

VIREYA VINE

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RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Dick Chaikin
Dear VV,

Boston, Mass

I have just returned from a memorial service at the Arlington National Military Cemetery in Washington, DC, and must report on a side trip to the United States Botanic Garden. As some of you may recall, around 1950 Copeland started to explore the Philippine Islands, and at the same time, the Nat'l Arboretum started to collect Vireyas from the British collections. In 1961 they were starting to make them available in the US, especially to Strybing Arboretum. So, many of the clones we have today stem from these collections. At the present time, the staff there numbers 5 people, only 2 of whom tend any plants.

I spoke with a gentleman who said he has been on the staff since 1960, so, I suppose he could be one of the most knowledgeable there. When I first spoke with him, he denied having, or ever having, any Vireyas. He also told me that the nursery was not open to the public whatsoever. As we were standing next to some tree ferns, I tried to show off my knowledge of tree ferns and epiphytes. He still refused entry. I tried to impress him with the fact that I was Cape Cod Vireyas, one of only 4 remaining Vireya nurseries in the entire USA. He refused more emphatically. So I was left to browse the display houses, dodging the huge crop of pigeons and other birds living inside the houses.

Well, you can imagine my surprise, when I strolled into the Epiphytic House, which holds the bromeliad collection. There, by the door, was a scraggly, poor example of a Vireya! It even had a label, which appeared to be sort of correct. Almost all the leaves were brown and it looked to be near death. Shedding a tear, I found it to be labeled "christi" (not 'Christie') from Red's Rhodies (Dick Cavender). It was almost buried by the bromeliads, they were so crowded. Looking closer, I found a zoelleri, in almost as poor condition, and an aurigeranum X lochae, both also from Cavender. All three plants were in drastic need of attention. Way in the back, near the wall, and really out of view of the passer-by was a macgregoriae X lochae from "Milano". Although this plant also needed attention, it had several buds starting to open, and one showing color, very pale orange, but not yellow. It appeared to have 4 flowers in that bud.

Just then my 'friend' appeared on his rounds. When I pointed the vireyas out to him, he said that he forgot those were there, a fact that was all too obvious in many ways. He appeared quite surprised to find out these were epiphytes and could be grown in a mix as loose as with an orchids. He explained that the plant in the back, the macgreg X lochae, was in almost pure bark - that was why it was doing so well. The other three, however, had a thin cover of bark mulch and were planted in pure loam! They were dying because of the mix!

Of course, he told me he would change the mix, and of course he told me he would try my idea of planting on tree ferns, but somehow, I got the impression he was just trying to get rid of me in order to have some peace and quiet. Perhaps if other vireyaholics could go there & educate the staff, we might be able to get a small display there. Or should we not bother. It is very sad to see Cavender's plants just go to waste, being neglected so. On the other hand, we could focus our attention on an East coast display garden at Planting Fields on Long Island. They have expressed an interest in vireyas to me previously. I will check out the plants I gave them, as well as the facilities, at the annual ARS meeting in May. In the meantime, I would caution anyone who is even thinking of giving plants to the US Botanic Garden, to think twice.

I found the collection of several *Sphaeropteris Cooperi* cyatheaceae, the Australian tree fern, interesting, although the tree trunks were rather thin - about 4" diameter, while mine is about twice that and shorter. Only the *Dicksonia antarctica* dicksoniaceae, the Tasmanian tree fern, grew fronds singly like my tree ferns, both Tasmanian and Australian.

Frankly speaking, considering the history of vireyas in this country, and the active part of that history played by the USBG, it was with great sadness that I found all this, and to have to report it to all those worldwide, interested in Vireya culture. The temporary displays for the flower show they were having, were nice, as was the orchid collection, but for a national governmental exhibit, it was embarrassing. They are building new greenhouse display areas, it will be interesting to see what they will do there.

Richard Chaikin
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Boston, Ma 02114

OK, folks, maybe this will be Vireya Vine about plant hunters, or about Vireya Hunters. Arm chair plant hunting? Not really because we have gone out into the wild cities and countrysides in search of Vireyas. But "Plant Hunting", nevertheless. ??? Everyone seemed to like my story about the Vireya hunting trip I took down the Oregon and California coast last February. So here is more!

From Mitch Mitchell Volcano, Hawaii
Dear VV, April 13, 1992

For various reasons my wife, Sandy and I decided to celebrate our 50th anniversary on our 49th which was March 7th. We visited the Hawaiian islands of Kauai and Maui.

On the island of Kauai we went to the National Tropical Botanical garden to see the Vireya collection. It is more extensive than I had imagined. Marty Power is the nursery manager and she gave me a list of what they have in Vireyas. She did explain, however, that all of the plants on the list are not alive. They have been having trouble with the cane borer. Quite a few plants were in bloom. I was mad at myself for scheduling our visit so tight so that I didn't have enough time for a good look. This garden is well worth a visit for any Viners who are in Hawaii, but be sure to save enough time. There is a lot more to see than the big Vireya area.

On Maui we stopped of to see another Viner, Jake Jacobson and his wife Margerite. Jake spends his summers at his Alaska home where he has a large collection of hardy Rhododendrons. He winters in Hawaii where he has collected a lot of *Maddenii*'s and Vireyas. It was interesting to compare his soil with ours. His soil is apparently very poor and clayey so that he must use raised beds and pots. Our soil at Volcano on the big island of "Hawaii", is quite porous so we don't have any problems growing plants in the ground.

When we returned home, it seemed only proper that I make an effort to accept an invitation from another Viner on our home island, Charles Kohler. His home is at a spectacular location on the Hamakua coast and is complete with its own waterfall. In addition to some very fine Vireyas he has a huge collection of day lilies and azaleas. Both Charles and his lovely wife are most enthusiastic gardeners and we have a great visit.

R. A. Mitchell, Jr.
PO Box 298
Volcano, Hawaii 96785

And then my wife Marlene and I went Vireya hunting again in April. Really we were going to the International Primrose Conference held just south of Portland Oregon. The conference was the first one held in 65 years and was great even though I can't figure out that genus.

The Vireya hunting started when we went down to Portland a day early. The first stop was at Dick Cavenders home in Sherwood. Going Rhododendron hunting in the spring is wonderful. Dick and Karen's house is on the top of a hill surrounded by 5 acres of plants. On a clear day he claims he can see Mt. Ranier 150 miles to the NE and MT Adams, Mt St Helens, Mt Hood in Oregon and far to the south. Dick had a pretty large greenhouse full of Vireyas (and other things). Remember that Dick is the one who says that these Vireyas are tough plants. His sure are tough and don't get much tender loving care, but they look good and healthy. I picked up a few choice plants from Dick. Of course when I am Vireya hunting I always take along some trading stock to grease the wheels.

The next morning we went to Bovies Nursery, owned by Lucy Sorenson. Lucy was excited to see me and to also get some grease for her wheels. She has a lot of Vireyas. I mean a lot of plants and they all look very good. Lucy has sold a big bunch of Vireyas to a new Mall being built, I think she said in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They plan on having tropical plants and claim to know how to grow Vireyas. I have always had trouble growing R. blackii and Lucy gave me a nice specimen. I also got some of her Special Vireya fertilizer which I have put on my plants.

From Clarice Clark, Puyallup, Washington
Dear VV, April 4, 1992

In response to the question from Mrs. Nyman in Kalama, Washington. I believe the species she is referring to is R. vialii which was in section Ovatum but is now classified by the Phillipsons to be in Section Azaleastrum. This plant is available from the Rhododendron Species Foundation and there are 4 foot tall specimens growing in the cool house. It is one of my personal favorites. The inch and a quarter long tubular-campanulate flowers are a vivid crimson, vaguely reminiscent of R. lochae. The flowers are axillary, not terminal as with most Rhododendron, and there are characteristic hairs on the margins of the lobes of the calyx. This plant is supposedly hardy to +15°F, but is not hardy at the RSF garden. It is native to Yunnan, North Laos, and Vietnam occurring from 4,000 to 6,000 ft.

Clarice Clark
901 16th Street SW
Puyallup, Wa 98371

Thanks Clarice, I think you are right. George Ryan called me the next day after VV31 was mailed and said the same thing. I went out to the RSF and looked at the plant and it is indeed a nice thing. It looks somewhat like R. hongkongense of which I now am the proud owner, courtesy of Dick Cavender. Both of these species have reddish new foliage.

From Reg Pohlmann, April 6, 1992
Dear VV, Devon, England

Mrs. Terry Nyman wrote about *R. vialii* in VV31. Could this be *R. vialii* which has a similar hardiness rating to *Vireyas*? Last August I was given a small plant by Barry Starling. He said it originated from the Royal Botanic Garden, Gothenburg, Sweden. One very distinguishing feature is that the leaves of the new growth are a lovely pink similar to those on some *Pieris*.

This brings me to Jim Gerdemann's letter. While visiting Barry Starling who lives at an elevation of 700 feet. I was surprised to see *R. kawakamii* growing outside and it had flowered (yellow) with seed pods to prove it. Unfortunately Barry hasn't kept accurate temperature records, but in my garden at almost sea level I have recorded lows of 18°F. His garden must be at least 4° colder. Prior to moving to Devon 7 years ago, Barry grew the same plant outside in Essex (east of London), where the climate is much colder in the winter. In Essex the only damage to *kawakamii* was some leaf burn during the worst frost. It looks like the RHS hardiness rating could be upgraded from H2 to H3.

I was pleased and saddened to read the note about Hugh Caldwell's fire and hope it brings good response. Hugh is a very generous man and has been responsible for about half of my collection of *Vireyas*. He also lost many young *Maddenii*'s, some of which I had sent to him. I will do my best to help Hugh later in the year.

R. P. Pohlmann
Little Acre
Duncannon Mead
Stoke Gabriel
Devon, England TQ9 6QY
Tel (080 428) 294

Thanks Reg. I have already sent Hugh a box of plants. Hugh has been quite good to other Viners around the world. The idea is sharing. You shall reap what you sow.

The Southern California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society voted at one of their board meetings to send a letter per month to the Vireya Vine with the hope that they can help keep the Vine going. Our good friend Bill Jenkins has sent his letter in as follows

From Bill Jenkins Los Angeles, California
Dear VV, March 25, 1992

I started growing *Vireyas* in 1975, just after Carl Deul gave birth to the Los Angeles Chapter of the ARS. My plants came from our monthly Chapter plant sales and from one Stribling annual sale in San Francisco. A neighborhood orchid grower went out of business and abandoned a large pile of shredded redwood bark. On a hunch I got a van load. As my *Vireyas* outgrew the 4 inch pots, they were moved thru a series of larger pots using this shredded material. For 5 years I could do no wrong. Then the supply of shredded redwood material ran out and I couldn't find any more. This, plus some disastrous experiments with fertilizer and chelated iron almost wiped out my once promising collection.

In 1985, I visited Mill Moynoier's thriving landscape of "in the ground" *Vireyas*, which suggested a solution to me. I acquired enough sphagnum peat, coarse Perlite, and small sized conifer bark, in equal amounts, to make 3 beds, each about 5 X 10 feet in size. These beds were constructed with bender board, 10 inches high, and filled with the mixture.

The first bed had full sun exposure except that trees cut off the hot south and west sun. At first the *Vireyas* did well and had some spectacular blooms. After 5 years, however the plants were in decline. I have just discovered a heavy invasion into the bed by roots of surrounding trees. Evidently nutrients and moisture was being sucked away from the *Vireyas*.

The second bed has orange tree neighbors and overhead sun, except for some shade cloth. Vireyas did beautifully here for 3 years, but lately, the shade cloth structure has become a wisteria arbor (not my idea, but the wisteria's). The Vireyas are getting too much shade and are declining.

Like in the Goldilocks story, conditions in the third bed were just right. This one was built on the concrete apron in front of my garage (since the garage is used as a work and music room, car access is no problem). Here there is full sun, except for 50% shade cloth. The Vireyas have responded wonderfully. After 5 years several are over 6 feet tall. Although the labels have become garbled over 16 years, the crosses that contain *R. leucogigas* are unmistakable. In fact, my advice to beginners is: "If you want big, gorgeous flowers - just make sure there is *leucogigas* in it". Most important of all has been the concrete base for the bed. In the beginning I thought this might be a disadvantage. Now, I am convinced that a concrete base provides better drainage and aeration (particularly, if there is a slope). In hot weather I sprinkle this bed lightly almost daily and the Vireyas love it. There is absolutely no invasion from tree roots. The death of rosebushes and other woody plants at the edge of the cement slab makes me believe that the phytophthora fungus is at work in the garden, but of course, the Vireyas are protected.

Anyone interested in viewing this experiment in Vireya culture is hereby invited to stop by any time. I probably won't be home, but the garden is open to the street. The address is about two blocks from the well known Los Angeles intersection: Wilshire and Bundy Drive.

Bill Jenkins
12311 Texas Ave.
Los Angeles, California 90025
Phone (213)826-9885

Thanks for the letter Bill. Every letter will help the Vine keep going. Bill is making a trip to the south Pacific in May of this year. He is going to be on the lookout for Vireyas.

And then here is an excerpt from a letter from Norman Cruttwell that he sent in December 1990. My great filling system caused it to get lost for a while. This was written while Norman was still in PNG.

From Norman Cruttwell, Papua New Guinea
Dear Vireya Vine, December 30, 1990

The plants at the Lipizauga Botanical Sanctuary continue to flourish. Of course we have the enormous advantage over other Botanical Gardens, of an extremely rich in situ flora, including many Rhododendrons. Since the garden opened in 1983, we have added plants from all over the highlands of PNG, including many Ericaceae, some of them being natural Rhododendron hybrids, all Vireyas of course. I have had *R. saxifragoides* from 4,000m on Mt. Giluwe growing at our modest 2,000m altitude for two years now, but am still waiting for it to flower. I grow it on a cushion of Sphagnum moss.

1990 has seen 3 new natural hybrids (?) come into flower. One is like *R. scabribibracteum*, but the flowers are much wider and brilliant red. Another mystery plant is like *R. zoelleri*, but with longer white tubes and wide lobes of rosy pink. The third is pretty obviously a cross between *R. macgregoriae* and *R. culminicolum*, rather small numerous flowers of deep salmon pink. *R. (cf) baenitzianum* is still the slowest thing in the garden and the unidentified 'Birat Red' is still a stunner with its soft scarlet trusses. Recently reintroduced are *R. vandeursenii* and *R. stevensianum*, two small compact epiphytes. *Vandeursenii* has coral red and *stevensianum* has purplish red highly zygomorphic corollas.

We do get quite a lot of visitors in the garden, including scientists, and we are trying to build a guest house for visitors who like to be up early to see the Birds of Paradise.

From Norman Cruttwell,
Dear VV,

Surrey, England
November 27, 1991

Recently I have been away from the Collage of St. Barnabas, but will be returning soon. I am staying with very kind friends, who have been driving me around in their car. I have been to the RHS gardens at Wisley and Kew, but didn't get to see any Vireyas, as they are rather a long way from the entrance. The Vireyas at Wisley have all died but I think that they have rescued a few cuttings. They used to have several of my plants, including *R. rhodoleucum*. Very disappointing because *R. rhodoleucum* is a beauty and very rare in nature.

Does anyone have my recent introduction of *R. 'Birat Red'* (not yet identified but aff. *R. zoelleri*)? It may be a natural hybrid, but there is nothing growing near it that could have crossed. It is a glowing soft scarlet red. A bush in flower is stunning. It is flourishing in the Lipizauga Botanical Sanctuary, and we have increased it by cuttings. The seed I sent to Wisley didn't germinate, which suggest it might be a hybrid. Some Rodie visitors have taken cuttings. Did Fran Rutherford? Australia should have it but I have never seen it mentioned in their Journal, except when I first wrote about it.

The situation at the Lipizauga Botanical Sanctuary (Mt. Gahavisuka Provincial Park) is somewhat worrying. As you know I had to leave suddenly, and have been trying every since to get a replacement for myself, but with no luck. I had 2 offers from Kew, but they both fell through. I have feelers out in Australia, but no result yet. I had a very good and enthusiastic Peace Corps Volunteer, whom they graciously allowed to work there part time, but he has now been transferred and not replaced.

At the moment I have only a national PNG-an, Gopsy Gozapao as assistant curator, but there is no curator (i.e. me!). Gopsy is very good and is working hard, but he hasn't had enough training and botanical know-how to keep up with the organization, the botanical identification, recording, etc. He has done a year's botanical course at the University of Technology, Lae, under Prof. Bob Johns (now at Kew). Gopsy is very interested in Rhododendrons and knows the names of all the species in the Sanctuary. He is keen on collecting and is good at cultivation. He needs a lot of encouragement. I had planned to send him this year to Pukeiti in New Zealand to do a practical course under Graham Smith, sponsored by the PNG National Parks, but owing to their dilatoriness, he missed out for this year but will hopefully go in 1992.

Another of the garden problems is to expand the Park/Sanctuary in two directions. The first is to add a strip of forest at the lower end to bring it down to the road. This area contains an amazing variety of Rhododendrons, including a new pink tubular species; a remarkable rose-red tubular, possibly a natural hybrid between *R. culmicolum* and *R. multinervium* (some if it's corollas are split, suggesting a hybrid origin); a putative hybrid *R. mac X rarum*; an anomalous form of *R. maius* (scented, pink tube and white lobes); *R. cf. beyerinckianum*; *R. scabridibracteum*; *R. (putative) dielsianum X rarum*; *R. (putative) dielsianum X culmicolum*, also a larger form of *R. rarum* growing terrestrially. Also a beautifully scented *R. multinervium*, *R. superbum* (white terrestrial form with salmon center, both plants damaged) and fine forms of *R. macgregoriae* with narrow leaves and loose deep orange flower heads. All of this and a lot of Orchids, including (I am not making this up!) *Dendrobium cruttwellii* and *Bulbophyllum cruttwellii*, the later being few and far between. All of this in a narrow strip of about 10 hectares. These plants need to be protected as soon as possible, brought into the Sanctuary area and fenced off.

The second proposed extension is much larger. I forget the figure but it is somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 hectares. It will extent the area northwards up to and including the small rocky peak of Mt. Gilizuveka at about 9,000 feet. It will add about 500 ft to the Parks altitude, bringing it into the Upper Montane Forest zone. Located there are large *Nothofagus grandis* trees, covered with epiphytes, including pink forms of *R. superbum* and a lot of *rarum*. There are also orchids, Gesneriaceae etc. which do not occur below. From the top we get a 360° view. The area also contains a small rock cave, which is believed by older people to be the home of Nokondi, a nature spirit, who gets angry when people cut the trees or kill his animals. A conservationist and true ally!

Both sites have been surveyed and marked. We are only waiting for the finance to be able to acquire them as nature reserves, under the National Park Service of the Department of Environment and Conservation. The village people are also trying to set up a guest lodge just below the Park, on a ridge at 7,000 feet. People could stay there overnight to observe the wild life, especially the Birds of Paradise.

My great concern is that the project that I have started will just fizzle out now that I have gone. The PNG Government is always short of money and is reluctant to spend much of it on the environment. I think that the Mt. G. Park and the L.B.S. will have to depend on overseas help and sponsorship for years to come. Logging and mining are now going full steam ahead, and it is urgent that we save as many species as we can before they are destroyed, both in and ex situ.

Rev. Canon Cruttwell
College of St. Barnabas
Lingfield
Surrey, RH7 6NK
United Kingdom

Well, there is a project for one of you Viners. Raising money to support the Rhododendron Garden in PNG. I think many of us can understand Norman's frustration. We start or help with something important and when we leave it just dies on the vine.

It looks like they, (the US Gov.) are going to let the logging companies keep cutting the big trees here in the North West USA. Can't any of these people understand that when these trees are cut - They Are Gone Forever. Are a few crummy jobs for a few short years worth - never having real old trees ever again. The destruction of tropical forest is a very unknown subject. If any Viners know what is going on there, please write and this small publication will tell the world (at least our small part of the world)

From Lyn Craven ACT, Australia
Dear Vireya Vine, June 4, 1992

During a period in which my Vireyas were neglected for several years, a growth abnormality occurred which caused some concern. On many plants the terminal bud would die; this occurred on both vegetative and flower buds. Nothing daunted, the plants would push new growth out from the buds at the leaf axis below the dead bud. These new shoots, at first would be perfectly healthy, but ultimately their terminal would also die. This pattern was repeated and the result was something very much like a witches broom.

The problem did not seem to be due to a fungus; no mycelium or fruiting bodies were evident. So the possibility of nutritional disorder was considered. Leaves from my unhealthy plants and leaves from some healthy species belonging to John Rouse in Melbourne, were analyzed for major elements (and a few minor, but no trace elements) by a plant nutrition researcher at my work. There was no significant difference between the samples. A few years later, while talking to some people in the plant nutrition group, the possibility of boron deficiency was raised.

Boron apparently is important in cell division and is especially necessary in the apical meristem and in seed development. Boron could be considered the forgotten element. Boron deficiency causes problems for researchers in pot culture, affecting seed yields in crops such as rape seed (or canola if you're a Canadianophile) and linseed. There are patches of boron deficient soils scattered around Australia which cause problems for some crops. To test for boron is a difficult procedure and I could not find anyone willing to do it at my price. I could have had it done at one physics lab for around \$1,000 Australian dollars per sample - this price may have been more, but the shock was so great that I have been trying to forget about it.

I have started to use a soluble fertilizer (Aquasol) which includes trace elements. I use this product on a regular basis and over the past two years I have seen very satisfying growth. Because of our short growing season here in Canberra, I like to slow down on the feeding over winter. I have obtained some boric acid which has been made up in distilled water to allow boron at the same concentration as in the Aquasol to be applied. I will use this boron/water in mid and late winter on those plants which have required a lot of water over the winter. High water usage = more frequent watering = more leaching of boron from the pots. The boron solution was made up as a stock with 1.03 gm of boric acid/1000 ml of water; this stock solution to be applied at a rate of 1 ml/1000 ml. NOTE: be careful! Boron toxicity is worse than a deficit.

Lyn Craven
26 Saville Close,
Melba, ACT 2615
Australia

Yes, Lyn is right about boron being toxic. A few years ago we were getting sand from a local pit here in Tacoma and using it in the planting mixes at the Park Department greenhouse. As it turned out this sand was very high in boron and we had all kinds of problems, ie., the plants would not grow and if they grew they looked bad and soon died.

What will the next Vine have in it? I have only one letter for it at this time, a good one from Bill Moynier. I am thinking about putting out a new Vireya Vine membership list if anyone is interested.

We need some more "plant hunting stories". Other Viners like to hear and read about trips to find plants.

VIREYA VINE
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Mrs. John Hill (Renee)
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John - Sending these
to you in case you did
not get them - I've
written White & will
have him send me
disphidra - and you
should be ok. (as has
him to check who you
weren't getting them.)