

VIREYA VINE

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SPECIES FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

This is the Fiftieth (50) issue of the Vireya Vine. Wow, 50 may not sound like very much, but the Vine has been a labor of love for many years and we are happy to see the increased interest in these wonderful plants.

This issue is devoted and dedicated to some of the early and recent Vireya plant explorers. And a first for us, a COLOR page. Color does cost quite a bit but this issue is very special.

Years ago I attended a Rhododendron Convention in San Francisco. The convention chairman, or maybe he was the local chapter President, was Hadley Osborne. Hadley, along with Peter Sullivan introduced many of us to Vireyas. I don't remember if there were any Vireya plants at the convention hotel but a few of us were allowed to see the Vireyas at the Strybing Arboretum. My father-in-law, Elwood Budil, talked Pete out of a cutting. We took it home to Tacoma Washington and grew it for many years. In a recent letter from Hadley, he offered letters for our use from Michael Black, an early collector/explorer from England. I shall try to extract useful information from his letters to Hadley. Because it is difficult to quote from other people's letters, I shall try to paraphrase things that might be interesting.

Letter from Michael Black to Hadley Osborn dated August 27, 1968. Black had just returned to England from the West Coast of the U.S.

How very much I enjoyed meeting you all. I was amazed not only by your terrific enthusiasm but also by the plants you have – most people here have no idea of the splendid things in your area. Coming back here to the Rhodo world is almost like a return to the middle ages – we're not nearly so "with it" as you. R. konori flowered here for the first time in the UK, but Tom Lelliott in Australia pipped me to the post by a month.

From a letter to Michael Black from Hadley dated October 4, 1968.

Thanks for the package of seedlings and cuttings. The biggest surprise was the tremendous foliage of your #81 R. culminicolum var. culminicolum.

You'd said earlier that our var. *angiense* was inferior in foliage and it clearly is. Unfortunately, Jock Brydon has resigned as Director of Strybing Arboretum, but with another excellent rhododendron man, Roy Hudson, as the new Director and with Pete Sullivan still around, the outlook there for rhododendrons continues excellent.

Bob Scott bloomed NFG 11735, which we had received with the mistaken designation of *R. macgregoriae*. I keyed it out tentatively as a variety of *dielsianum*, which coincides with your guess. Another of our members bloomed a *R. konori* from Sleumer's 1961 expedition. This collection has stiffer and better foliage than others we have received, and though the flowers were a little smaller than *R. konori* apparently can be, they were magnificently modeled and magnificently fragrant.

Letter from Black to Hadley written from Cambridge, October 31, 1968.

I'm stuck at this Academic Stronghold just now so I can't send any cuttings to Strybing, but will do so when I get home to Grasmere. Sleumer was up to see me last week – the Prof. Of Tropical Botany and I entertained him at a luncheon in Semi-Mediaeval splendor at the college. I think he enjoyed it despite the portrait of Oliver Cromwell glaring down upon him.

All of my Malesians are under cover now, of course, but so far they've not had any heat – daily reports come down my 'hot line' from home so I know exactly what's going on. While I remember, you know the bronze foliage *R. lochae*, well on looking through my plants I found one almost identical grown from Lelliott's seed as *R. lochae* x *christianae*. Wonder which label is wrong. PS. Sleumer brought me a Rhodo from the Philippines – *R. subsessile* – interesting.

Letter from Black to Hadley dated November 20 1968. With some cuttings through the mail.

Here are a few bits and pieces. Strangely enough most of the plants have wood that is too hard for cuttings at the moment, probably as a result of the hot summer we have had. But here are some details:

#B 7 is *R. pleianthum* from Kerrigomna Sia at about 10,000 ft. I made mention of this in the article in the RHS Yearbook for 1966. It's really a winner.

#B 126 S/Sect. *Phaeovireya* aff. *beyerinckianum*. Western Highlands, forest edge in deep shade. Locality Wazbag District, 8,500 ft.

#B 160 *R. beyerinckianum*. Identified by Sleumer. Nondugl, at edge of Al River, 9,000 ft. in fairly deep shade. Growing epiphytically, but has been down to earth since collection.

Stoner #4. Read about this in Stoner's article in one of the old RHS yearbooks. There seems to be a bit of a balls up here. As a lot of his things don't correspond with his herbarium material. I got it from the RBG Edinburgh, and identification by Sleumer from my plant as *R. commonae* / *R. stonori*, but a plant from the same source at Brodick is identified as *R. versteegii*. It hasn't flowered anywhere yet so it is difficult to check out.

#B 150 *R. culminicolum* var. *culminicolum*. I think that this is the thing that John Patrick told me over the phone that you had lost. It's from the banks of the Fatime at about 8,500 ft. It's a damn good ornamental in full bloom. It is often epiphytic in the wild and not terribly shade tolerant.

#B 167 Is a yellow form of *R. macgregoriae* from the banks of the Al River at Nondugl at about 8,000ft. Not a bad representation, but the flowers are perhaps a little larger than most. You name it, it grows there. On rotting trunks, rocks, terrestrially on clay banks etc.

#B 128 Is the form of *R. macgregoriae* which I got a Preliminary Commendation for at the RHS in July which I have named 'Sirunke Orange'. It was a seedling collected near the superb plant I mentioned in the 1966 RHS article. It flowered for the first time this year and I have hopes that it will with age become even better.

Letter to Hadley from Black dated 22 October 1969

Preparations for next year's expedition are well under way, though I do wish some idle clerk in Calcutta would get the lead out and send a permit for Assam. Sumatra should be interesting, and I've been promised maximum cooperation from the authorities by the Indonesian Ambassador, which should ensure I get to the north, where there are apparently the most interesting things. I have a notion to climb Mt. Kinabalu, in Northern Borneo. Every one else seems to have been up there, and then I will go on to Hong Kong to pick up what species I can, before they are all swept away by enormous buildings. I found that another Veitch hybrid exists over here. Hydon Nursery's, near Godalming, Surrey, stock it – it's called 'Sybil', and a truss they exhibited a few months ago looked presentable.

We hope to have more in the next Vine EWS

From Harry Wilka
Dear Vireya Vine,

Co. Dublin, Ireland
6 May, 1997

After my brief experience, I feel I should let you know how I am doing with my Vireya Rhods. My first year with Vireyas went very well with them growing unprotected in open ground among tree ferns and other Rhodos. The second year during my winter absence, disaster struck. I was told on my return to Ireland, the temperature around Christmas had dropped for two days to -6°C, a most unusual occurrence for the microclimate in which I live. However, one plant survived and is looking good, *R. Levinie* to my surprise. The beautiful olive green leaves with lots of hair does not look to me like a cold, damp weather lover, but I am delighted that it likes Killiney.

I did not take any chances with my new collection received last autumn. I plunged the pots into peat filled trays to their brims and left them in my greenhouse staging covered with a double layer of horticultural fiberglass fleece. They have been uncovered since March. The healthy growth to date is 10-15cm. I have now potted on into 20cm clay pots in a mixture of peat based ericaceous compost including a wetting agent. To this mix I have added 20% sharp river sand and 10% vermiculite. The plants are now standing on the greenhouse staging and I don't know what to do from now on. The Vireya Vine is a delight to receive and read.

Harry Wilka

Kinvara
Killiney Hill Road, Killiney
Co. Dublin, Ireland

OK, Harry, here are some comments and a few questions. I don't know what *R. Levinie* is. But it probably is not a *Vireya Rhododendron*. *Vireyas* don't really have hair on the leaves. It is more likely to be a plant in the *Maddenii* section. -6°C (21.6°F) is very cold and I don't think any *Rhododendrons* in section *Vireya* would survive it. To be safe, you are smart to put plants under cover during winter weather. Here in the Northwest area of the United States we do not have cold problems with these plants because we know we must protect them in the winter. Cold is not the only problem we could have. Just as bad as cold would be the dark wet months. Sometimes just getting plants out of the winter rains is a great help. We try to keep our plants on the dry side which tends to help a lot. I notice you are using clay pots and vermiculite. Most people have changed to plastic pots because they are more convenient to keep watered. I don't like sand because it often has quite small particle sizes even if it is sharp sand. One good thing about sand is that it is heavy and helps keep pots standing upright in windy areas.

My simple choice for a potting mix would be coarse peat and perlite at a 50/50% mix. *Vireyas* like very well-drained mixes. I would suggest to any *Vireya* grower to put their plants outside in light shade after the danger of frost is past. They love being outside and have much fewer problems with insect pest. Plants outside grow stronger and get more light to form flower buds. Here is my question to you. Where do you get *Vireya Rhododendrons* from in Ireland? Is there a nursery there that sells them? Are there other growers there? I think that the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has sent *Vireya* species to the Dublin Botanic Garden. Maybe you could look and report back about these plants. Thanks for the good letter. We all learn when we read about others experiences. What are you using for fertilizer? EWS

From Hank Helm
Dear VV

Bainbridge Island, Washington State
June 12, 1997

I am pleased to report on my trip with John Farbarik in May 1997 to Sulawesi, Indonesia. John convinced me we should make the trip during conversations in the fall of 1996. He had been there with Keith Adams from NZ in the Spring of 1996. (See Issue #48 of *Vireya Vine*).

Planning began in October of 1996 by obtaining Sleumer's descriptions from 'Flora Malesiana' from which we made a key of possible *rhododendrons* to see. A list of *rhododendrons* of Sulawesi as recorded in the RBG Edinburgh database was acquired and names verified from the latest publication from the Royal Botanical Garden in Edinburgh written by George Argent, Gillian Fairweather and Kerry Walter, 'Accepted Names in *Rhododendron* Section *Vireya*'.

By December we determined to get to the higher mountains where we would have the best chance of seeing the greatest number of species. The logical choice of location was the Latimodjong Range in Southwest Sulawesi and Mount Rantemario in particular. This is a 11,280 ft. (3,438 meters) peak and the tallest mountain in Sulawesi. Slumber's descriptions from 'Flora Malesiana' include fifteen species from this mountain range.

We left Seattle on May 8, 1997 and after a flight of twelve and a half hours arrived in Taipei, Taiwan. Our flight the following morning was for one hour to Kaoshiung and then on for four and one half hours to Bali. After a night there, we were off for a three and one half hour flight to Ujung Pandang on Sulawesi. From there we drove eight hours to Rantepao in Tana Toraja country, Southwest Sulawesi.



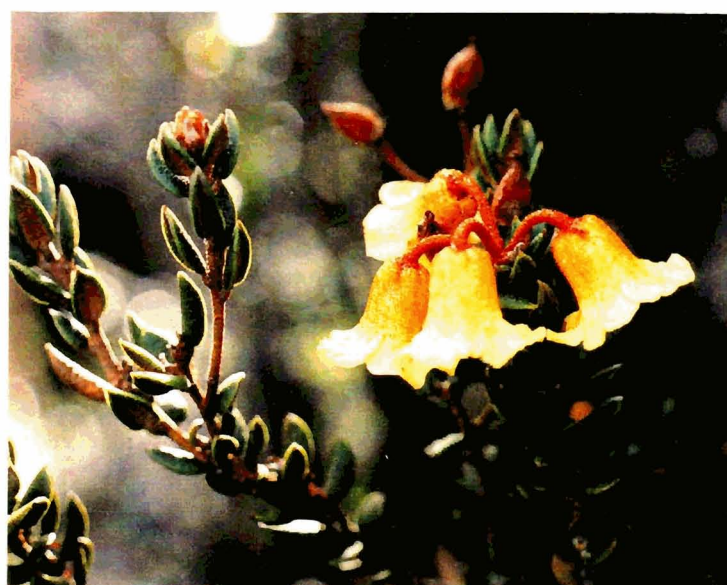
R. lagunclicarpum



R. quadrasianum var. *selebicum*



R. zollingeri



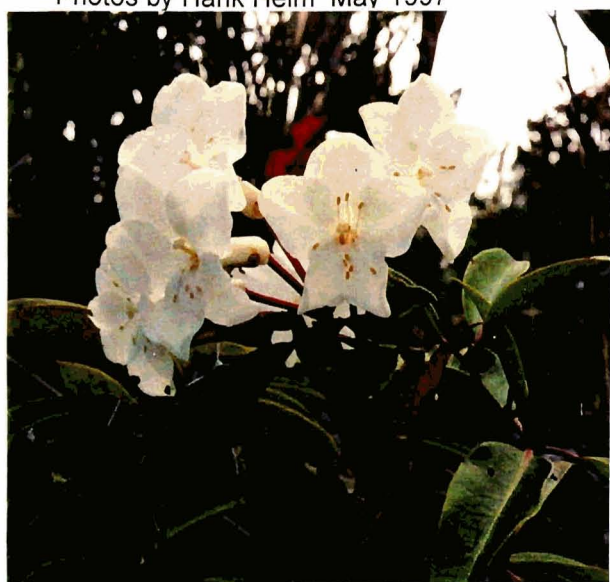
R. eyame

Note: Some identifications may not be correct. Time will tell

Photos by Hank Helm May 1997



R. lompohense *Leptobrachion*



R. rhodopus

The next day, May 13th, we climbed to the 6,500 ft. (1,981 meters) level of the mountain John and Keith had climbed in 1996, Mt. Seasean with a total elevation of 6,900 ft. (2,103 meters).

We photographed four species, three of which were in bloom. The species found are (subject to verification): *R. rhodopus*, *R. zollingeri*, *R. malayanum* and *R. cuneifolium*.

On May 14, we headed east into the Latimodjong Range south of Rantepao from the town of Cakke. Following a two hour drive from Cakke we reached Gura where the vehicle could go no further. We then made a trek of roughly ten or eleven miles (16 kilometers) arriving at Karangan at elevation 4,780 ft. (1,457 meters) where we stayed overnight in a village house. The next day was a long and difficult climb through coffee trees and farms and then up a very steep (sometimes hand over hand) trail across four streams and through jungle to elevation 10,480 ft. (3,194 meters). The stream crossings were via slippery rocks, small tree trunks and stems of timber bamboo. This climb of 5,700 feet (1,737 meters) would have been almost impossible except for the rhododendrons we began to see which caused adrenaline to take over! We saw and photographed twelve species of rhododendrons in bloom that day. The stops to look and photograph gave us a chance to catch our breath and rest. After camping for the night, we climbed to the top of Rantemario the next morning. On the way we photographed three additional blooming rhododendron species. At the summit, we photographed each other with the monument that had been erected by our guide's climbing club. That afternoon, we traversed around the mountain for a ways and photographed another species in bloom.

The weather turned bad that night with thunder, lightning and rain. We worried about getting down the trail because of the rain. In addition, there were the stream crossings to think about, so we decided to abort an attempt to climb an adjacent peak. On the way down we photographed several rhododendron species in and out of bloom that we had not seen on the way up.

Our camp for that night was under a cliff overhang and on a ledge some fifty feet above a river. The ledge was very narrow and needless to say, we spent a restless night. We did not want to roll off the three or four foot wide ledge into the river! Staying awake did allow us to see fireflies, bats and the lightning flashes. The roar of the river muffled the thunder claps.

After the trek to Gura the following day we waited for a public Bemo to take us back to Cakke and Rantepao. Because the next day was market day in Cakke, the Bemo was more than crowded. Twenty people jammed into a Toyota sport Utility Vehicle!!! Baskets went on top.

The species from Rantemario tentatively identified (subject to verification) are: *R. quadrasianum*, *R. celebicum*, *R. malayanum* (pink and pale yellow forms), *R. laguncularipum*, *R. nanophytum* var. *nanophytum*, *R. pudorinum*, *R. eymae*, *R. pseudobuxifolium*, *R. impositum*, *R. lompohense*, *R. poremense* and *R. cuneifolium*.

Thirty three collections were made on the trip with what we believe represent between twenty and twenty five species or varieties. Seed was collected from ten species and both cutting material and herbarium material was collected from all of the rhododendrons. The material is at the Rhododendron Species Foundation and at Bovees Nursery under White's and Lucie's care.

Our guide 'Acho' proved to be excellent. He had climbed the mountain many times before and was well acquainted with the trail. He made arrangements for a horse to carry our packs from Gura to Karangan and for porters from there to the summit and back to Gura. He cooked for us and assisted with stream crossings and up and down some of the very steep and slippery portions of the trail. With his knowledge of English and John's Indonesian, communication was not a problem.

The trip exceeded our most optimistic expectations and we are anxious to share our experience with others. Enclosed are colored photocopies of pictures taken of rhododendrons on the trip.

Henry R. (Hank) Helm
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USA

Have you got the new Vireya book yet? "Vireyas, a Practical Garden Guide" by John Kenyon and Jaqueline Walker. The authors are New Zealanders. John has a wonderful retail nursery on the east coast of the North Island. He sells lots of Vireyas and has a great collection. The book is soft cover, and has 96 pages which include 80 color photos. In Australia you can get it from, Mr. G. Teague who has it for sale from Florilegium, PO Box 644, Rozelle N.S.W. the price is \$25A. In the USA it is available from Timber Press in Portland, Oregon. You also probably can get a copy from your local Rhododendron Society Chapter book chairman. Red's Rhodies can get it and Bovees Nursery has a supply on hand. The price is \$19.95US plus postage of about \$1.50 in the USA. It should be available in book stores in New Zealand or from John Kenyon at 'Te Puna Gardens'. This book is quite well done with lots of good photos.

The book "Vireya Rhododendrons" by J. Clyde Smith in Australia is still available. It can probably be ordered from the Australian Rhododendron Society.

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has a small booklet called "Accepted Names in Rhododendron Section Vireya." It has 39 pages and contains list of 'Accepted names and their synonyms' and an 'Alphabetical list of all names used'. This Edinburgh booklet is only about species. A very useful item for species people to have.

VIREYA NURSERIES

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Bill Moyles - Vireya seed exchange - E-mail - wmoyles@hooked.com
Bovees Nursery will have a Home Page up on the INTERNET soon and one on the Citysearch service. We even plan to have chat page at Bovees so that we can write to each other. Dick Chaikin already has a Home Page up and running. To find these spots search for rhododendrons or maybe even try vireyas. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has a good Home Page up with lots of information.
Are you selling or giving away Vireyas or even cuttings. Let us know and we will list you.

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