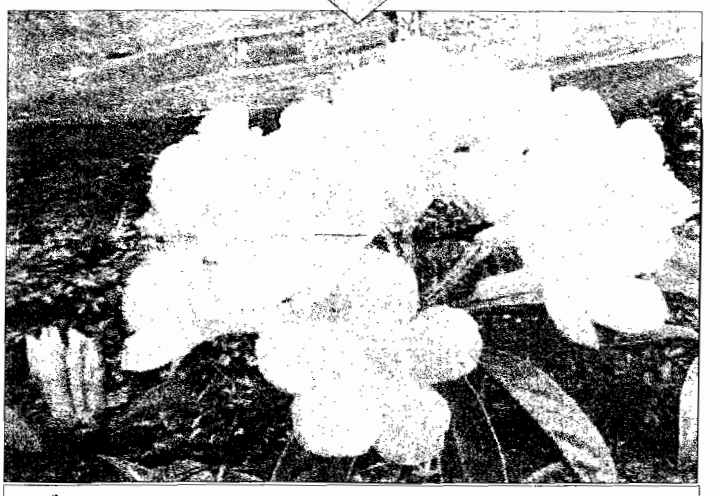
The Vireya Venture

Editor's Note



R. auriger anum

Vireya blooms have dominated our garden once again this winter/spring. The large perfumed blooms of Gardenia Odyssey, Buttermilk and Iced Primrose all out together have been a real treat.

In our excitement over new hybrids we often neglect the old. Susan Puddey (editor's sister and No.1 typist for the Vireya Venture) had a spectacular display of brilliant orange trusses of the older hybrid Flaming Ball, and few gardeners can resist a nice plant of Princess Alexander in full flower.

Lets hope these older hybrids are not lost from cultivation, they are a living record of Vireya hybrid development, a valuable genetic resource and many regardless of the nursery trends can still shine given the right position and cultural care.

Hope you enjoy the articles reproduced on Vireya collection and trekking and the success with their cultivation in Hawaii.

Neil

Spectacular, exotic vireya

by Susan Collins

Despite our abundance of beautiful tropical flowers, it's always fun to discover exotic plants from a faraway lands that will thrive and bloom like crazy in our own backyards.

A gorgeous ornamental gaining popularity with gardeners throughout the islands are vireyas, tropical rhododendrons that are native to the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

Vireyas make up about a third of the genus Rhododendron, with more than 300 tropical and subtropical species. They are epiphytes, like tropical orchids or Spanish moss, and can grow on a host plant or object that provides support but not nutrients. In the wild, vireya love to cling to moss on tree branches, but most species also grow as shrubs on the ground in coarse, well-aerated soil.

The blooms of vireya are luscious - even the palest of shades are intense in their beauty. The flowers grow in clusters called trusses, and range in color from soft, dreamy pinks to sunset oranges to firecracker reds. They will bloom several times a year here in Hawaii, and if you pinch back the new growth, you'll get more branching and more blooms.

"Most vireya hybrid work was done in California, Australia and New Zealand," says Richard Marques, president of the Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and owner of Pacific Island Nursery in Keaau. "We're just starting to hybrid here. It's a group of plants that keep on evolving."

The hybrid called Taylori is a favorite here in Hawaii, says Marques. It has a beautiful sprawling yet upright growth pattern - even without pruning - with a reddish hue to the new growth. The blossoms are white with a pink blush. It grows well as a tall shrub, or, as with many vireya, it will make a beautiful display in a hanging basket.

Josk's Cairn also does well here, with full dome-shaped

"Oz Nouveau"

Snippet for the Vireya Venture

Dear Editor

A new expression has emerged in the realms of the nursery trade, and in particular the landscape industry, that of ***"Oz Nouveau".*** It is referring to the latest style, if that is the right word to describe it, of landscape design that has been developed here in Australia. In fact, I would rather say that it was not just one style, but a movement away from the norm or traditional, bold, brash, daring, at times fun, but certainly different.

Oz Nouveau has not been around for long, but already there have been State competitions, National competitions, and what have you, and garden and nursery magazines are full of references to ***Oz Nouveau.***

But what has this got to do with Vireyas, you might ask? Simply this -

In a recently published list of the 50 most popular plants chosen for use in Oz Nouveau landscape designs, Vireyas get a mention. Not only that, but they rated about no.37, ahead of the cool climate Rhododendron, which only just managed to scrape in at the end of the list.

And, wait for it, Azaleas did not even get a mention! Of all the thousands of plants that could have been chosen, Vireyas are up there with the very best of them.

Does this mean that the time for Vireyas may actually be nigh? When all Australian Gardeners will know what a Vireya is, and know how to pronounce it, want one (preferably several of course), and will know how to grow one?

Let's hope so.

Best regards to all our "Venture" friends,

Graham and Wendy Snell

Spectacular, exotic vireya con't.

trusses of vibrant red and pink flowers that bloom all year. Sunny's Brother has bi-colored blooms with yellow throats surrounded in soft peach.

St.Valentine is a show-stopper in a hanging basket, dripping with small red blooms. "We had one that had a couple hundred flowers," said Marques. "Just spectacular!"

In their native habitat, some species of vireya grow in alpine regions in the dappled light of the forests, and others in the lower grasslands. This geographic dispersion has resulted in great diversity of the species, and according to Marques, local gardeners here on Hawaii Island are having success with tropical rhododendrons in such varied locale as Volcano Kona, Puna, and Hamakua.

"The No.1 thing about vireya is no wet feet, no soggy conditions," says Marques. "We grow ours in cinder, well drained with lots of organic matter."

Coconut chunks in perlite works well, but so will any media that provides good drainage. Marques says he uses "a little trick" to find out if the soil has proper drainage. "Pour a bucket of water(in the planting hole) and if the water quickly disappears, then it's good. If it sits, then it's the wrong place."

Pick a spot with lots of light, but not direct mid-day sun, and plant your vireya with the top of the root ball at or above soil level, then cover with several inches of coarse mulch. Make sure it gets wet a couple of times a week, and let it dry out between waterings.

Vireya will thrive in pots because they like their roots confined and don't mind being pot bound. The advantage of having them in pots is that you can enjoy their splendor in the house or outside on porches.

Vireya are very light feeders, so small amounts of balanced fertilizer with trace elements every six to nine months should be fine. Avoid over fertilizing.

Pest problems are few, Lacewing bugs, the same that attack azaleas, will leave silver spots covering the leaves. They are soft-bodied insects, and an insecticidal soap will take care of the problem.

Red spots may form on the leaf usually after some stressing of the plant such as drought. Don't be too concerned, it will not affect the growth or flowering of the plant.

The Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society is planning to build a vireya educational garden at the Panaewa Rainforest Zoo. It will be the only such tropical rhododendron garden in the country. Vireyas are being donated to the project from Hawaii Chapter ARS members in Australia, Scotland, and the Mainland.

If you would like to make a donation to help with the Vireya Zoo Garden or would like to learn more about vireya, contact Richard Marques or Sherla Bertelmann at Pacific Island Nursery, 966-9225. For information about tropical rhododendrons, including lots of pictures, visit www.vireya.supanet.com.

Susan Collins is a public information officer at University of Hawaii at Hilo.

Extract from Hawaii Tribune Herald,
Wednesday, August 22, 2001

Treading the paths of Dr. Sleumer in the Arfak mountains, Vogelkop Penninsula, New Guinea from Brentel Hansjorg

When Mr Moser of the German Rhododendron Society sent me an excerpt from the Yearbook 1963 of the society, I was immediately fascinated by Dr. Sleumer's reports of the rhododendron in the area around the Aggi lakes in the Arfak mountains.

I decided there and then to visit the area at some point in time. So when I found a trekking guide of tours in New Guinea which included the aforementioned tour, we sheduled the journey for August 2000. On August 15, we flew via Singapur-Makassar to Biak, a small island in the northwest of the New Guineas. Biak can be accessed by large aircraft from Garuda and Merpati. In Biak the weather was unfriendly, so we reached Manokwari at the foot of the Arfak mountains one day later than expected. More bad news was waiting for us: there had been continuous rainfalls for the past four weeks. None of the rivers could be crossed and the rare flights to the Anggi Lakes had been canceled. Having been utterly disappointed, we flew to North Sumatra, where we collected a few rhododendrons on the volcanoes surrounding Brastagi and Lake Toba.

The original trip stuck to our minds, however, and so we try again in January 2001. This time we arrived in Biak via Bali. Again we are greeted by rain. The flight to Manokwari only a few hours late. Matthias, our guide, is expecting us with the unpleasant news that there is not going to be a flight to the Anggi lakes that week. He convinces us that is is now possible to reach Anggi-Gita (the male lake) with a jeep on the newly-built road via Ransiki and the 7,200 feet high Trikora. Arriving at the first river, the Maruni, we discover why we could not beat the rain here. The riverbed is 1,700 feet wide with several arms, and the bridges are destroyed. Fortunately it carries little water at that time of the year, so we cross the Masabui River at Ransiki and go up to the mountains. The road runs along the river, then through untouched lowland rainforest, where a breach of 23-25 feet has been cut to build a road. How long will there be such a forest with such mighty trees? At the first steep part, the road is entirely washed out. The jeep gets stuck in a hole and is about to capsize. We filled up the largest holes with stones and manage the ascent after trying three times. We reached the Mati River and continue our way to the mountains. The road is in pretty good condition and climbs up through dense virgin rainforests. At approximately 5,250 feet a.s.l. the substance of the ground changes. The fine-grainquartz sands that make up the mountains here seem to pose a massive problem for road builders. On both sides of the road, deep holes of 7-20 feet have been eroded, holes big enough to swallow our jeep. The road surface is so marked by grooves up to three feet in depth that we barely reached the highest point, the 7,200 feet high Trikora. Here we spot the first rhododendron, the R.phaeochristum which is related to the beyerinckianum. Through the mist we see the first lake, the Anggi-Gita.

We continued downhill until we reached Yrikora, the first little village by the lake. The swamp is full of R. laetum with yellow/orange blossoms also the small blossomed R.inconspicuum can be found. We are warmly welcomed, the whole village running to meet us. Very soon we have to go back, the next rain fall could make the road impassable.

I find out that the name of the village is North Pole. In his report, Dr. Sleumer mentions the North Pole bivouac where he landed with a helicopter, coming from Mawokwari in1962. The children bring us a whole bunch of R. laetum. The night is very cold, the thermometer shows 54 degrees Fahrenheit and our Papua carriers, coming from the lowlands, are freezing.

The next morning, we crossed the lake in a dug-out. By the lakeside and on the surrounding hills we see vast colonies of R. konori. We also see the first blossoms that are white and some 4 inches in diameter and fragrant. The mountain scenery is impressive, the climate mild. On the other side we begin the ascent of the Koebre - the mountain ridge separating the two lakes. On the scorched slopes, rhododendron are the most frequent form of vegetation. We found R. arfakianum with its red blossoms, R. lindaueanum (a small-leafed bush) with red blossoms reminding us of R. gracilentum. Further uphill we discover R. asperum, with yellow blossoms (hybrids) instead of the usual pink and white. Near the peak we find the first "Giant Konori", with blossoms 7 inches long and ten centimeters wide. The impressive blossoms are white and a dark hue of pink. R. phaeochristum can also be found here. From the peak we can see the second lake, the Anggi-Giggi (the female lake). The carriers light a smoking fire to hire a boat from Surerey, which lies on the other side of the Anggi-Giggi. But there is no reply and Matthias states dryly that: "The Johnson is broken", meaning all outboard boats on the lake.

The crisis of the Indonesian economy has reached the Anggi lakes and so the large boats are rotting away in the mud by the lakeside. Having no other options, we begin our long way around the lake. When we reached a swamp by the lakeside, heavy rain set in and we are soaked through. But tempests

Treading the paths of Dr Sleumer cont.

do not last very long here and we continue through tall ferns and R. konori to Surerey, which we reach after three hours. Surerey is a relatively large village with a mission station. A German missionary lived there a few years ago and translated the Bible into the local Soubg language. The Soubg that form the local population subsist mainly on sweet potatoes, but also grow corn and vegetables. They have been christianized long ago. This is one of the nicest Villages, with small houses and gardens with flowers and very friendly people.

Dr Sleumer climbed the Gwamongga-mot (mountain) and the Sensenemes, both abundant in Ericaceae. So we set out the next morning to hike along the ridge of the Gwamongga-mot to Surey-mot and Sensenemes. The ascent to Gwamongga-mot leads through misty forests, where we keep finding R. lindaueanum, culminicolum var. angiense, konori, inconspicuum, arfakianum, erosipetalum and asperum. In his report, Dr. Sleumer describes a new rhododendron that he found near the peak, R. proliferum. So we decide to look for it. The "Giant Konori" grows everywhere and in the shade of a thicket of trees that are 6-9 feet high. We found a different species with hard, oval-shaped leaves with scales, three feet high, no blossoms and we found seeds, perhaps this is R. proliferum?

We also took cuttings from the other rhododendrons. We continued along the ridge of to Surey-mot, where we found another R. proliferum. It is wonderful to walk through the clear mountain air, with a beautiful view of the lake and the surrounding mountains. On the Surey-mot, there is a little lake with dark brown water. It is not allowed to take photographs here. Matthias explains that lightening will strike from the sky if photographs are taken. The Soubg are very superstitious. In Iray we observed that women would rather lift an electric cable and slip through underneath it than step over it. We returned to Surerey and rowed our dug-out to Iray, where we are hoping to catch a flight to Manokwari. From Iray, we walked into the surrounding mountains. Near a hill whose vegetation has recently been destroyed by fire, hundreds of R. laetum were sprouting. Also the Konori has grown from seedling to bushes.

Dr. Sleumer had found a new rhododendron here, R.bullifolium with large leaves, color unknown, maybe red. So we searched the area, always at an altitude of 6,700 feet - as indicated by Dr. Sleumer. R. konori is everywhere, but after a while we found a different species in the shade of surviving trees: yellow and red blossoms, with five petals, 3 inches long, 2 inches wide, yellow calyz, the petals are red on the outside. Maybe this is R. bullifolium or a hybrid konori-laetum.

Finally we find two more, always in the shade of trees, while kopnori-laetum grows in full sunlight. It is time to return home now and we make our way back to Iray. The next day is our scheduled flying day. There are heavy rainfalls during the night but the weather is bright on the next day. We are waiting for the Merpati plane to arrive. After two hours of anxious waiting, we are informed that the flight has been canceled.

We dread the long way back to Ransiki where there is another flight scheduled two days later. The Merpati is very unreliable, however, and there is a high risk of cancellation due to bad weather. As the local passengers all decide to walk, we have no other choice. From Iray we take a seven-hour walk via Kobrey to Trikora by the Anggi-Gita lake, where we spend the night. In Trikora, I am struck by the size of the araucaria and some sizeable specimens of the palm trees Kentia-Gibbsiana, that was used for building rafts and is now almost extinct. The next day brings us an eleven hour walk to Ransiki. At the steep part, where we had problems with the jeep, seven meters of road have disappeared in the ditch. Thus, the road cannot be used. After three hours drive and completely worn out, we arrive at our Hotel in Manokwari. Instead of a flight of 25 minutes, we have done 18 hours of walking! On the next day we bathe in the warm sea on Mansinam Island where two German missionaries (Otto and Geissler) brought the christian religion to New Guinea. On the following day we fly back to Biak, back to civilization. From here, we take the Garruda Air back to Makassar and Bali, where we relax for a few days and continue via Bangkok and Vienna to our home in the Tyrol

This was a journey into mountains of breathtaking beauty, certainly an unforgettable experience to remember in years to come!

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TOM RAINE - EARLY R. LOCHIAE COLLECTOR

Our good friend Graham Smith, Director of New Zealands, famous Pudeiti Garden, has sent us a copy of Tom Raine's 1957 letter, which he unearthed from Pukeiti archives. In the letter (to Blye, or Helen? Begg of Macquarie Rd.Toorak - we're hoping a connection to one of our A.R.S. Begg families) - Tom Raine details his exploits in finding R. lochiae on Mt. Spurgeon in 1951.
It is an extraordinary collectors' tale, and below follows a heavily edited transcription. The complete copy is available from our Librarian.

The Ridge,
Kurrajong Heights.
N.S.W.
16th August, 1957
Dear Blye,
If you really want a screed on Rhododendron Lochae, how scientific should it be?
It is found on all the high North Queensland mountains, but only above about 4000ft. - Mts. Bellenden Kerr, Bartle Frere, Spurgeon (where I collected it) Black Mountain etc. On the last named there is an extensive stand growing terrestrially over several acres. It was described to me as seen in the evening sun, in full flower, acres of crimson flowers with the terrestrial Calantho orchid poking its spires of pure white spasmodically through the Rhododendron scrub which grows so densely a way cannot be forced through.
On Mt. Spurgeon I found it only as an epiphyte, particularly on a species of Eugenia - which I don't think has been named. The trouble with this flora is that it has not been collected in the flowering season, and without flowers and fruit the species cannot be described or classified.
It is monsoonal country, difficult enough in the dry season, but surely quite impossible in the rains. Kingdon Ward collected under these conditions in the sub-Malayan-Tibetan area but there was plenty to reward him - literally hundreds of species of worthwhile garden plants - and then of course, he was a most remarkable and intrepid collector.
Our little area of Malay-in-North Queensland would not, I think have a very extensive flora and so it has never been, to my knowledge, collected over at all seriously. If there is one Rh., there could be more, but where to look? There is a patch of alpine moor about 8 miles from Spurgeon which I would love to have explored because that's the sort of place to look, but the country is so dashed frightening (it's so dense) that I tossed it in.
I was warned beforehand not to let my guide get off the track or he'd get lost for sure, and anyway, I promised his partner I wouldn't keep him away too long.
(Tom R. Raine)

TOM RAINE'S DIARY, 1951.
Rhododendron Lochiae. Ericaceae:

Monday, 18th June, 1951.

Left Mt. Carbine at 9.30 a.m. Reg James leading two pack horses, self in rear, (on, strange to say, a 15 yr. old named 'Rainee'.) The pack horses had not been used for some time and there was quite a commotion to get them under way. The track climbed fairly steeply almost immediately after leaving the town. At the end of an hour and a quarter's ride we were on top of the first ridge and had one last glimpse of the town about 1500 ft. below.

There was a steep descent of some 900 ft. from this ridge to the McLeod River which we reached at 11.15 a.m. this was very good time because we were travelling very light, with only a week's rations with us.

From the McLeod to our main camp was one long steady steep climb of about 2,200 ft. which we completed by 2.15 p.m. At about 3,200 ft. the flora altered and there was a belt of casuarina which I believe follows this countour line right round the mountain.

Mt. Spurgeon is about 1500 ft. above the camp built only 3 miles away, and since I wanted to study the flora in case it may have been useful to me, I decided on a quick lunch and an expedition on foot to achieve this. We set out at 3 p.m. and had a track of sorts to guide us over a fairly high ridge then had to cut our way through fairly thick underscrub up a very steep pinch to the top of Spurgeon. Even the highest point was still covered with dense scrub, and it was difficult to see the sun. Reg James admitted himself he was no bushman, and I was a little worried about the time. I was not feeling too happy myself in the dense stuff, there was so much of it, if you descended on the wrong spur you can end up anywhere! To recover my own confidence in the surroundings I led back down the hill by a more direct route which was possible only because we could slide down easily what is nearly impossible to climb! I was pleased to note that I missed where we had crossed by only some 50 yards. On the track home I was beginning to feel the day's exertions, and no doubt became a bit careless for I trod in a bandicoot's hole and gave my ankle a very severe wrench.

I was still concerned about Tom Carr's bum shipment of Rh., and had discussed it with Reg. It was here that Tom felled a Eugenia and got 50 specimens which he sent to Sydney, and they proved to be Agapetes. I have studied Erg's flora and find that there must be some close affinity, and there is just a possibility that Agapetes here takes the place of Rh., as is usual in such cases. With my ankle looking pretty hopeless I had to figure out what was the best thing to do.

Tuesday

Completed breakfast of grilled bacon and coffee and Reg caught the horses. My ankle was still like elephantiasis but I could limp on it although I could not stand on one foot. That evening I was tired out having been in the saddle for over 5 hours over country I could have sworn no horse could traverse. We walked over great fallen logs and just managed to slip under others overhead. I risked being dragged off because my ankle by this time was so sore I preferred that to dismounting and mounting.

The track instead of going round, followed over the two peaks of Mt. Misery, and the descents on the farther (eastern) side were very severe and very stony.

We let the horses go - it was then about 10.30 a.m. by the sun - and set off down the Mossman. For a long time there was nothing of interest. About a mile down we started to find isolated plants of Agapetes, and I was getting a little disturbed.

About half a mile further on we came to a more open section of river and I told Reg that if we did not find it here we would not find it at all! Just about here, there was a large fallen tree - a Eugenia of some 12 ft. girth which had apparently fallen only within the previous week. I would go no further until we had explored every inch of this hoary old forest giant. We eventually got to the main stem and, there, of course, was an Agapetes. I crawled on to the main barrel and was just about to say "This Reg, is Rhododendron Lochiae" when he also said "What's this"?

Off that one tree we may get a hundred specimens, but what surprised me was that Agapetes was growing spontaneously with it. I took off one beautiful specimen intertwined amongst the bulbs of a dendrobium which I wanted to keep intact if I could.

Reg's specimen had one terminal whorl of leaves with 5 nearly ripened capsules. These were nearly an inch long and quite unlike the figure in Bailey and considerably larger than any Rh., capsule I had seen. This plant was well up on the tree and probably was in full light. Also, this growth was, or at least appeared to be, only on the side of the tree facing north, a cursory survey of the stream seemed to indicate that it occurred only on the south bank, for here we had found quite a lot of specimens on the rocks and the mossy bases of the trees, but I had not yet seen it on the north bank.

At that stage, I was getting 100 seedling plants, 100 up to 9 inches or so, and a few say 20 or 30 big stuff if it looked good enough to handle. It must be remembered that I was the only person who had ever collected this in the off season, and I had a much better chance of getting it to Sydney in growing condition that heretofore.

It was nice to think you could get into hundreds of miles of rain forest and find a sub-shrub you had never seen in your life before, with nothing to look for but the shape of the leaf.

All the going was wading up and down the stream in ice cold water

Wednesday

Reg was a grand bloke on a trip like this: interested in everything and just as keen, I think, as I, after I had explained the position to him on finding the Rh. This was his home, where he had been tin scratching for the last 30 years. When I met him the previous Sunday he had just joined up with old Jim, down on the flat, in the wolfram game. It was bringing £106 per bag at the time, which was nearly £1 per lb. and you can hold a lb. of the stuff in your hand. It looks as if the two of them can knock out a bag a week, which is pretty big money. I think I was extremely fortunate to get him to take me up there.

This was probably the last opportunity anyone will have to get into this country because the tin up there is just about done and the tin scratchers are the only people who know the place.

My plan was to camp there Wednesday night, collect on Thursday and pack for shipment (although I had hoped to do most of the collecting on Wednesday) and make one trip straight through from the Mossman to Carbine on Friday when I would catch the service car on Saturday.

Herbarium Specimen:

Whorl of 5 nearly ovate leaves, 1 small lanceolate 3¼ inches long 2¼ inches broad;3½ 2⅛ 3¼ x 2⅛; 2¾ x 2; 1½ x 5/8; Pedrole ¾ inches long. Capsules 3 x 1½ long, pedicle 1½ inches long. Specimen appears to have had 5 or 6 flowers. By 12.15 we were just about ready to leave.

We arrived at the Mossman River at 3p.m. - not much longer than without pack horses, but

not much left of the day for collecting.
To give some idea of the density of the forest, for the first half of the journey I was no more than 20 yds. behind the pack horses and yet could only catch sight of them every now and again. We had to off-load at the first overhead obstacle, and from there on the back horse was free which was a big relief as I had felt he was rather short-coupled, and could not work out how they would achieve the sharp descents.
We went down the river a little further than previously and found some fine specimens of Rh. on a large rock on the north bank. There appeared to be a more open spot lower down which I wouldn't risk reaching then as the going in the river is really desperate work.
We burned around the hut to keep the rats away (they bite you while you sleep) and it surprised me the way Reg burned paspalum so dense that it was feet thick on the ground right up to the hut. The only cover we had in the hut was in the fireplace, so we lit a fire in the roofless part and slept in the chimney!

Thursday

We discussed plans the previous night until a late hour and practically decided to stay where we were for another few days so that we could get down to the Mossman Falls which was only 2½ miles away. This time we got further down to the junction of the Platypus and Mossman Rivers which is a very open place, and the Rh. was prolific. I still noticed that it appeared to flower only when in full light facing north. Encountered specimens with both green capsules and ripe ones which had only recently burst. I collected many of these on the off chance of getting some seed. Most inflorescences were in umbels of five, and one particular specimen on the side of a moss-covered rock must have looked a picture 6 months previously with over a hundred blood red flowers. We collected so much material in this area that I decided to call it a day. When we had finished packing I found we had something like 120 plants."

In "The Rhododendron" Volume 32, Spring 1992 is reproduced Dr.Bob Wither's Baron von Mueller Memorial lecture. On page 10, he reports that ....."Dr. Peter Valder commenced to grow R.lochiae in 1948-50 when he was given seed by Tom Raine of Raine Ridge, Kurrajong. Tom Raine had collected the seed in North Queensland, but I have no information on which mountain it was collected."
Maybe it was from Mt. Spurgeon? Anyone who has further knowledge of Tom Raine, or the Toorak Begg's is asked to contact your Editor.

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