

Ben Morrison Chapter Field Trip a Success!

Bob and Rosa McWhorter — Gambrills, Maryland

A special thank you is extended to the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and its past president Don Hyatt for inviting the Ben Morrison Chapter to join the field trip to the Great Smoky Mountains to see the beautiful native azaleas growing in their natural habitat. We are especially grateful to Don for his hard work and unselfish effort to plan and execute the perfect field trip. We also thank Bill and Gabrielle Scott for coordinating participation of Ben Morrison Chapter members.

In March 2005 the details of the field trip were published in the *Azalea Alert* and members were invited to sign up. The trip was scheduled for June 13 to 17, 2005.

Like many chapter members we were greatly impressed by a photo presentation and articles written about these azaleas by Don Hyatt, and there was considerable interest in the trip.

Preparation for the Hike

In deciding whether or not to take the trip we considered the nature of the hikes involved. The hike up and down Roan Mountain would take four to five hours. The hike to Gregory Bald would be four hours up and three and a half down and involved approximately a 3,000-foot change in elevation. With this information we considered our health, equipment needed for the trip, snakes, bears, poison ivy, and motivation.



Photo 1. Rosa and Bob well-prepared for the hike with his backpack, their walking sticks, and a flame azalea in the background. (Photo by an unidentified couple also hiking that day.)

Discussion of all this resulted in the determination that some equipment would be needed (security-blanket type stuff). A list of "trail items" was created but couldn't exceed what Bob could be expected to lug around for the better part of a day. Beyond this, we were about to retire and would have

the time. We had seen Don's pictures of the areas to be visited and wanted to see them for ourselves. Although we were concerned about the arthritis bothering Rosa's knees, we decided to make the trip while we both were still in generally good health. Opportunity usually knocks only once. "Ok, we're in," we said.

Bob has a backpack so we then had to decide what to put in it. For her retirement present Bob gave Rosa a large nine-ounce canister of Guard Alaska Bear Repellent with belt holder. This generated a lot of talk. It was decided that Bob would wear the bear repellent and Rosa would stick close to Bob.

We did buy some lightweight hiking pants and shirts that, being made of quick-dry material, proved to be very durable and comfortable. We were also equipped with good hiking boots. As a side note, between April and June we walked a mile and a half four or five days a week in preparation for the trip. We wore our hiking boots to get used to them. Being in average condition, this was all the physical preparation we made for the trip.

For each mountain hike eight bottles of water (about six pounds) were added to Bob's pack. Also included were snacks sealed in foil (don't want to attract bears as the repellent warning states "may not be effective in all situations") and lunches consisting of fresh fruit salads in vacuum sealed containers; add another pound. Then the question of nature calls came up. It was decided that a camping toilet was absolutely indispensable; add three more pounds to Bob's pack.

Finally there were the rain jackets, snake bite kit, calamine lotion, pocket knife, matches, and a lot of other stuff that make you feel secure when on the trail in the "big woods." Bob's backpack is starting to feel like an "overnighter" and at the last minute it was decided hiking sticks were needed; one for Rosa to point out the way to Bob and one to help Bob with the pack (Photo 1).

The Hike Began

What we did not know was that while we were getting the backpack ready, whipping ourselves into shape, and dreaming of beautiful azaleas (and bears), Don Hyatt was researching and planning every minute detail of the week-long trip. We discovered this when we arrived in Elizabethton, Tennessee, on June 13 and met Don and chapter members Bill and Gabrielle Scott, Dale and Carol Flowers, Dave and Eileen Holm, Joe Miller and Adrien, a teaching assistant from Senegal who was staying with Joe for the summer. We were also greeted by Barbara Bullock and her friend Tom along with other members of the Potomac Valley Chapter, ARS.

The weather forecast was very bleak due to a tropical storm in the south. However, after a few showers the first morning, the sun came out and the weather was just perfect all week!

The first half of the trail up Roan Mountain was wide, improved, and a relatively easy hike. Stopping for rest and water made it an easy and enjoyable adventure. At Engine Gap, about the halfway point, we found many beautiful flame azaleas blooming. Roaming about among these beautiful azaleas was a photographer's delight. It was here that Don, equipped with three cameras, lost his glasses in the dense grass that was everywhere around the azaleas. You would think our group of 22 persons could find those glasses; but alas, no luck.

Then it was onward to the top of Roan Mountain to see the *Rhododendron catawbiense* abounding there. While we did not see the big show of color hoped for, we found quite a few blooming along the trail, some in the most picturesque places imaginable. This upper half of the trail was narrow, rocky and our walking sticks were quite handy. Bob took a picture of the most beautiful bluets (*Houstonia purpurea*, small wildflower) that were growing along the edge of the trail. Overall, the hike was not unduly strenuous. No bears, poison ivy, or snakes to be seen.

While Don went to get new glasses in Johnson City, Tennessee, the group made its way over to Vivian Abney's East Fork Nursery to check out her native azaleas. Everyone found some beautiful plants. For example, Rosa Gardens now includes: "Gregory Bald seedling" (dark orange); "Lemon Drop" (deciduous seedling; *R. arborescens* (very fragrant); *R. canadense* (syn. *R. rhodora*), another Gregory Bald seedling (also orange); an unknown pink deciduous azalea (just beautiful!); and a red *Kalmia* 'Ostbo'.

The morning of our hike to Gregory Bald we saw two bears while entering the park. The convoy halted in the road and a few pictures were taken from the safety of our cars; no bear repellent needed. The early 6:00 am start afforded us the chance to see a spectacular sunrise over Cade's Cove before starting the hike. A picture of this is now on the desktop of Bob's computer.

During the hike up the mountain Bob kept Rosa drinking water, for all the right reasons of course. The camping toilet did come in handy. (With careful use it is quite invisible!) It took a full four hours to reach Gregory Bald. After a quick lunch everyone set about exploring the bald.

Don said we were seeing the early blooming azaleas, which was a treat for him, as he had not seen many of them before. He mentioned how beautiful the mid-season bloomers are. Nearly every bush was covered in blossoms, and one can only imagine what the mid-season must be like.

Everyone took lots of pictures. It really pays to have a digital camera with one or more large storage capacity flash cards. Just click away to your heart's desire. The beautiful early blooming varieties displayed white, pink, red, orange, yellow, and blends of all these colors. As amazing as our pictures turned out, they are no substitute for seeing this in the wild! (See Photos 2 and 3 for two of Bob's favorites.)



Bob's favorite Gregory Bald azalea. (Photo by Bob McWhorter)



Another beautiful Gregory Bald azalea. (Photo by Bob McWhorter)

After a rattlesnake was discovered somewhere in the grass, roaming about the bald slowed down a good bit. This was OK, because everyone had seen about everything there was to see, and it was time to head down the mountain. Although not used, the snakebite kit was a good idea.

The hike down took three and a half hours. Along the way we observed many of nature's wonders: mosses, ferns, fallen logs with rhododendron seedlings growing in them, mushrooms, and voles, and the streambed with waterfalls and three log bridges to cross were interesting and beautiful. When we got down, Rosa sat on the first log she came to. Her right knee froze and Bob was sent for the car. With a little ice and a rubdown Rosa was as good as new the next day. Everyone was absolutely delighted with the hike to Gregory Bald!

Rising for an early departure for home, we found that Don Hyatt had put a CD with all the great pictures he had taken on the windshield of everyone's car. Thus, Don assured that all took home wonderful memories of our trip to share with those who could not be there. We, along with all those who made the field trip, are indebted to Don Hyatt for the hours of planning, preparation, and perfect execution of this fantastic field trip.

The maps, briefings and list of cell phone numbers Don provided the group assured that no one was lost or without help if needed. His knowledge of native azaleas and their habitat and his attention to detail resulted in our having an unforgettable azalea experience. Don's sense of humor tickled everyone. Returning from Johnson City with his new glasses he arrived in the restaurant with large

black-rimmed glasses including a big nose and thick mustache. This gave everyone a good laugh.

There must and will surely be future trips back to Roan Mountain and Gregory Bald. There are now a number of persons qualified to plan and lead such an expedition. If you have not been there and seen them first hand, look for the next opportunity and take it. Bob will loan you the bear repellent.

We laughed all the way home as we recounted the week's activities and how we enjoyed the good company of friends (old and new). As Dale and Carol Flowers put it, "the thing we liked most about the trip to Roan Mountain were the amazing vistas, which you don't see from the overlooks along the scenic drives. It was like the mountain shots in the movie *Sound of Music*, except even more beautiful." Everyone felt the same.

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone on the field trip for making it one of our most memorable trips ever. We hope that the Ben Morrison and Potomac Valley chapters will find more fun and interesting things to do together in the future. Happy azalea trails till we meet again!

Bob McWhorter is a retired Maryland State Trooper and Rosa McWhorter is a retired IT project manager for the Department of the Navy. They joined the ASA in 1997. Their collection of azaleas and rhododendrons and the friendships made have enriched their lives and helped make Rosa Gardens an exciting place to spend time together and with family and friends. Bob is past president of the Ben Morrison Chapter of the ASA.

How to Achieve a Color Explosion: Grow Evergreen Azaleas from Seed

Robert (Buddy) Lee — Transcend Nursery, Independence, Louisiana

[Reprint of article from American Nurseryman, used by permission, Ed.]

Introduction

Evergreen azaleas can be grown relatively easily from seed. Although the process can be meticulous and time consuming, it can be extremely rewarding. There are no absolute correct or concrete guidelines for this process; however, there are overall accepted procedures and conditions that can be successfully incorporated into most situations.

Evergreen Azalea Seed

The seed capsules of evergreen azaleas can be inconspicuous and almost undetectable among the leaves (Photo 1). A developed seed capsule is usually green in

color and approximately 1/8" to 1/4" long, depending on the cultivar. Later in the growing season, the seedpod starts turning to a brown color as it matures (Photo 2). The actual azalea seeds are located inside the seed capsule. Some azaleas, such as 'Formosa', are sterile and will not produce any seed capsules. On the other hand, the cultivar 'Hinodogiri,' will usually set numerous seed capsules. Because azaleas in commercial production are usually shaped by shearing after they have bloomed in the spring, most, if not all, developing seed capsules are also removed from the plant by this shearing process. Even in established azalea plantings in the landscape, azalea seed cap-