (1911)	<i>Rhododendron stapfianum</i> Hemsl. ex Prain (1911)
<i>Rhododendron laetum</i> J.J.Sm. (1914)	<i>Rhododendron superbum</i> Sleumer (1960)
<i>Rhododendron lanceolatum</i> Ridl. (1912)	<i>Rhododendron taxifolium</i> Merr. (1926)
<i>Rhododendron lowii</i> Hook.f. (1852)	<i>Rhododendron womersleyi</i> Sleumer (1960)
<i>Rhododendron luraluense</i> Sleumer (1935)	<i>Rhododendron yongii</i> Argent (1982)
	<i>Rhododendron zoelleri</i> Warb. (1892)
	<i>Rhododendron zollingeri</i> J.J.Sm. (1910)

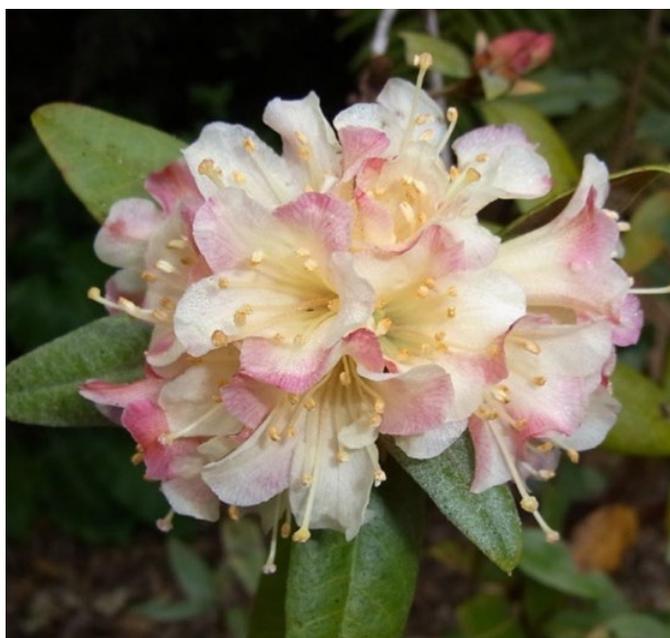
role, but which we cannot make the best of for conservation because most of the species are not recognised as being present in New Zealand.

An important part of the evidence needed for this work is nursery catalogues – hence my requests for catalogues and I have had about 50 come in so far. Thanks to the members who have contributed those documents - keep them coming! I have a set of about 20 vireya species which need more evidence, and if any of you have a July 1999 catalogue (I have all the others from the 1990s) or any from John Kenyon's nursery of 1998 or before, I would be pleased to hear from you.

As with my other reports, I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the project team and associates (Andrew Brooker, Gordon Bailey, Lynn Bublitz, Peter Catt, Sue Davies, Heather Robson, Graham Smith, Doug Thomson) and the ongoing participation of NZRA, Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust and Taranaki Regional Council. I also acknowledge Murray Dawson and the RNZIH and the value of the collaboration with them on the Section 26 work. Each of these parties brings skills and knowledge to the project and help to make it a success – long may we continue!



R. niveum, seen here at Cross Hills, is one of the species that has been distributed to the partner collection in Gore.



R. auritum, seen here at Pukeiti is one of the species that has been distributed to the partner collection in Gore.



R. armittii at Pukeiti. This species was distributed to the new partner collections in Northland.



FLOWERS, FLORILEGIA, PUKEITI & SUSAN

A personal tribute by watercolourist Claire Clark for Susan Worthington who passed away in February 2022.

Ten years ago Susan Worthington's botanical painting of the orchid *Cymbidium* 'Summer Splash' was so exquisitely beautiful that it took my breath away. Just as beautiful is Susan's painting of *Rhododendron superbum* (above) when it bloomed at Pukeiti Gardens, Taranaki.

I have loved the works of all botanical artists since first meeting Nancy Adams at the National Museum in the 1980s and then Nancy Tichborne, Sue Wickison and Susan Worthington, who were our guest artists at *Diamond Jubilee Splash* in 2012. Each artist had had 'a brush with royalty' and it was a glamorous evening at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts when the Governor-General opened the exhibition (photos below). During our conversations, Susan drew me into her wondrous world of florilegia -their purpose, the artists, the books published by Addison Publications, and her insights into HRH The Prince of Wales' love of watercolours and gardening. In 2009 Susan had afternoon tea with HRH at Highgrove and presented her artworks for *The Highgrove Florilegium*. When the *Financial Times* (2011) wrote, "Something as special as *The Highgrove Florilegium* should surely come along just once or twice in every lifetime" - for Susan, the opportunity did come twice - with *The Transylvania*

Florilegium. These artworks mark Susan's standing as an internationally recognised botanical artist.

The early years

Susan Worthington was a Taranaki girl, born 1944 in Stratford. Both her mother and grandmother were

at Auckland Teachers College. She then embarked on a career teaching adult art programmes. Well before commencing art studies in Auckland she had become a frequent visitor to Pukeiti Gardens in Taranaki. Graham Smith, past Director of Pukeiti Gardens said that Susan loved Pukeiti. "About

1974 we had flowered *Rhododendron protistum* 'Pukeiti' for the very first time, after about 24 years from seed sowing, and we made a fuss in the local Daily News to bring people up to see it. By 1979 it was flowering well and Susan and I first discussed painting the special *Rhododendrons* of Pukeiti. Everything Susan did after that was the result of her becoming artist in residence for many years during the spring, staying at the old Pukeiti Lodge, where she painted on the big Board table. She always insisted that visitors were welcome to watch and ask questions often resulting in the work being delayed well into the evening!

Susan stayed at Pukeiti Lodge for several weeks at a time in order to be able to work 10-12 hour days. Her *Rhododendron* portfolio built up from there and

each year I would find new species flowering for the first time to put in front of her. Often overwhelmed by these she would sketch and do colour swatches on the edge of the paper to enable her to come back later to finish them. It did not take long to build up more than 50 works and it was then that the idea of a book of the Pukeiti *Rhododendrons* materialised, developing later into an international



Susan Worthington MNZM

gardeners, and Susan sketched and painted from a young age. She had her first art lesson aged 12 but was a mature student when she enrolled for formal art training. In 1987 she graduated with Distinction from Whitecliffe Art School, and in 1992 graduated with a BA in English and Art History at the University of Auckland and a Diploma in Teaching

publication *THE PUKEITI LARGE-LEAF RHODODENDRONS The Watercolour Drawings of Susan Worthington*”.

During Graham’s visits to Susan’s home in Waikanae, he catalogued her collection of about 200 botanical artworks. Graham felt privileged to have worked alongside Susan and reminisced that the best times were when he produced something out of the box, such as first-time flowerings, and he could see Susan’s reactions! In the field he would take photographs, measurements and use colour swatches to get details of plants for her. They would discuss plant form and colour. Susan used colour to give depth to her paintings. She talked of a rhododendron as a being shaped like a ball with its colour a lot darker on the right hand side (see *Rhododendron* ‘Purple Splendour’) and its true colour in the middle of the plant.

Botanical Illustration studies

Botanical illustration became Susan’s passion. In a Radio New Zealand interview (2012) she described what was involved. “Everything has to be measured; be precise; count the number of stamens; know what is happening with the end of the stem; know where this year’s growth starts and last year’s



Rhododendron ‘Purple Splendour’ Plate Number 84 by Susan Worthington from The Highgrove Florilegium published by Addison Publications © A G Carrick.

finishes; know the underside of the leaf ... and you have to work with dying models”. She saw the role of the artist to then compose the drawing to give the plant the ‘wow’ factor on paper. As there were no botanical illustration courses in New Zealand Susan enrolled at English institutions. Her flights were a modest cost as her son was now a pilot for Cathay Pacific and her partner Max Kempson purchased a river-boat near the Thames for their home base in London. In 2001 she studied at West Dean College, in 2002 at Kew Gardens and in 2006 at the English Gardening School located in the Chelsea Physic Garden where she was awarded a Diploma in Botanical Painting with Distinction. She painted five rhododendrons for her portfolio.

Meanwhile, she was receiving international recognition as a botanical artist. In 2003 she was selected to exhibit at the Royal Horticultural Society Show in London and awarded a Silver Medal for her paintings of New Zealand native plants from Pukeiti. Her painting of *Cyathea smithii* was purchased by Dr Shirley Sherwood for her collection. In 2004 New Zealand Post issued stamps and a First Day Cover featuring Susan’s series of New Zealand-bred garden flowers. The stamps included Taranaki connections of *Rhododendron* ‘Charisma’ from Pukeiti and *Magnolia* ‘Vulcan’ bred by Felix Jury at Tikorangi. Dr Sherwood selected Susan’s *Cyathea smithii* for the 2005 exhibition *A New Flowering, 1000 Years of Botanical Art* held at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and for the 2008



Diamond Jubilee emblem



Susan at Pukeiti



Photo credit - New Zealand Post

exhibition *Down Under Botanical Artists from Australia and New Zealand* held at the Shirley Sherwood Gallery located in Kew Gardens, London. Susan won three more silver medals for botanical illustration at the BBC Garden World Shows held in Birmingham in 2005, 2008 and 2009. Susan now had a large portfolio of botanical art with a focus on Taranaki plants. She held a solo show of 50 artworks at Puke Ariki in 2007 titled *A Passion for Plants – Botanical Paintings by Susan Worthington*. In 2009 *Worthington's Plant Portraits* exhibition was held at Tupare. In 2019 Susan selected 10 paintings for the exhibition *Pukeiti - The living Museum* and was artist in residence at Pukeiti. Susan continued to enjoy teaching and conducted workshops for the Botanical Art Society of New Zealand and Watercolour New Zealand. In her last email to me in January Susan was highlighting an area of difficulty that I should think about. She said, "I am including photographs of white flowers as they are the hardest to paint on white paper without them looking dirty."

The Highgrove Florilegium

Susan described a florilegium as "a collection of flower paintings that records plants in a given period of time or place. It is like a historical time capsule and may record hybrid plants, which if they go out of fashion, can be lost". *The Highgrove Florilegium* project was created to celebrate the



Susan Worthington MNZM BA Dip. A Hons Dip. EGS Dip. Tchg Investiture 2013 - Photo credit Government House

60th birthday in 2008 of HRH The Prince of Wales. It became a seven year project involving 72 botanical artists from all over the world producing 124 paintings of the plants and trees growing in his garden at Highgrove in Gloucestershire. The project's Panel of Experts included representatives of the Chelsea Physic Garden who had seen Susan's 2006 *Rhododendron* portfolio and viewed her as a *Rhododendron* expert. In 2007 she was back in New Zealand when she received a request to paint *Rhododendron* 'Purple Splendour' which had been one of the Queen Mother's favourites. It was still in flower at Pukeiti and she completed the painting. The Panel deemed it "a most beautiful, sensitive and refined painting" and asked

her to paint *Rhododendron* 'Scarlet Wonder'. She replied that they would have to wait until the end of the year as it was no longer in flower. When asked for a third painting she selected *Aesculus hippocastanum*, the English horse chestnut as she already had preparatory drawings. Susan, the only New Zealand artist selected for the project, was honoured in 2010 when the Taranaki Electricity Trust gifted *The Highgrove Florilegium* to the people of Taranaki. The two volume book set is in the Puke Ariki collection in New Plymouth.

The Pukeiti Large-leaf Rhododendrons

In 2014, 23 of Susan's superb portfolio of large-leaf *Rhododendron*

paintings were e-published internationally in *THE PUKEITI LARGE-LEAF RHODODENDRONS The Watercolour Drawings of Susan Worthington* by Addison Publications, London in association with The Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Inc. New Zealand. The paintings were produced in 2011 and Susan recalled being snowed in at Pukeiti's Lodge during one of Taranaki's coldest winters. Some of the species flowered for the first time and she had only hours to record their details before they spoiled in the heat of The Lodge. She used the laundry as a cool room to store blooms.

Honour

Susan's contribution to art was recognised in 2013 when she was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services in New Zealand as a botanical artist.

The Transylvania Florilegium

Susan's next international project was an invitation to work on *The Transylvania Florilegium*, created by the Prince of Wales Foundation Romania. When HRH first visited Transylvania over 20 years ago he fell in love with this unspoiled area of Romania which is one of Europe's last medieval landscapes of meadows covered in indigenous wild-flowers. Lady Pearson, of Addison Publications, wrote that "When he suggested the project His Royal Highness said that the artists would need to visit. There is no other way to paint these wild-flowers. We arranged for a group of eight artists to visit Transylvania each year for five years. Susan was there in May/June 2015". The artists stayed in the Prince's properties which include guest houses. In the group photo botanist John Akeroyd is in the back row and Susan is seated far right. Susan contributed two paintings including the Caucasian daisy *Tanacetum corymbosum* and *Stachys recta* L. Her botanical paintings will continue to be exhibited worldwide in exhibitions of *The Highgrove* and *The Transylvania Florilegia*.

Sources: Susan Worthington, Claire Clark, Graham Smith, Lady Pearson, Pat Greenfield, Radio New Zealand Archives, Botanical Art Society of New Zealand, Space Studio & Gallery, and Watercolour New Zealand Archives.



Botanical artists at Zalanpatak 2015 - Photo credit Addison Publications



Rhododendron sinogrande from THE PUKEITI LARGE-LEAF RHODODENDRONS The Watercolour Drawings of Susan Worthington

NEW REGISTRATION 2022

Brian Coker

New Registrations

The following cultivar has been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society, England as international registration authority for the genus *Rhododendron* and added to the New Zealand *Rhododendron* Register.



390 R. 'Ailsa Stewart'

R. 'Pink Rosette' x 'Leo'

Cross made by Mr DA Stewart, Rotorua who also raised the cultivar and named it for his wife. It was commercially introduced by his nursery, Rhodohill Nursery in 2018.

The very tight truss is dome shaped with 14-16 dark salmon pink buds opening to fully double funnel shaped flowers 110-115mm wide and 60-65mm in length without stamens. There is a light fragrance.

The inside of the corolla has pastel pink edging fading to creamy pink at the base. Very distinctive smaller inner double petals showing the same colour variation. The outside

of the corolla has pastel pink edging extending down the centre of each lobe to the base, fading to very light pink at the edge of the 7 lobes.

Oblong leaves are 150mm long and 65mm wide, rounded at base and cuspidate at the apex.

Note that this cultivar was initially distributed under the name 'Ailsa', (including being distributed to attendees of Rhodenza 2019 in Rotorua), however as that name has previously been used for another cultivar 'Ailsa Stewart' is now the registered name.

The registration form (November 2018 version) can be obtained from the NZRA website, www.rhododendron.org.nz or direct from the Registrar b.hcoker@xtra.co.nz.

For anyone contemplating naming a rhododendron (even if it is not certain whether formal registration will follow) the Registrar can check whether the name is available and acceptable for registration and arrange for the name to be reserved. This will then avoid using a name which has already been registered and ensure that the name will be accepted should formal registration be completed.

The Registrar holds a copy of the RHS *Rhododendron* Register and Checklist (together with all updates) which lists all formally registered rhododendrons together with other named but unregistered rhododendrons. You are welcome to email the Registrar if you have any queries relating to parentage or formal description of any rhododendrons, or require any assistance regarding registration.



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R. 'Tom Garbutt' registered directly with the RHS in 1999, photographed in Brian and Helen Coker's garden



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