



# VIREYA VINE

ISSUE #90, May 2010

PUBLISHED BY THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION  
R.S.F. PO BOX 3798, FEDERAL WAY, WA. 98063  
*E. White Smith, Editor*

This is a special issue of the Vine. I think you might enjoy knowing a little bit about Vireya people who, I think, are or were really important.

OK the problem is -- my computer crashed and I lost the E-mail group list that I was sending the Vine out by E-mail with. So I have to start over with the list. **PLEASE send me your E-mail address again at [info@bovees.com](mailto:info@bovees.com)** Some people have said “why did you not back up the E-mail list?” Not that simple, where is the list at on the computer anyway?? But this will not happen again, I hope.

Please note on your mailing label the date near the bottom. **This year date is the last time you have contributed money to the Vine or written a letter for the Vine (you get money/date credit when you write a letter).** We request at least \$10US for the Vireya Vine and if I do not hear from you for 10 years I will remove your name from the data base. \$10 is a pretty good deal and many people send in a few dollars every year or so. Much as I would like we can't do this newsletter for nothing. The RSF office holds all of our funds and pays me back for printing and stamps. This issue, #90 will be mailed to 285 people around the world.

## **A Great Ride in the Rhododendron World -- May, 2010 E White Smith**

**So you know what? -- It's been a great ride. During the first part of December of last year I spent a week in a Portland, Oregon hospital. Had some kind of pneumonia. I am OK now but it really gets a person to thinking. It has been my great pleasure over the last 26 years to be the editor of the Vireya Vine Newsletter. I took over from Bob Badger doing Issue #5 and now we are reading #90. Great fun and I have loved every minute of it. A lot of you people know me and I have met and known a lot of you over the years.**

I have known all of the other people who have tried to do a Vireya Newsletter, including Michael Cullinane in New Zealand, Clive Smith in Australia, Graham Price in Australia who still does a Newsletter and Martin Montholer from Germany.

Here is a list of very important Vireya people whom I have known over the years. They include probably all of the most active people in the Vireya World.

Starting in Australia is Brian Clancy a great hybridizer. My wife, Lucie and I were honored to be able to visit at his home in the Melbourne area. Lyn Craven, is an Australian plant scientist and plant hunter, and many years ago I was in Lyn's greenhouse looking at Vireyas. John Rouse, who probably had the best collection of species in the world at the time, was another plant scientist in the Melbourne area. Jack Wilson, a vireya grower from Melbourne went with a group of us down to the Oregon/California coast looking for *R. occidentale*, our native azalea. Jack had a great time and we all got very wet for a couple of days. John Womersley had worked in Papua New Guinea for years. John was in my small greenhouse in Tacoma, Washington one time looking at my Vireyas, how honored I was. Bill Mearns and Don Stanton from the Wollongong area were a couple of the very early Vireya growers. Don and I spent two week in the back of a small bus in New Zealand, and then Don came to America, stayed with us and then gave a talk at a Rhododendron Convention in San Francisco. Clive Smith, also from the Wollongong area who came through America and spent a couple of days at our home in Tacoma, Washington. We took Clive and his wife up to Mount Rainer which really impressed them. As mentioned before, Clive published a Vireya newsletter for many years and even wrote a small Vireya book in about 1989. Bob Withers who got the spelling right and had the name changed from *R. lochie* to *R. lochiaie*. Withers had the only plant of *R. notiale* (was *R. lochiaie* before the name got changed, which still has some of us confused). (I think Lucie and I have a plant of the real *R. lochiaie* but I am not sure).

And from New Zealand is Keith Adams from New Plymouth, a nursery man and plant collector who spent a lot of time in Northern Borneo hunting for Vireyas and collecting. He introduced into cultivation a couple of species from his trips. Keith is a great friend of Lucie and me and has stayed with us a few times. Once Lucie and I drove across America to pick Keith up and return him to our west coast, what great fun! Mark Jury from the New Plymouth area has a nursery and grew many Vireyas. Mark's father went to PNG very early on and collected Vireyas. I saw a plant of *R. macgregoriae* that must have been at least 12 feet tall in their garden. Michael Cullinane was a nursery man who did a Vireya newsletter for a few years and had a great collection of Vireya species.

And let us not forget Oz Blumhardt, a nurseryman from north of Auckland, who not only collected in the wild but had a really extensive collection of species and hybrids. Oz hybridized and introduced the popular *R. saxifragoides* hybrids for the world. The species *R. saxifragoides* is next to impossible to keep alive in cultivation but the hybrids are easy and great flowering small plants. Jan and Brian Oldham had a small *Vireya* operation in Auckland for a while. Brian made a lot of nice *Vireya* hybrids including *R. 'Larissa'* a very nice pink flowered plant which he named after his daughter. Lucie and I had the pleasure of staying with them a few years ago. Brian has been one of my good letter writers for the *Vireya Vine* over the years, thanks Brian. And then one time Keith Adams and I spent an afternoon with Jan Oldham and a couple of bottles of good wine talking plants with her, what great memories and fun. Brian was a MD so he was still working in them days. And finally the great Graham Smith, the past director of the Pukeiti Trust Garden up the hill from New Plymouth. Pukeiti must be one of the best *Rhododendron* gardens in the world, and a lot of it is Graham's doing. Graham also led plant hunting trips to PNG, and Fran Rutherford (my *Vireya Vine* partner) went on one of his trips. Pukeiti has a great species *Vireya* collection with the plants planted in the ground. I have been there many times and the last time Lucie and I were there the whole garden looked wonderful.

I met Norman Cruttwell a couple of times. He was an English church person who lived most of his life in Papua New Guinea, helped care for the native people and hunted for and collected *Vireyas*. Norman even established a *Vireya* and orchid garden in the PNG hills that he was very proud of. *R. cruttwellii* was named after him and *R. christianae* was named after his mother who lived with him at times.

From South Africa came Leslie Riggall who was an Englishman who moved to South Africa in order to keep the tax people in the UK from getting all of his money. Leslie had a large *Vireya* garden and he also wrote a lot of letters to the *Vine*. He came through America one time and stopped in to see our nursery and plants in Portland, Oregon. At a *Rhododendron* meeting in Seattle I met Hideo Susuki from Japan. Hideo has been a *Viner* from the early days and a good financial contributor over the years to the *Vireya Vine*.

From Germany is Martin Montholer, another person who tried a newsletter. Martin spoke one time at a *Rhododendron* Conference in Hilo, Hawaii. He works at the great *Rhododendron* Garden in Bremen Germany. Also at that garden is Hartwig Schepker who came to our place in Portland to pick our brains and to buy a bunch of species *Vireyas* for the new *Vireya* house they were building.

I think that Hartwig is now the Director of the garden. I have not been there but understand it is a wonderful place.

We know a few important people from the UK. First must be Dr. George Argent who has done most of the *Vireya* plant collecting in the past years. George was the tropical taxonomist for the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh (RBGE) Scotland, retired now but still at it. George wrote the *Vireya* species book, 'Rhododendrons of Subgenus *Vireya*', a major work which will probably never be done again, at least in our lifetimes. George has been at our place looking at our *Vireya* species a couple of times and making a few corrections to our names. One time we had him put on a small slide show out in front of our sales area for a few Portland *Vireya* friends. That was really special! Both Peter and Ken Cox have been to our place and us to theirs. They have tried to grow and sell *Vireyas*, and I think still do but they are so far north that it is not at all easy. But they are the great plant people who published 'The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species', another great book that will probably never be done again. We use it all the time even though there are almost no *Vireya* species in it. If you are a Rhodie nut and do not have this book you should. I think it is in its third printing now and the Species Foundation has some for sale.

Chris Fairweather had a large plant nursery in Southern England where he was trying to grow some of the *Vireya* hybrids for sale. I think he was the only nursery in the UK that really tried to sell *Vireyas* besides the Cox's. I just happened to run into Chris on a sandy beach on the big island of Hawaii. He was sitting under a very small bush trying to keep out of the sun, and as I walked by he called my name. Small world I would say! Chris Callard has to be one of the few great *Vireya* people in the world. Chris lives in London and is the web master for the internet site, [www.vireya.net](http://www.vireya.net). Everything you ever wanted to know about *Vireyas* with list of hybrids and species, and great photos also. Thanks Chris, we just can't thank you enough for all your hard work over the many years. Then there was Tom Tatum from Canada. Tom was going to write a *Vireya* species book and had a good start, but never finished it. Tom also grew a lot of *Vireyas* at his nursery in Portland, Oregon.

OK now about the Americans. Starting in Hawaii, Glenn Sahara who lives up the hill from Hilo on the Big Island of Hawaii. Glen has been growing *Vireyas* for a very long time and has some really big plants. Glen has been generous with cuttings to members of the Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

A great friend of ours is Mitch Mitchell who lives in the village of Volcano up next to the National Park on the Big Island. Probably at least 25 years ago I sent Mitch a big box of cuttings of almost every *Vireya* I had and he rooted them and took off to be a real *Vireya* nut.

Mitch, Dick Chaikin, and John Bodenham and I spent a month in the UK looking at Rhododendron gardens and searching for Vireyas (we found almost none). Before meeting up with us in England, Mitch had just climbed Mount Kinabalu in Northern Borneo. Mitch was one of the driving forces in starting the Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and at an age of over 90 is still very active. Sheria Bertelmann and Richard Marques have a Vireya nursery up the hill from Hilo and have really been instrumental in introducing Vireyas to Hawaii. They have also been very active in building up the Hawaii Chapter and promoting the Vireya plants.

And on the US mainland. One of the most important Vireya people in the USA is probably Lucie Sorensen (Lucie Sorensen-Smith my wife and owner of Bovees Nursery in Portland, Oregon). At least 30 years ago Lucie acquired some Vireyas from Carl Deul in and then acquired a Vireya collection from Arne Jensen who lived on the Oregon coast. She then began growing and listing Vireyas in her catalog. I had been growing these plants for about 35 years so when we got married some 13/14 years ago we put our collections together and took off from there. Lucie and I now have what we call the biggest collection of Vireyas in the world. About 700 different clones including about 135 different species. We have about 3,900 square feet of greenhouse space full of Vireya plants all the way from small rooted cuttings to 12 foot tall, 25 year old plants of *R. zoelleri*. We even have a live blooming plant of *R. saxifragoides* the very difficult species from the high mountains of New Guinea. During really hot spells in the summer Lucie takes chopped ice and puts it around the plant to help keep it a bit cooler. Growing in the Vireya display house at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a dwarf plant of *R. 'Lucie Sorensen'* which I named before we got married and was put there by our friend George Argent (maybe it is still there?)

Most of us have heard of Bill Moyles who lives in Oakland, California. Bill handled the Vireya seed exchange for many years and helped introduce many new species and hybrid crosses to growers around the world. Bill did not just send seed out to people, he tested the seed to make sure it was good first. Bill also planted and cared for a large planting of Vireyas in a steel lath house located in an Oakland water front park. A really great showplace for people to see.

Bill Moynier had a Vireya nursery (mail order) in Los Angeles, California in the early days. He spread many plants around America to interested people. Bill was a good friend of Peter Sullivan who worked with Vireyas in the nursery at Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco. Sullivan received and grew on many Vireyas from people like Dr. H. Sleumer, the true father of Vireyas in the modern world. 5

Pete Sullivan shared plants and cuttings with almost anyone who asked, and I got a few from him from time to time. Sullivan also had a display garden in San Francisco in a location between two buildings at his Catholic church where the plants really thrived. I think the garden is still there. Pete Schick was also one of the early *Vireya* growers who lived in Fort Bragg, California. Pete had a great collection both in his greenhouse and in the ground before a freeze wiped him out. Pete had a 5 foot tall plant of *R. superbum* in full bud, a species I had not even ever seen before, gone. Onetime Pete showed up at a meeting with two flats of potted species which he gave to me. Boy, that really got me started with species. That was back in the days that if you got one new species a year you were doing well. What a great friend Peter Schick was and so generous to everyone. Lucie called Peter Schick the “Johnny Appleseed” of *Vireyas*.

Dick Chaikin was a dentist in Boston but also ran a small mail order *Vireya* nursery for a while. He also had a dentist office on Cape Cod. Dick had a small lean-to greenhouse where the plants grew that his patients could look at. Dick grew and named some really good *Vireyas* including *R. ‘Cape Cod Cranberry’*. Dick now lives in Florida most of the time. Frank Mossman from Vancouver, Washington went to Mount Kinabalu with David Goheen about 25 years ago and collected seed. Frank was a Doctor who grew his plants in an open space under his medical office. He was also very generous and gave many plants away to interested people including me. Frank Doleshy lived in Edmonds, Washington, north of Seattle. He was a telephone man and was a friend and correspondent with Dr. H. Sleumer where he must have gotten a lot of seed and cuttings from the wild. Some of the species we still grow have come from Doleshy’s collection including the very rare *R. pachystigma*, which has just recently been rediscovered in New Guinea, but which I had for many years from Frank. Lucie and I sent a rooted cutting on the RBGE in Scotland from our plant.

I met David Leach a couple of times. He grew *Vireyas* early on at his garden in the mid USA. Leach of course wrote the still important great book, ‘*Rhododendrons of The World*’. Ralph Love had a garden on the water in San Francisco where he had a *Vireya* collection. Ralph now lives near Carmel, California where he still grows the plants. He was an important *Vireya* person in the California Chapter of the ARS. Jim Gerdemann was a plant researcher at the University of Illinois who retired and moved to the Oregon coast where he grew many *Vireyas* in a small greenhouse and outside in the ground. Jim spent his time trying to perfect some kind of cold hardy hybrids, but was often frustrated because it would not get cold enough where he lived to do good testing. Jim also gave many plants away to other growers.

And then there is Dick Cavender from the Portland area. A friend of Tom Tatum, Dick was an early *Vireya* grower who gave Lucie and me many plants including the rare *R. intranervatum*, a species with pale yellow flowers and very large pale green leaves with very prominent leaf veins (see Argent's book page 272). (Actually he loaned the plant to us, but we are reluctant to give it back). Dick named a hybrid from a cross of *R. stenophyllum* x *macgregoriae*, *R. 'Doris Mossman'*. I think the *stenophyllum* pollen was from some collected by Frank Mossman on Mount Kinabalu.

I have never met Dr. Peter Stevens but he worked at the Arnold Arboretum and is now at the Curator of the Missouri Botanical Garden. He worked with George Argent at least once in the wild and has been great supporter of the *Vireya* Vine Newsletter. And my old friend Fran Rutherford who passed on at 94 year young in September of 2009. Fran went on a Plant Collecting trip with Graham Smith to PNG and wrote many letters to the *Vireya* Vine. Fran was also my partner in publishing the Vine. Fran did all the hard work, getting the Vine printed and mailed, for 26 years. All I did was the editing. Fran was the main financial contributor to the new "Rutherford Conservatory" at the Rhododendron Species Foundation, a plus 4,000 sq foot greenhouse structure, which some day might be the one of best tropical/*Vireya* display houses in the world. Probably 25 years ago Fran and I were at a meeting at the species Foundation when a large wine box of *Vireya* cuttings came in from New Guinea. Because the Foundation could not at the time handle *Vireyas*, Fran and I took the box to my house in Tacoma, Washington and divided up the cuttings and then tried to root all of them, which we did with fairly good results.

So is that it? No there are some people that I have forgotten like Clarice Clark who went into the wild looking for *Vireyas* and was the propagator at the RSF for a while. Hank Helm, who with John Farbarik, went to the island of Sulawesi collecting *Vireyas* and sharing them with the RSF and us. John Farbarik also went to Sulawesi with Keith Adams and introduced many new species to cultivation. There are still a few species on that island that have not been introduced to cultivation. Graham Snell from Australia who ran a *Vireya* nursery for many years. Neil Puddey from Australia who still has a *Vireya* nursery. Glen Jamieson, who has been in PNG and is the Editor of the ARS Journal and a *Vireya* grower on Vancouver Island, BC Canada. David Binney, a MD and plant hunter from the NZ North Island. Paul Smith, a *Vireya* house grower at the RBGE, Scotland. Jose Almandoz, from Spain who runs the *Vireya* Yahoo site. Robert Hirano, who grew *Vireyas* at the Lyon Arboretum in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Charles Trommer, from the Island of Hawaii has a nice collection. Jane and Peter Adams, who have a new *Vireya* nursery on the Island of Hawaii who will be important some day to the *Vireya* world.

Dr. Herman Sleumer, who wrote the first Vireya species book. My signed copy says 1976. I met him only once when he was giving a Vireya talk at the University of Washington in Seattle many years ago. And finally my daughter, Julie Miller, who now lives in Tacoma, Washington and has a very nice greenhouse planted with Vireyas. Julie and her husband Bill are going to move to the big island of Hawaii and grow all kinds of neat tropical plants. They already have some Vireyas planted at their house over there. I must not forget my old friend Ralph Sangster, from Melbourne, Australia who tried very hard to form the 'International Rhododendron Union', but that did not happen. I got to know Ralph well over the years. He grew a few Vireyas and was a great supporter of Vireya people.

What a Great Ride! How lucky can I be? Thanks to all my good friends and supporters. These are all people who have played a role in bringing Vireyas up to the present time. Lets keep going. Lets keep the Vireya Vine going. I need your letters.

*Chris Callards web site at [www.vireya.net](http://www.vireya.net)*

***Send your e-mail address to [info@bovees.com](mailto:info@bovees.com) E White***

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