

The Azalean

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President's Letter

Rick Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia

When you read this message, we will be coming into "Prime Time," for our gardens and azaleas. This is my favorite time of year when bare branches started showing signs of life (hopefully) and my garden starts breaking out in bursts of color from the many different varieties of azaleas and companion plants which we have planted over the years.

This is also the time for the society to come back to life after a long winter. I'm excited about some of the new and ongoing initiatives in the society. I'm hoping to see a large number of you at the ASA convention in Little Rock. The folks from the Louisiana Chapter stepped up to the plate for the second year in a row, working with members of the ASA in Arkansas, the Little Rock Visitor's Bureau and Arkansas Master Gardeners, to bring our convention to a part of the country we've not visited before. I'm also excited about a new concept being tested at this convention. There will be a workshop on azaleas held the day of registration, primarily for non-ASA members of the Master Gardeners. In addition to a number of sessions on azaleas and their propagation, the attendees will also be given memberships for the remainder of 2018. It would be great if we could get a new chapter in Arkansas.

Those ASA members who have been involved in the efforts to restore the native azaleas on Hooper Bald are probably familiar with the town of Robbinsville, NC. Robbinsville is currently applying to become an Azalea City and are looking to hold an Azalea Festival in June. We hope to be active participants in this festival and perhaps gain new members in western North Carolina.

Fred Anderson, an ASA member from Knoxville, TN is actively participating in horticulture venues in the Knoxville area, talking about the ASA and azaleas in an attempt to gain new members and start a new chapter in East Tennessee.

The Legacy Project continues to build strength as more people become involved in adopting different hybrid groups to maintain. Efforts are currently underway to add these hybrids to public gardens, propagate them for sale to the public and collect and maintain information on the cultivars. For example, the Northern Virginia Chapter is currently working with Meadowlark Garden in Vienna, Virginia to establish a Klimavicz Legacy Garden. Sponsoring a hybrid group (or several) is an excellent project for any individual or chapter to take on.

In a previous President's Message, I spoke about purpose. We are the ASA and we are the ones who promote it and derive the benefits of membership. I encourage you to actively participate in developing worthwhile programs in your chapters, educating the general public on azaleas and helping our society grow. The society is what we make it. We have a lot of talent in our ranks, horticultural and otherwise. If you see the opportunity to make a contribution, do it. I know that many of us, myself included, feel a little inadequate in our knowledge of azaleas. Getting involved is how you learn. Don't let what you can't do keep you from doing what you can.

I hope to see you in Little Rock.



The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (*Ericaceae*).

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For the Record

In Paul Beck's article "Tax-Exempt" vs. "Public Charity" in the Winter 2017 issue, (page 89, paragraph 2, line 4) the amount shown for average yearly receipts for a "Tax-Exempt" entity should have been shown as \$5,000, not \$50,000.

The Azalean

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On the Cover

Native flame azalea *Rhododendron calendulaceum* growing up through pink mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) at Wine Spring Bald. That bald is an excellent location to see *R. calendulaceum*, *R. arborescens*—the sweet or smooth azalea—and mountain laurel. The tour group caught them all in a very floriferous year in 2016. In several spots dark orange red azaleas were growing up through the pink mountain laurel. See related article on page 4. [Photo Charles Andrews]



The Southern Appalachians: An Azalea Paradise

By Charles Andrews—Cumming, Georgia

North America claims the majority of the world's deciduous azaleas with a current count of 17 species. Asia and Europe have only a handful combined. None are in the Southern Hemisphere. While one of the American natives is a western species, one is a cool-climate northeast species, and some are Coastal Plain species, the epicenter of our native azaleas resides in the Southern Appalachians and foothills from Virginia to Alabama. Here resides the highly praised *R. calendulaceum* (flame azalea), called by William Bartram, "this most celebrated species of Azalea ... certainly the most gay and brilliant shrub yet known." Frederick Pursh said, "It is, without exception, the handsomest shrub in north America." Joining it in the mountains and foothills are the red to orange *R. cumberlandense* (Cumberland azalea), the white *R. arborescens* (sweet azalea) and *R. viscosum* (swamp azalea), and four early blooming pinks: *R. vaseyi* (pinkshell azalea), *R. canescens* (Piedmont azalea), *R. periclymenoides* (pinxterbloom azalea) and *R. prinophyllum* (roseshell azalea).

For this reason, George McLellan and Don Hyatt, members of both the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) have been making annual extended spring trips to Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia to see our magnificent azaleas and other flora of this area. George has been going on this Southern Appalachian pilgrimage since the 1990s. Don has gone almost as long. Providing an itinerary and list of motels, George and Don graciously invite others to join them. Most participants are members of ASA and/or ARS. I have been going for several years. [Photos 1 and 2]

The entire trip usually extends for a week to 10 days in the middle of June, though one can pick and choose

portions. The group moves lodging from place to place to be near the next days' excursions (e.g., Mountain City, TN; Franklin, NC; Robbinsville, NC). Individuals make their own reservations. Excursions vary from mostly driving with stops along the roadway (e.g., Blue Ridge Parkway), to short walks (e.g., Hooper Bald), to long hikes (e.g., Gregory Bald).

The Azalea Chapter ARS takes many field trips every year. Most are one-day affairs in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina. A favorite is Mt. Cheaha in Alabama. Together, all these trips from Virginia to Alabama allow you to see many of our native species in the wild and see various other native plants and outstanding natural sights.

Whether you join these fun-loving groups or head out on your own, you should see our Southern Appalachian azaleas in their native locations. Often Southern Appalachian azaleas are found on balds. Southern Appalachian balds are on the tops of mountain ridges and crests below the timber line; but where you would normally expect forest growth, the bald is mostly covered in native grasses and shrubs. At 4,000 to 6,000 feet, these open balds are ideal for some of our native azaleas. The origin of these balds is uncertain, though grazing from deer and elk and later grazing animals of settlers kept the balds open. With government acquisition of most of the balds, little grazing has taken place, and the balds have slowly become overgrown and reduced in size. Only recently has the US Forest Service recognized the importance of keeping the balds open.

Presented here are some of the best locations to see Southern Appalachian native azaleas, listed roughly geographically northeast to southwest (See map on page 20). Bloom times vary depending on the species or variety. Even within a species, the peak bloom will vary from

▼ Photo 1—2017 Field Trip Group (l to r): Bud Gressman, Joe Nicholson, Jim Dezzutti, George McLellan, Rick Bauer, Jan Nicholson, Karel Bemady, Don Hyatt, Dale Berrong.



Photo Charles Andrews



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 2—Roan Mt. azaleas and J Jackson and Dale Berrong (r).

▼ Photo 3—Don Hyatt photographing a yellow azalea in Grayson Highlands State Park.

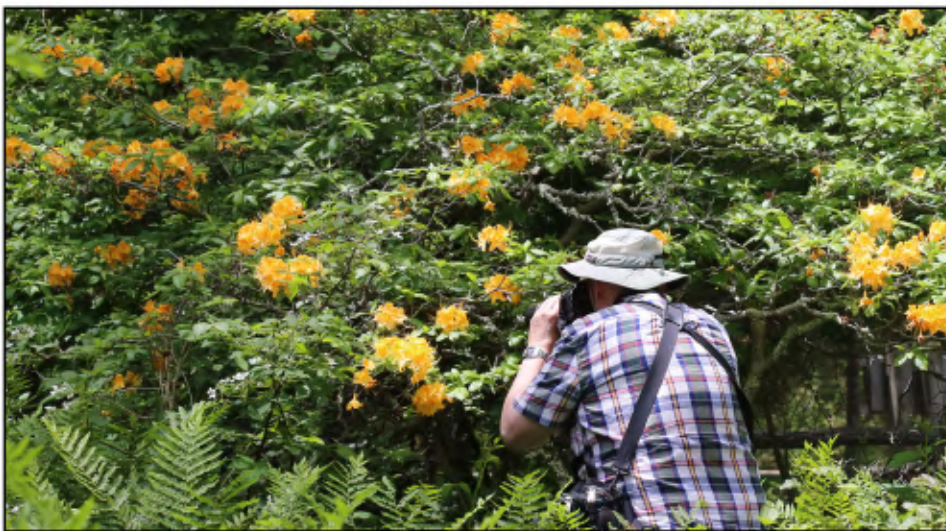


Photo Joe Nicholson

▼ Photo 4—View looking west toward Jane Bald with Roan Knob beyond.



Photo Ralf Bauer

season to season. Table 1 (see page 9) gives locations, azalea species, and approximate bloom times. Table 2 (see page 10) provides information on site elevations. In addition to the plants, the scenery and vistas are spectacular. Sites mentioned are only some of many places to see our magnificent native azaleas.

Grayson Highlands

The Grayson Highlands are near Mt. Rogers and Whitetop Mountain, Virginia's highest peaks. The Appalachian Trail (AT) passes through Grayson Highlands State Park, and in addition to the AT many trails wander throughout the park. Most visitors go to see the famous wild ponies, but we go to see flame azaleas, *Kalmia latifolia* (mountain laurel), and *R. catawbiense* (Catawba rhododendron). Mid-June is a good time. [Photo 3]

Elk Knob

Just inside North Carolina from Tennessee northwest of Boone is a mountain I was not familiar with until 2017. Elk Knob is now in a state park with a pleasant 1.9-mile trail to the 5,520-ft peak. Elk Knob is on a road called Meat Camp Road. I am sure there is a story about this somewhere. The lower part goes through a shady grassy understory of *Carex pensylvanica* (Pennsylvania sedge). We saw among other plants *Hydrangea arborescens* (smooth hydrangea), *Arisaema triphyllum* (Jack-in-the-pulpit), *Phlox*, *Lilium superbum* (Turk's cap lily, not yet in bloom), *Lilium grayi* (a Gray's lily, in full bloom), *Clintonia umbellulata* (speckled wood lily), and an attractive plant of *Plantanthera psycodes* (purple fringed orchid). One surprise was the fact that *Maianthemum racemosum* (Solomon's plume) was everywhere, but we did not see a single plant of *Polygonatum biflorum* (Solomon's seal). Usually we see both, often side by side.

Joe Nicholson pointed out to me *Betula alleghaniensis* (yellow birch) and *Betula lenta* (black or sweet birch). The twigs of the black birch smell and taste strongly like wintergreen. Yellow birch does too but not so strongly. Some folks make wintergreen extract from the twigs of these trees.

Near the top is a thick grove of *Crataegus* (hawthorn), all gnarled and stunted. The weather up at the top must be rough much of the time.

Almost at the top is a *Cornus alternifolia* (pagoda dogwood), in full bloom as we reached the end of our climb. The leaves look very much like dogwood, but the fragrant, upright, flat-top cyme blossoms are very different from our more common flowering dogwood. This particular plant is also stunted from the harsh conditions of the mountaintop. In an understory forest, a pagoda dogwood will send out a swirl of four or five branches every four feet or so up the trunk. The tree can become 30 feet tall and wide, with the tiered horizontal limbs sweeping down like a pagoda roof.

Most of the *R. calendulaceum* are at or near the top where the sunlight really begins to come in. Many are of the same golden to orange shades, with one or two yellows below in the woods. Near the summit is a semi-double where some of the stamens have turned into partial petals. The view at the top alone is worth the trip: mountains in the distance and azaleas directly in front of you.

Roan Highlands

Roan is always a special treat. Many have said it is the most magnificent display of Catawba rhododendron in the United States. You get to add to that the wonderful colors of flame azaleas. In some years, the bloom of the rare Gray's lily joins the floral chorus. Some years we see *Lilium grayi* only in bud. A few of the other plants found along the way include *Vaccinium*, which is said to be spectacular in the fall with their burgundy leaves, *Veratrum viride* (false hellebore), *Houstonia caerulea* (blueets), *Aronia* sp. (chokeberry), *Abies fraseri* (Fraser fir), and *Kalmia buxifolia* (sandmyrtle). [Photo 4]

The trail begins at Carvers Gap on the Tennessee-North Carolina line at 5,512 feet and traverses over Round Bald, down to Engine Gap, up Jane Bald, down into Jane Gap, and then begins the climb toward Grassy Ridge Bald. Most of this is on the Appalachian Trail, but the AT turns to the left after the climb from Jane Gap, and that is where we continue straight out to the end of Grassy Ridge for the incredible

displays of *R. catawbiense*. The entire journey from Carvers Gap to the end of Grassy Ridge is about 3.2 miles. The highest point on Grassy Ridge is 6,189 feet. While the trail is up and down and steep in a few places, it is mostly easy walking. On a clear day, you feel you are walking on the top of the world. The views are outstanding.

Most of the azaleas are on the back side of Round Bald down toward Engine Gap. More are around Jane Gap. Thus, they are not far from the parking area at Carvers Gap. Almost all are on the south side of the trail, which runs the ridge, perhaps because of the prevailing winds and weather. Because of their exposed state, they lead a rough life and are low to medium in habit, unless they are growing in more protected pockets. Flower colors range from strong yellow to red. *R. calendulaceum* is the only native azalea species found on Roan. [Photo 5]

The best views of *R. catawbiense* are from Grassy Ridge. When you see Grassy Ridge for the first time you know immediately why it is called a heath bald. At one spot the Grassy Ridge Trail goes through a tunnel of Catawba rhododendron. Toward the end of Grassy Ridge, the trail runs along the right side of the ridge, and *Kalmia buxifolia* is growing on the rocks. This low-growing plant with tiny leaves and flowers has been found only in three disjunct populations: sand barrens in New Jersey, Carolina coastal plains, and southeastern Blue Ridge Mountains. It was once called *Leiophyllum buxifolium* but was moved to *Kalmia*. It looks nothing like mountain laurel. The common name is sandmyrtle. I have seen this plant here and on the Tanawha Trail near Grandfather Mountain. It would seem to be a great rock garden plant, though I do not know how heat tolerant the mountain variety is.

Blue Ridge Parkway

One of the best sections for azaleas and their companions on the Blue Ridge Parkway is between Asheville (NC Hwy 191) and Beech Gap (NC Hwy 215). Most of the azalea sightings begin near Mt. Pisgah.

From the far corner of the Buck Spring Gap parking area, you can take the trail to Mt. Pisgah. Botanizing, you will

▼ Photo 5—*R. calendulaceum* in the Roan Highlands



Photo Charles Andrews

▼ Photo 6—*R. viscosum* var. *montanum* at Fryingpan Gap.



Photo Charles Andrews

find *R. minus* var. *carolinianum* (Carolina rhododendron), *R. calendulaceum*, struggling *Castanea dentata* (American chestnut), the montanum variety of *R. viscosum* (swamp azalea), *R. pilosum* (minniebush), *Lilium superbum* (turk's cap lily), and *Clethra acuminata* (mountain pepperbush).

In 1993 Dr. Kathleen Kron decided many forms of white late-blooming azaleas should be combined into a single species, even eliminating previously identified varieties like *R. viscosum* var. *montanum*, declaring them part of the natural variation of the species. While *R. viscosum* is called with some justification the swamp azalea, not much is swampy about *viscosum* var. *montanum*, which thrives on rocky, often dry, hillsides in the mountains. It is low growing, usually well under 5 feet, and highly stoloniferous, often like a thick groundcover. The winter buds are very pubescent, unlike the smooth buds of typical *viscosum*. *R. viscosum* var. *montanum* is a distinctive plant. [Photo 6]

Minniebush used to be *Menziesia pilosa* before it was transferred into the *Rhododendron* genus. The leaves are somewhat similar to our native azaleas, but the very small, bell-shaped flowers are quite different.

At the Pisgah Inn, a short trail leads from the east end of the parking lot to the south edge of the ridge. Along the trail is a fairly large American chestnut with blossoms, still trying to survive the chestnut blight. Also on the trail is *Corylus americana* (American hazelnut), *Gillenia trifoliata* (Bowman's root), and *Smilax herbacea* (carrion flower). Here you can see the highly stoloniferous *R. viscosum* var. *montanum* and the apparent natural hybridization taking place between *R. arborescens* and *R. viscosum* var. *montanum*.

Typical *viscosum* can be but is not usually stoloniferous; neither is typical *R. arborescens*, the sweet or smooth azalea. Yet we saw flowers with red pistils on a tall but stoloniferous plant at Pisgah. Here the new growth was hairy, typical of *viscosum*. A mile farther down the parkway at Fryingpan Gap is a large, completely smooth-stemmed *R. arborescens* that is highly stoloniferous. It covers perhaps 100 sq. ft, with scores of trunks coming from the ground. This plant was not yet in bloom in mid-June 2017.

▼ Photo 7—*R. vaseyi* at the Devil's Courthouse Tunnel.

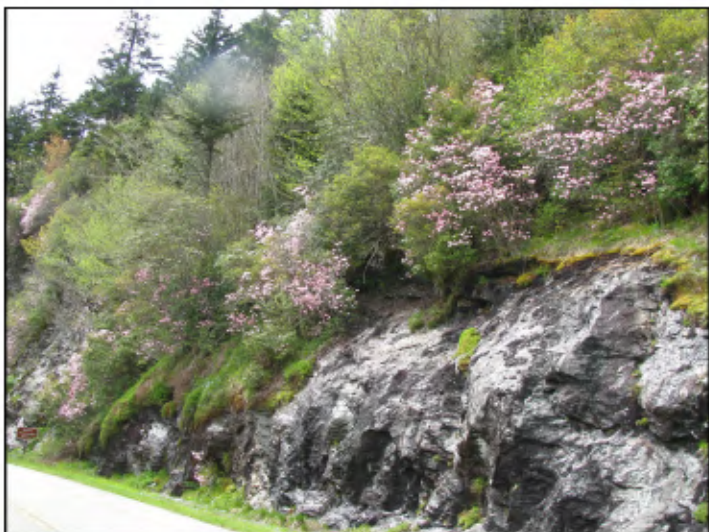


Photo Charles Andrews

At Fryingpan Gap a gated forest road goes to the fire tower at the top of Fryingpan Mountain. Next to the road, a trail leads from the gap back to Pisgah. Along this trail were Solomon's seal, Solomon's plume, carrion flower, Turk's cap lily, speckled wood lily, minniebush, *Iris verna* (dwarf iris), *Clematis viorna* (leather flower), and several uncommon plants of *Ilex longipes* (Georgia holly). *R. viscosum* var. *montanum* was everywhere, found with occasional *R. arborescens* and apparent hybrids of the two. A running *arborescens* (looks like *arborescens* but spread over 15 feet with runners) was not yet in bloom, but we saw plenty of *viscosum* var. *montanum* in bloom and a very large *calendulaceum*. Many of the *viscosum* have traits of *arborescens*.

Beyond Graveyard Fields is Devil's Courthouse Tunnel. In this section of the Blue Ridge Parkway the vistas are worth frequent stops, and *R. vaseyi* grows on the rocky hillside carved out by the construction of the parkway. One of the best spots is just east of the tunnel. Early to mid-May is the approximate time of *vaseyi* bloom here. In the vicinity are also *Pieris floribunda* (mountain fetterbush), the rare *Hypericum buckleyi* (Buckley's St. John's wort), bluets, and *R. minus* var. *carolinianum*. [Photo 7]

At Beech Gap, NC Hwy 215 crosses the parkway. Just below the gap heading south on NC 215 is a wide pull-off spot on the right with a high rock face. Growing along the base of the moist, seeping rock wall are *R. vaseyi*, *R. maximum* (rosebay rhododendron), *Lyonia* (staggerbush), mountain laurel, smooth hydrangea, and many others. Except near the rock wall and the drainage at its base, the area is mowed annually so many of the plants are severely pruned. We found a blooming mountain laurel only inches tall.

There are many other spots along the Blue Ridge Parkway to view plants, such as along Black Balsam Knob Road, where white-flowered Catawba rhododendron grow. These described above are only a few.

Mt. Toxaway

Clarence Towe introduced me to Mt. Toxaway, an Ericaceae paradise. A winding blacktop road goes up to

▼ Photo 8—A white *R. vaseyi* on Mt. Toxaway.



Photo Charles Andrews

the communication towers on the 4,777-ft peak. The main roadside “weeds” are *R. minus* (Piedmont rhododendron), *R. maximum*, and *R. vaseyi*. Near the top, *R. calendulaceum*, *R. arborescens*, *R. viscosum* var. *montanum*, *R. pilosum*, and the *arborescens* x *viscosum* hybrids are all present. We saw some happy *Galax urceolata* (wand flower) with very large leaves in full flower. On our 2017 trip, I kept telling Dale Berrong the *R. minus* should have already bloomed, but everywhere we turned there were minus blossoms. Shows what I know. Lower down some few *R. maximum* were in bloom. One sad aspect about Mt. Toxaway is the power company had been spraying the area under the lines with herbicides and had killed many of the azaleas along the roadway. These poisoned plants were ones flourishing in the sunlight. At the top, construction for a new tower has removed several very old *calendulaceum*. This is a location that demands several trips each year: early May to see *vaseyi* in bloom, mid-June for *calendulaceum*, a little later for *arborescens* and *viscosum* var. *montanum*. Near the top walk along the road and along paths to see the plants. [Photo 8]

Andrews Bald

Andrews Bald and Clingman’s Dome are off U.S. Hwy 441 at Newfound Gap. From the Clingman’s Dome parking lot, Clingman’s Dome is a 0.5 mile walk on asphalt, all up a steep hill. Andrews Bald is a nice 1.9-mile hike first downhill and then up. The trail has been improved. Andrews Bald is a small bald with primarily *R. calendulaceum* and *R. catawbiense*. The flame azaleas range in color from a nice golden yellow to deep orange red. On the bald and the trail are plants like *Sorbus americana* (mountain ash), *Viburnum cassinoides* (witherod viburnum), mountain laurel, speckled wood lily, and *Epigaea repens* (trailing arbutus).

Gregory Bald

Gregory Bald (4,948 ft) is justifiably famous for its massive hybrid swarm: *R. cumberlandense* mixed with *arborescens* and *viscosum* (all diploids). At one time *calendulaceum* (tetraploid) was said to be in the mix, but triploids have yet to be found. With one exception, many

tests to date by Dr. Tom Ranney and his graduate students at North Carolina State University show plants on the bald to be diploids. George McLellan found one azalea just off the edge of the bald that turned out to be tetraploid, and a colony of *calendulaceum* is growing just below the bald where a trail to Parson Bald leaves the trail to Gregory. [Photo 9]

Most of the plants on the bald look in the main like *cumberlandense*, orange or orange red. Perhaps 10% are the pinks, whites, yellows, and multi-colors that illustrate most articles about Gregory. Typical pictures from Gregory do not accurately tell this story because people tend to take more pictures of the colorful hybrids and not the typical Gregory Cumberland azalea. [Photo 10]

On a beautiful day with low humidity, from the top you can see at least 50 miles with Cades Cove clearly in view. The bloom period is long, roughly from mid-June into early July. Most plants are in full sun. The climb is rough on this 72-year-old man. The shorter Gregory Trail from Parsons Branch Road is currently closed, so you now have to take the Gregory Ridge Trail up Forge Creek, 1.75 miles longer and 1,000 feet higher in elevation. The trick is to start early, hike slowly and steadily. For me it is about four and a half hours up and three hours down, with three hours on the top exploring and taking pictures.



Photo Charles Andrews

▲ Photo 10—A yellow azalea on Gregory Bald.

▼ Photo 9—Trekking (l to r) Ralf Bauer, George McLellan, and Ron Hooper on Gregory Bald.



Photo Charles Andrews

▼ Photo 11—Hooper Bald scene.



Photo Ralf Bauer

Gregory Bald may have been created by early burning and animal grazing. Before the Civil War, Russell Gregory used the bald in the summer for his animals. He had a cabin on the bald. The Forest Service is reclaiming some of the bald, which had shrunk to about 10 acres. The ARS donated a mower that the Forest Service hauled up on a mule and stores in a shed on the edge of the bald. The open area has now been expanded to about 18 acres. In the new part I saw

one of the reddest *cumberlandense* I have ever seen. I call it Red Red Red GB. Almost 'Midnight Flare' red.

Hooper Bald

Hooper on the Cherohala Skyway is one of my favorites for *calendulaceum*. The Cherohala Skyway is a new roadway, completed in 1996. It passes by the edge of Huckleberry Knob, the highest point along the scenic route at 5,560 feet,

Table 1: Southern Appalachian Azalea Locations

| Location | Where | Azaleas | When (approx) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Andrews Bald | In NC between Gatlinburg TN and Cherokee NC, southwest of U.S. 441 at Newfound Gap at end of Clingmans Dome Rd. | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June |
| Blood Mountain | South of Blairsville GA on AT west of Neels Gap on U.S. 19/129. | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> <i>R. cumberlandense</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> cumb x arb hybrids | early to mid June <i>calendulaceum</i> mid to late June otherwise |
| Blue Ridge Parkway | One of best sections is between Asheville (NC 191) and Balsam NC (U.S. 74) | <i>R. vaseyi</i> <i>R. calendulaceum</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> <i>R. viscosum</i> arb x vis hybrids | early May for <i>vaseyi</i> mid June <i>calendulaceum</i> mid to late June <i>arborescens</i> & <i>viscosum</i> |
| Elk Knob | State park in NC between Mountain City TN and Boone NC, west of U.S. 421 on Meat Camp Rd. | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June |
| Grayson Highlands | State park in southwestern VA near the NC border, north of U.S. 58 | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June |
| Gregory Bald | On TN/NC border near Cades Cove TN | <i>R. cumberlandense</i> <i>R. viscosum</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> hybrids among the 3 <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June <i>calendulaceum</i> mid June to July otherwise |
| Hooper Bald | In NC on Cherohala Skyway (NC 143) between Robbinsville NC and Tellico Plains TN | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June |
| Mt. Cheaha | State park in the Talladega Mountains south of Anniston AL | <i>R. cumberlandense</i> <i>R. canescens</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> hybrids among the 3 | early to mid May <i>canescens</i> late May <i>cumberlandense</i> early June <i>arborescens</i> |
| Mt. Toxaway | On Tower Rd off U.S. 64 between Cashiers and Brevard NC | <i>R. vaseyi</i> <i>R. calendulaceum</i> <i>R. viscosum</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> arb x vis hybrids | early May for <i>vaseyi</i> mid June <i>calendulaceum</i> mid to late June <i>arborescens</i> & <i>viscosum</i> |
| Roan Highlands | On TN/NC border between of Roan Mountain TN (TN 143) and Bakersville NC (NC 261) | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> | mid June |
| Wayah & Wine Spring Balds | Up Forest Service Rd 69 (Wayah Rd) off county Wayah Rd west of Franklin NC | <i>R. calendulaceum</i> <i>R. arborescens</i> | mid June <i>calendulaceum</i> mid to late June <i>arborescens</i> |

and then about a mile farther by Hooper Bald, a 5,430-ft grassy bald. The trail from the parking area at Hooper to the bald is only about .25 mile in length. Like at Elk Knob, this trail leads through an attractive grassy understory of Pennsylvania sedge. [Photo 11]

Hooper Bald is known for its large and colorful *calendulaceum*. No other azalea species are there. Most are on the west side of the west-east ridge before it opens into the large grassy area. The open bald itself is filled in June with colorful yellow *Ranunculus* (buttercups), and around the edge we see witherod viburnum, and mountain ash. On the east side of the bald you get a clear view of Huckleberry Knob. [Photo 12]

Hooper is probably not a natural bald. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a man named George Moore created a fenced hunting preserve on the bald and imported exotic animals. That may have been the beginning of the open bald there. Azaleas took advantage of the sunlight and lack of competition.

From the parking area, we usually walk to the bench along the path and turn into the woods to the left along a faint trail about 10 yards before the bench. This trail leads to the lowest azalea, informally named by Don Hyatt and others. “Hooper Copper” is an extremely large-flowered azalea, sometimes with 3-inch blossoms, that open yellow and age to a copper color. From there you can wander up through many “rooms” of spectacular azaleas among Fraser fir, mountain laurel, maple, and blueberries. For several years, with the sanction of the National Forest folks, members of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS have led work parties to clear around the azaleas on Hooper.

Most Hooper azaleas have large flowers. Colors range from yellow to dark red, one informally named by Don and the others “Best Red”. Because of the openness, the plants are usually quite floriferous. Hooper azaleas are special.

Wayah and Wine Spring Balds

Wayah Bald and nearby Wine Spring Bald are known for *calendulaceum* and *arborescens*. A well-maintained dirt

| Table 2: Elevations | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Location | Details | Elevation |
| Andrews Bald | Clingmans Dome | 6,643 ft (2,025 m) |
| | Andrews Bald | 5,906 ft (1,800 m) |
| Blood Mountain | | 4,459 ft (1,359 m) |
| Blue Ridge Parkway | Buck Spring Gap (MP 407.6) | 4,980 ft (1,518 m) |
| | Mt. Pisgah | 5,721 ft (1,744 m) |
| | Mt. Pisgah Inn (MP 408.6) | approx 5,000 ft (1,524 m) |
| | Fryingpan Mountain | 5,342 ft (1,628 m) |
| | Devils Courthouse (MP 422.1) | 5,462 ft (1,665 m) |
| | Beech Gap (MP 423.3) | approx 5,070 ft (1,545 m) |
| Elk Knob | | 5,520 ft (1,682 m) |
| Grayson Highlands | | 3,698-5,069 ft (to 1,545 m) |
| Gregory Bald | | 4,948 ft (1,508 m) |
| Hooper Bald | | 5,430 ft (1,655 m) |
| Mt. Cheaha | | 2,407 ft (734 m) |
| Mt. Toxaway | | 4,777 ft (1,456 m) |
| Roan Highlands | Round Bald | 5,826 ft (1,775 m) |
| | Jane Bald | 5,820 ft (1,773 m) |
| | Grassy Ridge Bald | 6,189 ft (1,886 m) |
| Wayah & Wine Spring Balds | Wayah Bald | 5,342 ft (1,628 m) |
| | Wine Spring Bald | 5,440 ft (1,658 m) |

Forest Service road goes to the top of Wayah. The Forest Service spur road to Wine Spring Bald is now closed to vehicle traffic, so we walked up the road to the top and then walked down the power line that leads back to where our vehicles were parked. [Photo 13]

In 2017 we were all anxious to see what had happened with the large forest fire at Wayah the previous fall. The main damage was on the east and south where the wind-swept fire blasted up the steep mountainside to the tower and the picnic area. Most of the split rail fence leading to the circle at the picnic area is gone, completely burned. The wooden top of the Wayah tower burned, but the rock base seems fine. Much of the vegetation in the fire areas was burned. Large trees on the ridge top near the hill slope are dead, but we saw native azaleas and mountain laurel sprouting with vigor from their crowns everywhere. Burned *R. maximum* did not seem to be regenerating. Of course, the fire killed many azalea trunks but probably not the plants themselves. We did see some *calendulaceum* blooming

at the top but burned below. The double flame azalea on the Appalachian Trail had been burned but was in bloom. The trusses were very nice. *R. arborescens* was just beginning to bloom this year. Overall, my guess is the fire will in the long run improve the condition of the azaleas. Wayah Bald had become overgrown. [Photos 14 and 15]

The fire did not reach nearby Wine Spring Bald west of Wayah. As a precaution, the area all around the transmission and cell towers on Wine Spring was bush-hogged. This cut many especially attractive mountain laurel and several *R. arborescens* var. *richardsonii* under and around the guy wires to the towers. I suspect the severe pruning will not kill them, and they will come back in the next few years. Wine Spring is an excellent location to see *R. calendulaceum*, *R. arborescens*, and *Kalmia latifolia*. If you can catch them in a floriferous year and at peak as we did in 2016, it will be a sight you will remember forever. That year,

Continued on Page 18

Chapter News

Alabamense Chapter

Patrick Thompson, President

Alabamense Chapter members Billie Oliver, Dennis Pinkard, and Morgan Beadles, along with Arboretum employees and volunteers, have helped for years building, and more recently field-checking, the azalea collection at the Davis Arboretum in Auburn, Georgia, to update the arboretum collections records. In the winter edition of *The Azalean* we requested collections records from public gardens around the country. Here is a preview of the arboretum's work on that survey. This chart represents the varying proportions of types of deciduous azaleas in the Davis Arboretum's collection. Later this year you can expect a full article reporting details from several prominent azalea collections, including the amount of wild collected plants reported, as well as lists of cultivars, and comparisons of how well the native species are represented, and the states where collections have been made.

You will notice that a large piece of the Arboretum's pie-chart is labeled ER/YR Tetraploids. This is a group of plants from the panhandle of Florida and South Alabama that occur in many collections in the Eastern US but that don't quite key out to *R. austrinum*, and don't have a more appropriate species name right now. For more on these vigorous plants, read Ron Miller's article "Is *Rhododendron austrinum* Always Yellow? A Case Study in Blindness." in the Spring 2011 edition of *The Azalean*.

Welcome new members: Juanita Dodd, Lillian, AL and Wayne Snellgrove, LaGrange, GA

Ben Morrison Chapter

welcomes new member William Hoffman, Ridgewood, NJ.

Louisiana Chapter

Allen Owings, President

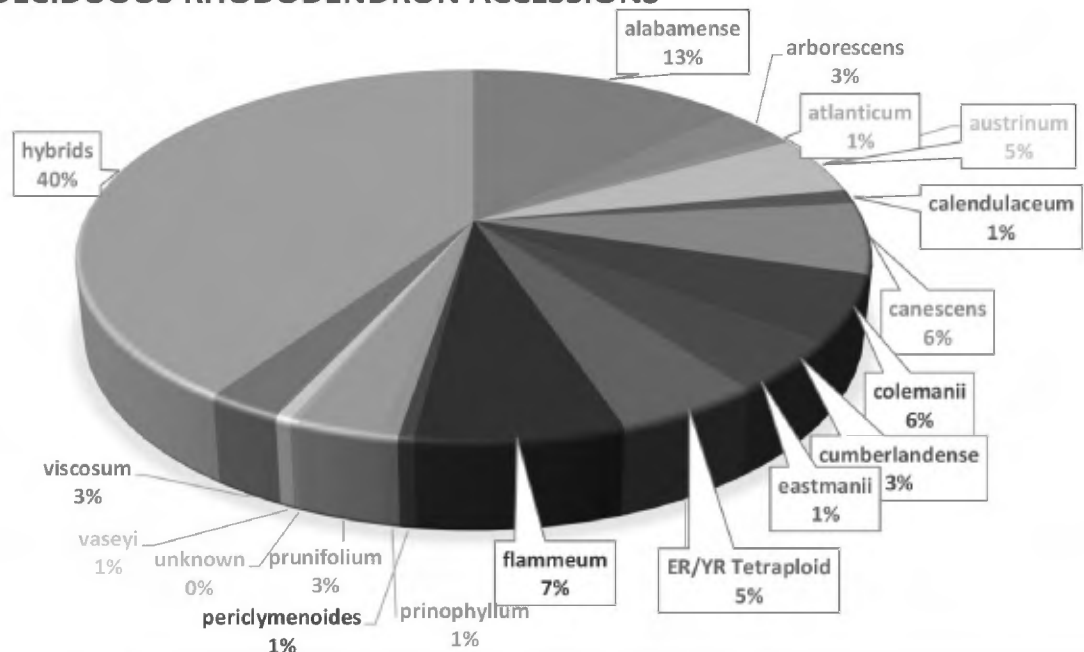
Peggy Cox, former president of the Louisiana Chapter ASA and past board member of the ASA, was named a Life Member of the Louisiana State Horticulture Society at their annual meeting in Baton Rouge in January 2018.

▼ Allen Owings, left and Peggy Cox, right.



Photo Yan Chen

AUBURN UNIVERSITY DAVIS ARBORETUM COUNT OF 717 DECIDUOUS RHODODENDRON ACCESSIONS





▲ Award presented by Danny Summers from SNA (left), to Buddy Lee (right).



▲ Chapter Treasurer Paul Beck (standing) discusses chapter budget as Carolyn Beck, Budne Reinke, and President Barbara Kirkwood look on (l to r).

Congratulations to Louisiana Chapter member, past ASA president and life member, Buddy Lee who won the Don Shadow Award of Excellence at the Southern Nursery Association Conference, held during the MidAtlantic Nursery Trade Show (MANTS) Baltimore. The Don Shadow Award of Excellence is presented to an individual, corporation or organization that has provided exemplary service, leadership and generosity in the development, promotion and use of new and improved landscape plants.

Northern Virginia Chapter

Barry Sperling—Corresponding Secretary

The Northern VA Chapter ended an active 2017. The development of a working relationship with Meadowlark Gardens in creating a display garden for the hybrids of Joe Klimavicz was a highlight, as was the annual cap on the year: the Holiday Social.

Carolyn Beck and Barb Kirkwood have been working on the logistics of finding a site within Meadowlark Gardens which would be appropriate for the Klimavicz's evergreen hybrids and developing the paperwork which would make the garden successful and protected.

At the Holiday Social, the potluck meal provided more than enough food, of all varieties, to fully stuff the members before they collapsed into their chairs. At the meeting, President Barb Kirkwood presided over several orders of business, including details from the treasurer, Paul Beck, on the club's successful year, the reelection of officers (President Barb Kirkwood, Vice President Lars Larson, Secretary Joanne Neckel and treasurer Paul Beck) and a vote for recipients of our yearly donations (made possible by plant sales):

Meadowlark Gardens, Friends of the National Arboretum, the Green Spring Gardens Title I program, the Norfolk Botanical Garden (including their Glenn Dale project), and the Azalea Society of America.

We are all appreciative of the efforts of Jean and Lars Larson in opening their home again for the social! 2018

looks to be at least as active as 2017 and our calendar is available to all on the website: www.nv-asa.org

Rick Bauer's monthly newsletter provided most of the information above. Thank you, Rick!

Welcome new member: Robert Benbow, Hot Springs, AR.

Rev. John Drayton Chapter

Welcomes new members: Catherine Burbank, Charleston; M. Linda Ensor, Summerville; Annette Kibler, Mt. Pleasant; and Pam and Ollie Olivier and Mary Jean and Elena Piorkowski of Johns Island, SC.

Texas Chapter

Sherrie Randall, Secretary

Our next upcoming chapter event is March 17th for the 30th annual Jasper Azalea festival. We will be hosting a booth selling some evergreen hybrids we've never sold before as well as selling deciduous azaleas. Buddy Lee will be presenting the City of Jasper with a plaque denoting them as an ASA Azalea City. Chapter President Robert Thau, of Jasper, will accept the award on behalf of the city.

The spring meeting will be held at the home of Charles and Sharon Bradberry in Nacogdoches on March 24th.

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We'll seek input for activities for the year, garden venues throughout east Texas to visit, ways to increase our membership and keep members involved, and look for ways to improve what we do.

Welcome new members: Dawn Franks, Bullard and Drake Sacks, The Woodlands, TX.

Vaseyi Chapter

Welcomes new member Larry England, Monterrey, TN.

At-Large

The ASA welcomes new at-large members from six states:

From Arkansas: Doug Brodie, Batesville; Phyllis Kirtley, Benton; Sue Madison and Bob Stassen, Fayetteville; Terri Waterman, Hot Springs.

From Florida: Kenneth Menke, Tallahassee and Kanon Simmons, Macclenny.

From Georgia: David Prado, Cumming.

From New Jersey: John and Bonnie Patterson, Hamilton Square.

From North Carolina: Mary Griffin, Kim Hainge, Karen Taylor, and Revonda Williams from Robbinsville.

From Tennessee: Helen Bachrach, Marianne Custer, and Randy Stewart from Knoxville and Fred Looper from Crossville.

Navigating the ASA Membership Database

By Paul Beck—Treasurer and Assistant Webmaster

This is the first in a series of articles describing the interactive features of the new ASA website. This series was introduced in the 2017 winter issue of *The Azalean*, and there will be a short article in each issue describing a single feature as outlined in the introduction. This article focuses on the **membership database**.

Database Usage

The ASA membership database is a key component of the society records. Apart from the obvious purpose of keeping track of our membership, the database also provides recording of dues payments by our members, and provides support to the treasurer for the process of creating and sending out renewal notices. It is also used to generate the data for mailing of *The Azalean*, and thus needs to be kept accurate.

Restricted Access

It is important to note that our membership data is kept private by requiring a website login in order to view the data. Login access is available **only to current ASA members**. This provides a level of privacy to our data, but members can further restrict access to portions of their data (address, phone, email) so that this information is only accessible to the website administrators or key persons who have been granted special access to perform their society role (such as membership chairperson).

Searching

A key feature of the new online membership database is the ability to search for members using several different search criteria. The default display is your chapter membership. If you do not know the chapter of the member for which you are searching, change the **Chapter** pick list to "**ALL Chapters**". Search criteria include **Last Name**, **First Name**, **Chapter**, **State** or **Country** and **Expired**. These terms may be combined in any fashion. The Name search fields assume that the searched-for member's name starts with the indicated characters. If you are looking for some characters anywhere in the name, use a "%" to start the search string.

Data Exporting

After getting search results, you may wish to export the data to Excel in order to further sort, print or process the data. Exported data is to be used for non-commercial use only. In order to perform the export, click the "**Custom export**" button under the **Chapter** pick list.



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Custom export

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Select All | <input type="checkbox"/> id | <input type="checkbox"/> chapter_name | <input type="checkbox"/> primary_name | <input type="checkbox"/> full_name | <input type="checkbox"/> first_name |
| <input type="checkbox"/> last_name | <input type="checkbox"/> email | <input type="checkbox"/> phone_number | <input type="checkbox"/> street | <input type="checkbox"/> street_2 | <input type="checkbox"/> city_state_zip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> city | <input type="checkbox"/> state | <input type="checkbox"/> country | <input type="checkbox"/> zip | <input type="checkbox"/> year_joined | <input type="checkbox"/> expiration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> joined | | | | | |
| Export | | | | | |

▲ Figure 1

▼ Figure 2

New Person record

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Prefix | First name | MI | Last name | Suffix |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text" value="Beck"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| Email Do not publish ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> | | Cell Phone Do not publish ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| <input type="text"/> | | <input type="text"/> | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Email Do not publish ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> | Home Phone Do not publish ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Street Do not publish address ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> | Home Phone Do not publish ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> |

▲ Figure 3

When you click this button, a series of checkboxes appear as shown above in Figure 1.

Click on the checkboxes before the name of the field you wish to export. The Select All checkbox will cause all data fields to be output. Once you have selected the fields, click the **Export** button below the fields. A CSV file will be created and either opened in Excel or saved to disk, depending on how your browser is configured.

Data Updating

A key aspect of the database is that a Society member can edit his or her own data record, and view their membership payment history. Although this feature is rarely used by our members, it is an important way to ensure your data is up to date. After you login to the website, and select **Members** from the **About the Society** menu, you will be presented with the member records for your chapter.

If you click on the **View** link at the right end of your information, a new page will open with the details of your membership record. At the bottom of the page is a summary of your dues payments and donations made since 2014. This will be kept up to date from now on. At the top of the page will be two buttons, as shown below.

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Edit member | Add person |
|--------------------|-------------------|

The **Add person** button is used to add an additional person to your data record. This is generally used for a joint membership when the two persons have different last names. Also, each “person” has separate email and cell phone data, so this method can be used to publish this information. When a membership record is displayed in the search results, and that record has more than one “person”, each person is displayed on a separate line with their cell phone. If the **Add person** button was clicked, the member record is opened in edit mode, with the new person fields highlighted in red, and the last name field populated with the last

name in the member record.

The **Edit member** button will also open the member record in edit mode, and permit the updating of any and all fields except the year they joined the society, the expiration year, and their chapter. These fields can only be changed by an administrator. As mentioned previously, the ASA membership database is restricted so that only logged in members can view the data. The member may modify their record, however, so that some of the data fields are restricted so that only administrators may view that information. There are three checkboxes to accomplish this restriction. At the top of the member record is the following checkbox:

Do not publish anything ⇒ ☐

Clicking this checkbox will restrict the member’s address, email and phone number(s) from viewing by other members. Also, there are individual checkboxes to selectively restrict viewing to these fields independently (see Figure 3).

These fields may also be restricted by contacting the website administrator. After changes have been made to the record, it must be saved by clicking the **Save button** at the bottom of the page. There is also a **Close button**, which closes the window without saving any changes.

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Save | Close |
|-------------|--------------|

Deadlines for input for *The Azalean*

May 1—
Summer 2018 Issue

July 1—
Fall 2018 Issue

October 15—
Winter 2018 Issue

December 1—
Spring 2019 Issue

Basking in Spring's Passionate Breath: the Aromi Azalea Legacy Garden at the Mobile Botanical Gardens

By Amanda Wilkins—Mobile, Alabama

I am always struck by the prominence of azaleas and Camellias in this part of the world. I came to Mobile, Alabama, in 2015 to begin my new job as curator at the Mobile Botanical Gardens, and one of my early projects was to help with the design of the new Aromi Azalea Garden. Through this project, I was able to meet Maarten van der Giessen; little did I know what lay ahead. I had no idea who Dr. Eugene Aromi was; I was not familiar with his azaleas or his work. (Please see Frank Bryan^{1,2,3} and Maarten van der Giessen⁴, who have told the touching story of how Dr. Aromi became one of the Gulf Coast's most beloved "azaleaphiles.")

As an introduction to Aromi's work, Maarten invited me out to "Aromi World" at one of his nursery sites in Semmes, Alabama, just outside of Mobile. It seemed every other sign on the way to Semmes had something to do with plants. Upon arriving, I climbed into Maarten's SUV and he took me on a drive down memory lane all the way out to a little grove just on the side of the nursery. The morning sunlight filtered through the trees into the clearing and it seemed as if the flowers of the plants within glowed. Aromi's life's work was strategically planted out in rows stretching back into the woods. Here there were incredible yellows, pinks, whites; deciduous azaleas as tall or taller than myself! I had never seen anything like it! I was hooked.

This vision of being surrounded by towering, glowing deciduous azaleas fueled the design of the developing Aromi Garden, and the love of plants inspired the addition of other specimen plants and accentuating masses. The design plan was completed, but I decided to go work on my master's degree in Edinburgh, Scotland, before the installation of the plants began.

While I was in the UK studying I made the obligatory pilgrimage to the Royal Botanic Garden Kew; the timing was perfect for observing the Exbury Hybrids in full flower at Kew. The display beds were arranged in an antiquated style and it looked like they'd be renovating it soon (as of summer 2016). The plants were mature and incredible though; humans hummed around the flowers just as much as the bees, completely enamored by the smells, colors, and the sheer volumes of magnificent blooms that overwhelmed all of their senses. When I saw the diversity of the flowers at Kew, I was reminded of the how special Aromi's work was and the potential for the Aromi Garden in Mobile.

What made Aromi's work with deciduous azaleas so special was his strategy to breed heat tolerance into the large-trussed cultivars of the Exbury Hybrids, which were quite popular in the cooler climes of the US at the time. Using species obtained locally, Aromi and his wife Jane made crosses with the Exbury azaleas, which usually died after a season or two. His first generation was very successful and

heat tolerant, and subsequent generations only improved from there. He attained a rainbow of cultivars with large trusses or floriferous habits over the course of his life.

There was much work to be done when I returned in early 2017. The first step was to inventory the Aromi Garden. It's hard to judge the state of a garden if you don't know what you've got! My job as curator includes plant recording and developing display labels. So, armed with a loose list of what might be present, plus a clipboard and numerous pens, I painstakingly visited each plant, noting its health, habit, and where it was in orientation to the rest of the garden in spring 2017. Maarten van der Giessen and I walked through a few times to verify that hybrids were labeled properly and flagged the ones that weren't. We completed more than 90 percent this year. Just a bit more work to do in 2018.

The importance of written records cannot be overstated. It is easy in the heat of the moment (or the day!) to just get the work done, and consider it done without going back and writing down your results. I am guilty of it; but I am also haunted by memories of trying to go back and remember things and not to be able to recall the name of the plant or the color of its flower or when exactly I saw it blooming. If I cannot remember it, then how can I expect anyone coming after me down the line to?

As of summer 2017, the collections at the Mobile Botanical Gardens contain: 16 of the 31 named Aromi evergreen hybrids, and two of his unnamed hybrids;² 62 of the 104 named deciduous hybrids, as well as some unnamed hybrids; and a few that were named by Maarten after Aromi passed, such as 'Peter van der Giessen' and 'Linda Guy'.⁴ There are more than 200 individuals of Aromi's cultivars in the Aromi Legacy Garden, and many more in the adjoining Millie McConnell Rhododendron Garden.

In 2008, James Thornton made a plea to the members of the Azalea Society of America asking those who were breeding azaleas or knew of those who were or did in the past, to contact the society, so that way their work could be known and recorded.⁵ I was very heartened to hear this echoed at the 2017 ASA conference in Covington, LA.

The society is taking further steps by starting the Legacy Project. (See the ASA website for more information: <https://www.azaleas.org/legacy-project/>). Rick Bauer and Charlie Andrews were adamant about making sure the collection at the Mobile Botanical Gardens was included. Sherrie Randall at Stephen F. Austin State University Gardens in Texas is our Legacy Lead. With van der Giessen's help, we have been working to share cuttings and pictures to make sure the overall collection of Aromi's work is conserved. Thornton mentioned in his article the work done by Dr. Aromi and Maarten van der Giessen to make sure Aromi's life's work continued on. This work now lives on in perpetuity for the

public to enjoy at the Mobile Botanical Gardens.

Now that we finally knew what we had, the next step was to keep the plants healthy and make sure they were being displayed in a pleasing manner. The summer was spent planning an overhaul in the garden, under the watchful eye of Maarten van der Giessen and Linda Guy: studying the bones, observing how the garden flows for visitors, and identifying where azaleas would be replanted. This past fall has been a mad scramble of staff and volunteers moving, planting, and replanting azaleas, and adding other shrubs and herbaceous perennials in the mix. There is always more to be done!

Deciduous azaleas are grouped in triads or stand as specimens throughout the Legacy Garden. Many of the single specimens are one-of-a-kind or unnamed hybrids. The paths sweep down the hillside and make it seem like an amphitheater full of azaleas. Looking down into the garden you can hardly see the forest for all the azaleas, their plump buds full of promise for the Spring.

Some of our deciduous favorites are:

- ▶ ‘Dr. John Giordano’- Red flowers in deciduous azaleas are really exciting. *Rhododendron flammeum* is a special species, and this cultivar named for the infamous Dr. Giordano shows it off in the undertones of the curved petals. The longer you look at the flower the more dimensions you see. It is a stand-out from a long distance.
- ▶ ‘Glory Be’- This is what Dr. Giordano exclaimed when he saw this growing in the woods at John Allen Smith’s place.
- ▶ ‘Mauvilla Gold’- Speaking of standouts, this deciduous azalea combines the best of pink, orange, and yellow. It is a strong bloomer with a very unique color combination in the truss.
- ▶ ‘Appalachian Gold’- While the strong golden yellow of the flower is outstanding, the comparatively robust foliage of this cultivar makes it easily recognizable even out of flower. The dark green leaves have a two-toned look and provide good texture, compared to other cultivars.
- ▶ ‘Fantastique’- An incredible yellow for sure! When Tom Johnson of Magnolia Gardens brought their French interns down to visit van der Giessen, one of them exclaimed this when she saw this cultivar. From then on it was ‘fantastique’!

The evergreen section of the Aromi Legacy Garden features several rare evergreen cultivars. ‘Pride of Prichard’, a Southern Indica Hybrid made by a local woman (Prichard is a town near Mobile), was used by Dr. Aromi to make some of his favorite evergreen azaleas, like ‘Red Ribbons’ and ‘Pink Petticoat’. There are also a couple of unnamed *Rhododendron oldhamii* Aromi crosses that bloom just as long, or longer, than the species.

Some of our evergreen favorites are:

- ▶ ‘Michaele Lux’- Large, frilled petals on a compact, dense plant. Even out of flower you can tell who this is.

- ▶ ‘Amelia Rose’- This is one of the most rose-like azaleas you can get, and it is a strong, prolific bloomer when in season. The shrub is covered in mauve-magenta double rose flowers that really make a statement in the garden. I really fell in love with azaleas when I saw this cultivar.

After listening to all the stories, I have come to understand that I am joining this project incredibly late. I read Dr. Aromi’s article in *The Azalean* from 1999⁶ and was saddened to realize many of the people who were involved in helping continue Aromi’s legacy passed long before I was even out of high school. They now exist only in the stories told by others and the rainbow of azaleas that grow in our gardens. The fragilities of the human effort and memory are humbling, and make the work done by plant recorders and curators in botanical gardens that much more important. I am honored to have been able to be a part of the project at all.

Dr. Eugene Aromi and his wife wrote into the Winter 2003 edition of *The Azalean* to thank van der Giessen and Frank Bryan for their efforts compiling a list of his hybrids.⁷ He said: “It’s been a mountain of labor, but also a mountain of joy.” It was just the next summer that Dr. Aromi would pass away. Even in the face of all the impending work, I dream of the day when I can walk down through the gardens, drawn by the sweet scent of hundreds of Aromi’s azaleas, and come face to face with the glorious, glowing choir of Spring’s majesty.

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Author’s Notes

I am excited to mention that the Mobile Botanical Gardens continues to honor Dr. John Giordano through the deciduous azalea named for him and Dr. John Allen Smith with the Japanese Maple Garden named after him.

I would also like to thank Maarten van der Giessen and the Horticulture Advisory Committee at the Mobile Botanical Gardens for their guidance and support as this project grows and develops.



Photo Amanda Wilkins

▲ *Rhododendron* 'Clear Creek'

▼ *R.* 'Pink Carousel'



Photo Amanda Wilkins

▼ *R.* 'Radiant Red'



Photo Amanda Wilkins



Photo Amanda Wilkins

▲ *R.* 'Mauvilla Gold'

▼ *R.* 'Queen's Rose'



Photo Amanda Wilkins

▼ Maarten van der Giessen and Aromi's Azaleas



Photo Amanda Wilkins

Amanda Wilkins is the Curator of Plant Collections at the Mobile Botanical Gardens in Mobile, AL. She received her bachelor's degree in horticultural science from NC State University, and her master's degree in the Biodiversity and Taxonomy of Plants from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and the University of Edinburgh. She has worked in numerous botanical gardens across the country, from the Polly Hill Arboretum to the National Topical Botanical Garden but has especially enjoyed the camellias and azaleas of the Gulf Coast.

Continued from Page 10

I had never seen the mountain laurel so prolific in their bloom, especially on the power line back downhill. In several spots dark orange red azaleas were growing up through the pink mountain laurel. One particular *arborescens* is very interesting. The smooth stems are burgundy in color, and the flowers which were just beginning in the finger stage were infused with dark burgundy coloring. I was pleased to see a pagoda dogwood on Wine Spring. Where the Appalachian Trail crosses Wayah Road, you can park and walk up along the trail around the back side of Wine Spring Bald. This walk gives the impression that the predominant understory shrub in this area is *calendulaceum*.

In addition to azaleas, you can find *Aruncus dioicus* (goats beard), withered viburnum, *Aquilegia canadensis* (columbine), and *Heracleum lanatum* (cow parsnip) among many other interesting plants. On one stretch of road was a solid mass of Bowman's root for over 40 yards, making quite a sight.

Blood Mountain

In Georgia a section of the Appalachian Trail crosses Blood Mountain and goes through Slaughter Gap. You can hike the trail from the Wolf Pen Gap Road (Slaughter Mountain side) or the US Hwy 129 side. George McLellan likes to call the trail from Slaughter Gap to Blood Mountain the Charles Manson Trail. From US 129 we went up the Byron Reece Trail to the AT and took the AT to Blood Mountain, continuing about one mile northwest of the mountain toward Slaughter Gap. At first along the Reece Trail, you see *R. calendulaceum* but soon that changes to *R. cumberlandense*. At higher elevations are *R. arborescens* and *cumberlandense-arborescens* hybrids. Based on plants found at nearby Vogel State Park, Walter P. Lemmon in 1942 called these hybrids a new species, *Azalea furbishii* Lemmon & McKay. David Leach conclusively demonstrated that these plants were in fact hybrids by growing seedlings from *furbishii* plants and by his own man-made crosses with *cumberlandense* and *arborescens*. [Photo 17]



Photo Charles Andrews

▲ Photo 12—Hooper Bald *R. calendulaceum*.



Photo Ralf Bauer

▲ Photo 13—*R. arborescens* on Wine Spring Bald.

▼ Photo 14—Dale Berrong and Karel Bernardy inspect fire aftermath at Wayah Bald June 16, 2017.



Photo Joe Nicholson

Mt. Cheaha

The highest point in Alabama is Mt. Cheaha. It is below Interstate I-20 and is not the southernmost but one of the southernmost locations for *R. cumberlandense*. Situated in the Talladega Mountains, Cheaha is in the southern end of the Appalachians, not part of the Cumberland Plateau. When planning my first trip in 2011, I expected to see a few plants of this mostly high elevation species. To my surprise, the mountain has hundreds and hundreds of spectacular plants. The ground is highly rocky, with small as well as boulder-size rocks. Azaleas grow like weeds among a thick groundcover of both *Vaccinium* (blueberries) and *Gaylussacia* (huckleberries). Wand flower is also prominent. Mountain laurel scatters the hillsides. [Photo 18]

In February 2014, a strong ice and wind storm hit the mountain. On our trip the following May, we found many downed trees. The ice and wind ripped off large tops and limbs, some a foot or more in diameter, and littered the ground. Walking around and over these obstacles was difficult. The storm significantly opened the canopy and the understory is now much brighter. This has improved the azalea bloom.

Joining *cumberlandense*, the primary azalea species found on the mountain are *R. arborescens* and what we now think is *R. canescens* (Piedmont azalea). You can find a few beautiful *cumberlandense* hybrids as well. For several years we thought the earlier blooming pinks were *R. periclymenoides* (pinxterbloom azalea) but that does not appear to be the case. We are planning a trip to see these early bloomers in flower. [Photo 19]

In another little draw down the mountain, with a small spring branch flowing, *R. arborescens* grows next to the water and large quantities of *R. minus* filled the hillside. Along that small branch are Catawba rhododendron, pagoda dogwood, and *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum* (cinnamon fern) over 6-feet tall. The Catawba rhododendron is mostly a high elevation species. We wonder if these plants are indigenous to Cheaha.

To see the Cumberland azalea in bloom at Cheaha, the end of May is usually best. The Piedmont rhododendron, Catawba rhododendron, and mountain laurel are also in bloom at this time. The sweet azalea peaks several weeks later. Cheaha is an excellent location to see the large quantities of the Cumberland azalea. We like to go every year.

Come Join Us

We are fortunate to have a treasure such as the Southern Appalachians. If you are interested in field trips to any of these places, contact Don Hyatt don@donaldhyatt.com or Charlie Andrews candrews@mindspring.com.

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Photo Charles Andrews

▲ Photo 15—A double-flowered *R. calendulaceum* on Wayah Bald.

▼ Photo 16—A pink-infused *R. calendulaceum* at Wine Spring Bald.



Photo Charles Andrews

▼ Photo 17—Blood Mountain *R. x furbishii*.



Photo Charles Andrews



Photo Charles Andrews

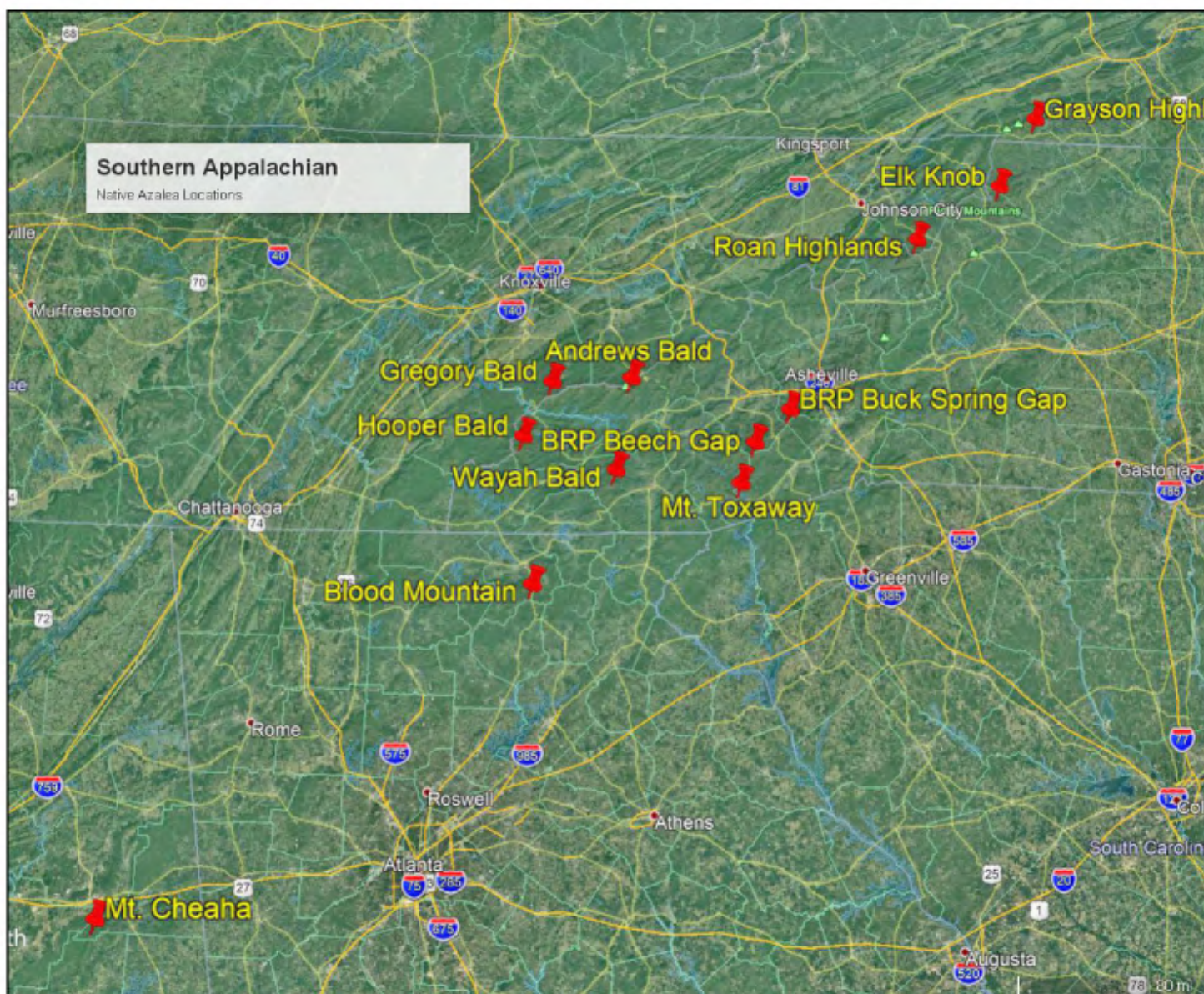
▲ Photo 18—Mt. Cheaha *R. cumberlandense* star form.



Photo Charles Andrews

▲ Photo 19—A Mt. Cheaha hybrid.

▼ Tour locations visited from NE to SW.



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Portions of this article are based on field reports by Charles Andrews published in *Azalea Blooms*, the newsletter of the Azalea Chapter ARS.

[Note: In Table 2, MP is the abbreviation for milepost number, Ed.]

Charles Andrews of Cumming, Georgia, is vice president of the ASA and a member of the Vaseyi Chapter. He is a plant lover in general, but his heart is with azaleas. He enjoys writing and speaking on azalea topics, has contributed to *The Azalean*, and serves on the journal's Editorial Advisory Board. He also serves as president of the Azalea Chapter of the ARS. He has been studying American deciduous azaleas for 35 years. He believes these plants deserve more scientific study and horticultural emphasis. Charles is working to make accurate information on the history, identification, distribution, and culture of native azaleas more available.



▲ Dr. Eugene Aromi checking one of his hybrids against color chips. Photo Mike Kittrell, from the April 4, 1997, Mobile Press Register, used by permission. (See related article p. 15-17)

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Book Review

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Azaleas by Shen Yin-chun. Published by China Forestry Press, Beijing (2016) in Hardcover. ISBN-10: 7503881402, ISBN-12: 978-7503881404. Book dimensions and weight: 12.2 x 9.4 x 1.7 inches and 7 pounds, 570 pages, generously illustrated. At the time of this review, the cost of the book is stated as \$360 US, but its availability is in question as it is reported by Amazon to be “Currently unavailable.” AbeBook.



▲ Y.C. Shen, from *Azaleas* dust cover.

com, however, shows that they have five copies available at \$511.67. My theory is that AbeBook’s price is incorrectly shown in dollars since the dustcover of the book indicates that the price of the book is 520 Chinese Yuan. The current (2-28-18) exchange rate is 6.33 Chinese Yuan to \$1.00 US.

Y. C. Shen’s *Azaleas* reflects an investment of many years and Herculean effort. Written primarily in Chinese characters, it is not intended for western readers. However, larger, heavier, and more colorful than Galle’s book by the same name, the forward by Robert Edward (Buddy) Lee appears in English and provides insight into Shen’s life and credentials. The acknowledgments page, also in English, reveals the impressive list of world class azalea and rhododendron experts, representing five continents and 19 countries, who participated in the book’s development. Despite my inability to read Chinese characters, the beauty of the book for my purposes is in the vivid photographs (as many as 12 images per page) and the azalea cultivar index beginning on page 565, which is also in English. The scope of the book includes Asian, European, and American azalea developments.

Born in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, China in 1934, Y.C. came by his love of horticulture through his late father, Shen Juan-ru, who was a well known and respected horticultural authority on numerous plants including orchids, azaleas, and “pot culture” (bonsai and penjing). In the 1920s, Shen’s father was involved in hybridizing azaleas and was one of the first people to import Japanese and Belgian Indian hybrids into China. Y.C.’s interest in plants began at a very early age. In an Amazon editorial review of his new book, Y.C. tells how, in the late 1940s after school, he would regularly join his father in their back yard to study plants.

While azaleas were one of the famous traditional decorative flowers in China as far back as the Tang dynasty (618-907), Chairman Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the sociopolitical movement in China from 1966



▲ Cover image from *Azaleas* dust cover.

to 1976, called for the destruction of the “Four Olds”: old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. During this period, traditional education and scholarship were viewed as contrary to true Communist ideology; and flowers were deemed “capitalist class playthings” (Y.C. Shen, personal communication, undated letter). It is difficult to imagine how the Shen family managed under what must have been the most difficult of circumstances. Somehow, they succeeded in salvaging some of their books and notes from the book burnings that destroyed so much of China’s heritage.

Y. C.’s publication record is remarkable. He published articles on bonsai and various flowers in Chinese magazines and newspapers and a number of books: *Cultivation: Arts in Miniature Pots* (1981), *Orchids* (1984), *Azaleas* (1985, a more modest softcover not to be confused with the book being reviewed here), and *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the World Famous Azaleas* (2004) which I suspect was a precursor to his current book. Immigrating to the US in 1984, he calls South San Francisco his home. He has continued his study of plants, and he has published several articles on camellias and a book entitled *Camellias* (2009).

Y. C. Shen’s latest book on azaleas can indeed be judged by its beautiful cover.

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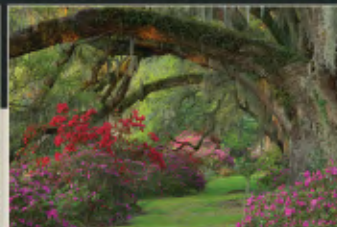
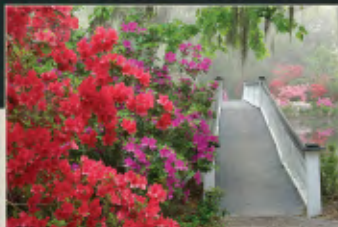
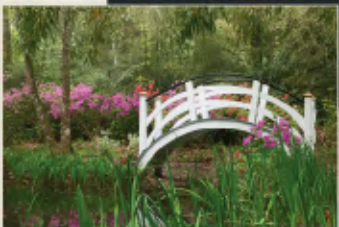
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