



# Potomac Valley Chapter American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Fall Newsletter: September 2011

## Calendar

- \* **September 25, 2011** – Regular Meeting, Potomac Community Center
- \* **October 7 - 12, 2011** – Hooper Bald Project, North Carolina
- \* **October 15, 2011** – White Garden Help, Mason-Dixon 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- \* **October 21-23, 2011** – ARS Eastern Regional, Richmond, VA
- \* **November 5, 2011** – PVC Fall Banquet, Normandy Farms, Potomac
- \* **January 29, 2011** – Regular Meeting, Potomac Community Center

## Chapter Officers

**President:** Richard Mohr

rngmohr@msn.com

**Vice-President and Secretary:**

Still Available!

**Treasurer:** Phyllis Rittman

prittman@erols.com

## Next Meeting:

### “The 2011 ARS Convention”

by Don Hyatt

**Date: Sunday, September 25: 1 – 4 PM**

**Location: Potomac Community Center**

Please join us at our first meeting of the fall season. Don Hyatt has put together a colorful presentation of the 2011 ARS Convention held in Vancouver, WA. He will show highlights of the many wonderful tours including a pre-convention trip up the Columbia River Gorge, the Jane Platt garden as well as other family members, the famed Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden, the Cecil Smith Garden, Dick Cavender’s garden, the Japanese and Chinese gardens in Portland, and the home and nursery of Mike and Maria Stewart.

After the convention, Don, Bill Bedwell, and Karel Bernady took an extra week to tour the Oregon and California coast from Portland down to San Francisco. Their goal was to see the West Coast native azalea, *R. occidentale*, in the wild and they were not disappointed. Yes, they made it to Stagecoach Hills to see the “mother lode.” It is an incredibly beautiful and fragrant species in shades of white and pink with a gold blotch. They also saw many other great gardens. As is Don’s style, expect a fast-paced program with plenty of scenic pictures, a few anecdotes and touches of humor, and occasional digital tricks. It will be fun!

## Directions to the Potomac Community Center:

From **I-270 North**, stay in the **Local lanes** and take exit **#4B/ MONTROSE RD WEST**. Continue west on Montrose Rd. for **1.7 miles**. Turn **LEFT** on **FALLS RD** (MD-189). Continue **1.4 miles** to the Community Center: **11315 Falls Rd** (on the left)

**Refreshment Duty:** Persons whose last names begin with **A** through **H** are asked to bring some refreshment goodies for the table.



The West Coast Native Azalea: *R. occidentale*

## Fall Banquet: Steve Hootman

Be sure to block out **Saturday, November 5**, on your calendars. We will be holding our annual banquet that afternoon at the Normandy Farms restaurant in Potomac, MD. We will send out reservation forms later, but we wanted to share a few details now.

We are extremely fortunate to be able to secure Steve Hootman as our banquet speaker. Steve is the Director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Federal Way, WA, and one of the leading experts in the field. He is among a handful of modern plant explorers who has been able to make trips into remote parts of the world to study rhododendrons and collect new plants. Many of us still remember his exciting talk nearly a decade ago when he shared experiences of one plant hunting trip he took to China.

Steve is a very busy man, and we appreciate that he was able to work us into his fall schedule. He will be leaving shortly after our meeting for an extended trip to the wilds of New Guinea to study rhododendrons.

## **Dues are Due!**

Accompanying this newsletter is your dues notice for the coming year. Please return to our Treasurer,

**Phyllis Rittman**

**Contact [prittman@erols.com](mailto:prittman@erols.com)**

Be sure to make checks payable to the Potomac Valley Chapter ARS. Annual Membership is \$40 per year. Associate membership for those who already belong to one ARS Chapter is \$10 per year.

Please make sure your current email address and phone number are correct and printed clearly on your renewal form. We will include that information in our membership roster if you desire, but we also need the contact information in the event we need to alert members to a last minute change in plans.

## **Picnic: *Last Minute Change in Plans***

We hope everyone who planned to come to our July picnic got the word that we were moving the location. Members tried to contact people to let them know we were shifting to the home of Richard and Ginny Mohr due to the excessive heat in the upper 90's.

We seemed to have a good turnout with lots of people, plants, and food. We sincerely thank the Mohrs for giving us a place to escape from the heat and for Ginny's fast action to get Seneca Falls State Park to move our deposit on the Fawn Pavilion to next year in June instead of July so we didn't forfeit the rental fee.

It was great to see a number of people who had not been able to make meetings for a while, like Harry Dewey, one of our longtime life members. Welcome back, Harry! It was good to see you!

## **Arboretum Update: *Save the Azaleas***

The campaign to fully endow the azalea and boxwood collections sponsored by FONA, the Friends of the National Arboretum, has been making slow progress. A million dollar gift was made early in the year but that is not enough to fully endow both collections. FONA has set a goal to raise a second million dollars, but to date less than \$60,000 has been received, a little more than 5% of their goal.

There have been a few big contributions recently, including a \$5000 donation from the American Rhododendron Society and a matching \$5000 donation from the American Boxwood Society. The ARS Board has put some stipulations on their gift that it be placed into an endowment fund. Although well intentioned, the restrictions have caused problems since FONA does not have staff to manage a multiple accounts with different restrictions on each gift. Instead, FONA sent

up two funds, one with the original million that had many restrictions and one with a bit more flexibility where they will be able to allocate funds as needed to assure the long range health of the Azalea Collection.

FONA's Executive Director, Kathy Horan, said we need to look for creative ways to raise public awareness next spring. One way to reach the goal more rapidly would be to gain support from some major contributors, people or organizations who could donate tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars at one time. FONA is still in the brainstorming phase, so if you have ideas, please share your thoughts. Mrs. Horan did indicate that there was a personal contribution of \$1000 from one of the members of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS this summer, but larger donations have been scarce, especially at this time of year. It is important that members of the ARS continue to support the campaign. For more information, check out FONA's website: **[www.fona.org](http://www.fona.org)**

The Arboretum did hire an Intern, Dave Empel, who worked with Barbara Bullock in the Azalea Collection this summer. Barbara said he was a good choice and worked very hard. Extra skilled help always makes a big difference. Several local chapters of the ARS and ASA had contributed to that fund including our Potomac Valley Chapter. FONA said there is still \$6200 left to put toward hiring another Intern next year but it does take \$7000 to fund one of those positions. They will surely meet that goal for 2012, but all the local chapters should look for ways to continue that support an Intern in future years.

## **Other Activities:**

### **Eastern Regional, Richmond: October 21-23**

We hope our members will support the ARS Eastern Regional in Richmond hosted by the Middle Atlantic Chapter. There will be tours, speakers, banquets, plant and book sales, and more. Details are in the Summer Journal or register online at: **[www.macars.org](http://www.macars.org)**

**Mason-Dixon Chapter's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** On October 15 from 12:30 PM to 4PM, our neighboring chapter celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a luncheon and speaker. Contact Ray Smith: **[lnsras@gmail.com](mailto:lnsras@gmail.com)**

**Jim Gears' Open House:** Jim will be holding his fall plant sale in West Chester, PA, Sept 9-10 and 16-17. For more information, contact Jim.

**Azalea Society Auction:** The Northern Virginia Chapter ASA will hold a public azalea auction at Merrifield Garden Center in Gainesville on Sept 11. Contact People: Rick Bauer: **[rbauer@cox.net](mailto:rbauer@cox.net)**  
Carolyn Beck: **[carolyn.f.beck@gmail.com](mailto:carolyn.f.beck@gmail.com)**



A Cold Vent on Ice Mountain

Geologically speaking Ice Mountain is aligific talus. Aligific means cold producing and talus is an accumulation of broken rock, thought to be 50-60 feet thick in places on this mountain. The talus slope creates a refrigeration effect that makes some 150 cold vents at the base of Ice Mountain. During the winter months air sinks in the talus and forms ice. In the warmer months cold air is expelled through the vents.

In the past people used the ice for food preservation. In fact, it was common for the local people to dig ice to make ice cream and lemonade for their July 4<sup>th</sup> picnics. Today the ice is usually gone by the end of May.

Owned and protected by the Nature Conservancy, Ice Mountain is open only for guided tours. About 12 of us

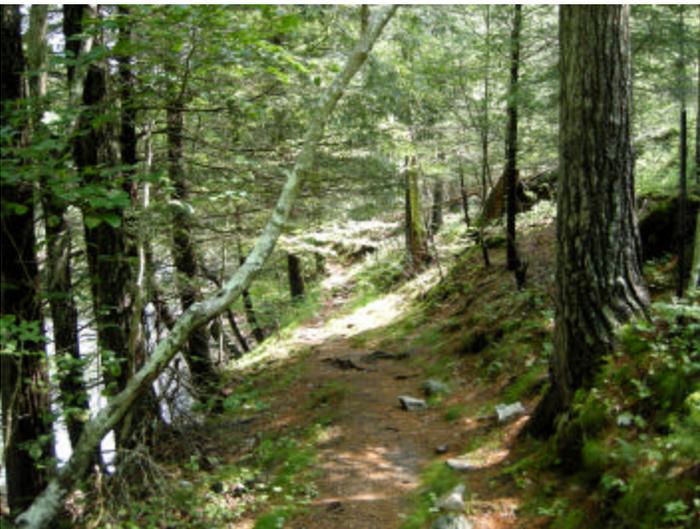
were guided through private properties that took us about midway up the mountain. At that point the tour went downward towards the mountain's base along the North River. Crisp green leaves, ferns, mosses greeted us. The forest was clear except for some uprooted trees caused by a 2008 tornado. Mosses artistically covered these fallen trees, making wonderful displays.

### ***A Day Trip:***

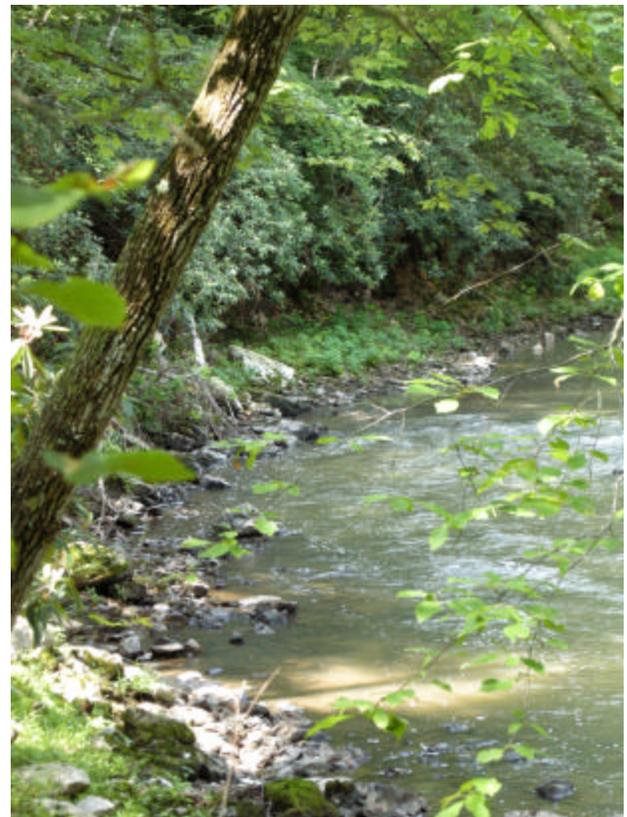
## **Discovering Rhododendron Forests, Mosses, Ferns & Rare Plants on Ice Mountain**

**By Jean Beaudry & Carol Segree  
Photos by Carol Segree**

Ice Mountain is part of an arc-shaped mountain range in the Allegheny Mountains in Hampshire County, West Virginia about 25 miles northwest of Winchester, Virginia. This mountain supports a rare boreal ecosystem that is generally only found north of the Canadian border.



The Trail to Ice Mountain



*R. maximum* along the North River



**Fallen Trees in the Open Woodland**

As we walked to lower levels, we started to see *Rhododendron maximum*, often 15 to 20 feet tall. When we reached the base of the mountain, we found thickets of rhododendrons lining the banks of the North River. It was mid-June and the rhododendrons were just beginning to open their flowers. Our tour followed a path along the base of the mountain just above the river, which was landscaped with ferns, mosses, deciduous azaleas, kalmias, and prickly roses.

Soon we were guided to the biggest vent, called “The Big One.” Standing in front of this ice vent felt like a very strong, icy blast from an enormous air conditioner. Our guide put a thermometer in the vent and one above it. When we return about 30 minutes later, the outside thermometer registered 87° F; inside the vent, it was 34° F.



**Rare Ferns on Ice Mountain**

Another vent was covered with moss, which hosted the rare Appalachian Wood Fern. Thought to extinct, this fern was discovered growing plentifully on Ice Mountain. The Nature Preserve has fenced some of its rare plants, especially the Prickly Rose, to keep the

deer from grazing them. We saw lots of native azalea seedling as well as some mature plants, but we not sure what species they are since they had already bloomed.

Blasts of cold air called our attention to small vents that we probably would not have noticed otherwise. After walking along the river for a ways, we retraced our steps, back up to where we started—about a mile all together. Some members of our group chose to end their tour; others went up the mountain about a half mile to a lookout point called Raven Rocks. This is a set of natural stone chimneys named after the ravens that inhabit them. We went nearly to the top and then decided to inspect plants rather than the views. We saw *Arbutus*, hawkweed, and laurels growing among the sandstone rocks on the steep paths.

Back in the village of North River Mills, where our tour started, we were given a bonus tour—a small Methodist church built in the 1880s. We were amazed by the ceiling and walls that had been stenciled with natural dyes many years ago and the lovely small antique organ. The village, once a community of about 100, has no full-time residents today. This little church has 10 members and is served twice a month by a visiting minister.

After hiking about two miles in temperatures approaching 90° F, we took off to find lunch and relive our wonderful adventure.

## **White Garden Cleanup: *October 15***

When Margaret White passed away in 2010, she left her lovely 13-acre rhododendron garden in Falls Church to the Regional Park Authority so it could become a park. For many years, our chapter used her home as a site for picnics, meetings, and garden tours.

Mary Olien, the Director of Green Spring Gardens in Annandale, now manages that property in addition to her other duties. She has been trying to build a core group of people who will help maintain the garden since funding for staff is not likely in the near future. Mary scheduled several volunteer work sessions this year with the last one on August 17. Participation seems to be dwindling but there were two Potomac Valley Chapter members who came to that August session, Jim Hayes and Don Hyatt. With only 7 workers, we still accomplished quite a bit removing dead branches and pulling weeds. The garden actually looks quite nice and Margaret’s rhododendrons are budding up well. We do need more help, though.

The next work session is set for Saturday, October 15, from 9:00 AM until noon. Please consider helping out, even for a short time. To get on the email list, send contact info to: **Mary.Olien@fairfaxcounty.gov**



Mike Stewart inspects a young *R. sinogrande* seedling

## The Big Leaf Rhododendrons

By Don Hyatt

Every time I visit rhododendron gardens in the more benign climates of the Pacific Northwest or Scotland, I return home wishing I could grow some of those large leaf species. I really have no room for rhododendron trees in my garden and my climate is too severe, but those plants are spectacular. One can always dream.

The big leaf rhododendrons generally fall into two groups and those are placed in the Section *Pontica*, the same taxonomic group that contains most of the elepidote rhododendrons we know and grow in our gardens. Familiar members of *Pontica* include some of our hardier rhododendrons like *R. fortunei* that was a parent of the large leaf Dexters, and dwarfs like *R. yakushimanum* (*R. degroniamum* ssp. *yakusimanum*) as well as our Eastern native species like *R. maximum* and *R. catawbiense*. The section also contains tender species like the blood red *R. arboretum* from the Himalayas and of course the Section's namesake, *R. ponticum*, from the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Interestingly, *R. ponticum* is known as the "dreaded weed" since it has become a serious invasive pest in many locations of the British Isles and New Zealand.

The *Grandia* Subsection (*Grande* Series) has eleven species and the largest leaf forms in the genus. In the wild, some plants can grow to 100 ft tall. Native to the lower elevations of the Himalayas in western China, Tibet, Nepal, northeast India and parts of Burma (Myanmar), all of the species in this subsection require sheltered sites and relatively mild climates, Zones 8 to 9 provided the summers do not get too hot. The regions where they grow get abundant moisture and the humidity is high.

The "biggest of the big" is *R. sinogrande* with individual leaves that can reach 3 ft long! The plants do have to reach some size before they bloom, but when they do it is pure majesty with those huge leaves and enormous trusses of cream to light yellow flowers. The plant doesn't need to bloom to become the focal point in any rhododendron garden, however. Those huge glossy leaves with deep veins are magnificent.



A mature *R. sinogrande* in Bloom

The foliage on *R. grande* only gets 18 inches long and its flowers are cream, light yellow, pink, or rose. *R. kesangiae*, a relatively recent introduction, is very similar. They all look alike to me... big and beautiful!

The hardiest of the group is *R. macabeanum*, but its leaves are not as large, usually only a foot in length. The foliage will develop indumentum as the plants mature, and the flowers can be cream to yellow. Many hybridizers have longed to get some of those qualities into rhododendrons that will grow easily in our region, but most of the species in this group seem to be



The beautiful foliage of *R. macabeanum*

reluctant parents. Crosses often produce seed, but the viability is typically poor and germination quite low. However, all we need are one or two good plants!

The *Falconera* Subsection (*Falconeri* Series) has 10 species, and their leaves are not quite as large but are still ever attractive. *R. falconeri* is a very tender species from the Himalayan foothills, hardy in Zone 9. Its large leaves can be up to a foot long, indumented, and the flowers are usually pale pink to cream.



Foliage of *R. rex* ssp. *rex*

One of the species in the group, *R. rex* and its subspecies variants like *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteam*, are much hardier. Native to western China, these forms are reportedly hardy to Zone 7. My garden is supposed to be Zone 7, but there is a slight difference. In the blistering heat this summer, I recorded the highest temperature ever on that Friday in July when so many records in the East were shattered. In the shade at the back of my house, my thermometer hit 110.3° F! It was probably cooler elsewhere in the garden since that area gets reflected heat from the house, but it was hot!



Flowers of *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteam*

*R. rex* has great foliage with heavy indumentum, and the blossoms are white to pale pink with a prominent blotch. It has proven valuable as a parent producing some stunning hybrids like 'Hardy Giant' when crossed with *R. fortunei*, or the hybrid produced by Jens Birck of Denmark that he calls 'Great Dane', a cross of *R. rex* with *R. yakushimanum*.

There are a few rhododendrons with large leaves that we can grow. Many of us have admired 'Hardy Giant' in the Beaudry's garden, but there are others with fairly large leaves. The species *R. calophytum* is a member of the subsection *Fortunea*. Its leaves can be up to a foot in length and it is hardy to Zone 6. Wil Smith, one of our Associate members from Pennsylvania, apparently has a large *R. calophytum* that has been grown well for him for many years.



*R. calophytum*

Since flowers only last a week or two, I prefer rhododendrons with distinctive foliage that I can admire all year long. I want a hardy *R. sinogrande*!

## Hooper Bald Project

Local interest from North Carolina and Tennessee seems to be increasing for the Hooper Bald Project. Over the Columbus Day weekend, we will be planting 800 *R. calendulaceum* seedlings back into the wild. Jim Brant has set the main planting day for Saturday, October 8. With a "cast of thousands" including local boy scouts and many others who may not be familiar with plants, he may need additional people who know how to plant an azalea to help supervise workers. Don Hyatt will discuss details at our next meeting.

**Donald W. Hyatt, Newsletter Editor**  
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