

ARS 2018 Convention Report—Bremen, Germany

By Richard Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia

This year, from May 20-26, the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) held their annual convention in conjunction with the Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft (DRG—the German equivalent of the ARS) in Bremen, Germany. Those who attended the convention also had the opportunity to extend their trip with a series of pre-tours in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, and/or a post tour to Finland. There were 176 attendees from 18 countries. Twenty-eight Azalea Society of America (ASA) members, who also have membership in the ARS, took advantage of this wonderful opportunity. The convention was held at the Swissotel, Bremen, a modern hotel just steps from the old city center of Bremen.

Sunday, May 20

Most convention attendees arrived on Sunday, May 20. The ARS held their board meeting on Monday so many of us had free time on Sunday and Monday to explore the city of Bremen. It was also a holiday weekend, so the town was full of tourists and local residents. To top it off, we had beautiful sunny weather. This weather was a continuation of an unseasonably warm spring. We were advised that it might be a good idea to visit the Bremen Rhododendron Park in advance of our planned Thursday visit, since blooms of a number of the varieties had already peaked.

Those of you who are familiar with the Grimm brothers' stories, have probably read "The Town Musicians of

▼ Photo 1—Statue of the Grimm Brothers' "Town Musicians of Bremen."



Photo Susan Bauer

Bremen." The town has memorialized the main characters in the story with a statue outside of the city hall (Rathaus). The Rathaus and the Roland statue in front of it are both recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. [Photos 1, 2, 3.]

Monday, May 21

The official registration occurred Monday evening, followed by a reception and then an official welcome from the president of the DRG, Dr. Andre-Michael Schultz, ARS President Ann Mangels, and ARS Vice President Ken Webb. The evening was capped off by a delicious dinner of German specialties.

Tuesday, May 22

Tuesday was a day of presentations, all with the theme of the convention: "From the wild...into our life." Tuesday's focus was on "Finding Rhododendrons," with presentations focused on the origins of rhododendrons in the wild. Several renowned individuals in the horticulture field gave us interesting presentations dealing with the different varieties of azaleas across the planet and stories about the discovery of these varieties. A large number of the species came from Asia and it seemed that all of the trips to collect the specimens involved roughing it and leeches. We can be thankful to those who have made these arduous trips and returned with the plant material and some beautiful photos.

That evening we went to the Rathaus where we had a reception and were welcomed by Senator Dr. Joachim Lohse, Senator for the Environment, Construction, and Transport of

▼ Photo 2—The Bremen Rathaus (City Hall) is the seat of the President of the Senate and Mayor of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen and is one of the most important examples of Brick Gothic architecture in Europe. Since 1973, it has been protected by the monument protection act and in 2004 was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with the Bremen Roland statue.



Photo Rick Bauer



▲ Photo 3—The Bremen Roland statue was erected in 1404 and symbolizes trading rights and freedom.

the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. The welcome was in a beautiful hall in the oldest portion of the Rathaus which dated back to the 1400s. After the welcome, we had a wonderful buffet dinner in the Ratskeller Restaurant in the basement of city hall.

Wednesday, May 23

Wednesday we hit the road heading towards Ammerland, the rhododendron growing area of Germany. We visited the Van der Berk Nursery first. This nursery consists of 124 acres of drained moorland. They raise their plants in the ground rather than in pots and the plants they sell are mainly to landscapers, so they are much larger than those found in garden shops. Their collection of rhododendron and azaleas includes over 160 species. [Photos 4, 5.]

To give us a better view of the nursery, they attempted to load a number of us on a device to lift us up into the air for a better view of the rhododendron fields; however, once we were up in the air, the device malfunctioned. (I guess we exceeded the maximum weight limit.) They eventually brought another piece of equipment over to rescue the 10 of us enjoying the view. [Photos 6, 7.]

After our visit, we traveled to Bad Zwischenau where we enjoyed a typical German lunch at the lakeside Fährkroog Dreibergen Restaurant. As was typical of the area, the restaurant grounds had an ample supply of mature



▲ Photo 4—“Golden Eagle” azalea in Van der Berk Nursery.

▼ Photo 5—“Schnee Gold” (“Snow Gold”) azalea.



rhododendrons.

Our next stop was the Park der Gärten (Park of the Gardens) in Bad Zwischenahn.¹ The park was the site of the Lower Saxonian Horticulture Show in 2002. After the show, the decision was made to retain the 35-acre property as a park with a series of over 40 theme gardens. They have an extensive area dedicated to rhododendrons and azaleas that includes a number of hybrids derived from the *Luteum* azalea, a native of southeastern Europe and southwest Asia, frequently referred to as the yellow or honeysuckle azalea. [Photos 8-11.] They also have Mollis hybrids which were developed in Belgium and Holland. [Photo 12.]

We ended the day at the zu Jeddelloh home and nursery.²



Photo Rick Bauer

The zu Jeddelloh family has been cultivating the land in the town of Jeddelloh for over 15 generations. The zu Jeddelloh Pflanzen Nursery was founded over 80 years ago by Jan-Dieter zu Jeddelloh with conifers the primary focus. Their beautiful home garden, with five themed gardens, also serves as a display garden for their nursery, which mainly serves garden shops.

The visit was split into two parts, the display garden and the nursery. Our group was also split in two for the tours. The zu Jeddellohs had set up a tent where we were served refreshments by Sabine zu Jeddelloh (who also serves as Vice President of the DRG) before we headed out on a tour of the five-acre garden.

After the garden tour we boarded a train (on wheels) to take us for a tour of the nursery operation. [Photo 13.] The nursery specializes in container plants. For those members who have attended the conventions in Louisiana, it is very reminiscent of Bracy Nursery and their orderly line-up of plants.

We returned to the hotel and our day ended with a buffet in the hotel restaurant.

Thursday, May 24

Thursday started with a guided tour of the city of Bremen. While most of us had been to the city earlier in the week, the knowledgeable guides helped us in understanding the city's history and importance. Its major historical importance was as one of the members of the Hanseatic League.

At the end of the tour, we boarded busses to take us to the Bremen Rhododendron Garden. As its name implies, its major focus is rhododendrons (and azaleas), though other companion plants are also on display. While the season was a little early this year due to unseasonably warm weather, there were plenty of plants at peak bloom. The garden is well laid out and the plants very well marked. The day was broken up into three tour periods where you could take three of the five tours offered. [Photo 14.]

The day ended with another sumptuous meal in the Botanika visitor information center. Botanika includes a greenhouse which contains non-hardy rhododendron from

▲ Photo 6— View of the rhododendron fields at Van der Berk Nursery.



Photo Susan Bauer

▲ Photo 7— Attendees stuck in the air while enjoying the view of the Van der Berk Nursery.

▼ Photo 8— Luteum hybrid, "Alba Grandiflora."



Photo Rick Bauer



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 9— Luteum hybrid, "Ignaea Nova."



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 10— Luteum hybrid, "Nancy Waterer."

▼ Photo 11— Luteum hybrid, "Richardissimo."

▼ Photo 12— Mollis hybrid, "Suzanne Loef."



Photo Rick Bauer

▼ Photo 13—"Train" to take us through the zu Jeddloh Nursery.



Photo Rick Bauer

▼ Photo 14—Azalea and Rhododendron Garden in the Park der Gärten (Park of Gardens) in Bremen.



Photo Rick Bauer



Photo Rick Bauer

different parts of the world including Borneo/New Guinea and the Himalayas. [Photo 15.] All of the convention attendees also received a picture book in English about the Bremen Rhododendron Garden.

Friday, May 25

Friday was another day of presentations, focused on the second portion of the theme: “Into our life: Using Rhododendrons.” The talks highlighted the use of rhododendrons in gardens and in medicine. That evening was our gala banquet. Again, we were treated to delicious food and drink. The ARS also held their award ceremony. Four ARS Gold Medal awards were given out, including one for Dave Banks. The evening was capped off by a talk on “The Crazy World of Rhododendrons” given by Don Hyatt. It was informative and entertaining, as Don’s presentations normally are. It also introduced “Bubba” the deer (who destroyed his deer fence), to a whole new international audience.

Saturday, May 26

On Saturday we headed up to the Ammerland region again, stopping at the Schroeder Nursery in Wiefelstede first.³ Our visit started with a welcome by the Managing Director, Timo Schroeder, who explained that the nursery’s focus was producing plants with a strong root structure. To do this, they take plants with the characteristics desired by the customer and graft them to hardy root stock, using *Rhododendron* “Cunningham’s White.” This enables them to provide hardy plants...even in varieties which normally do not have a robust root system. He also gave us a quick demonstration of their grafting process.

After the demonstration, we all loaded onto tractor-pulled trailers for a hayride through the nursery operation. [Photo 16.] The nursery operation covers more than 17 acres and produces 1.5 million plants each year by grafting the desired varieties onto the hardy root stock. These grafted cuttings are grown in a series of greenhouses before they are potted and moved to container fields. [Photo 17.]

After a delicious lunch break of German sausage, pork steak, and potatoes, served at the nursery, we headed off to the Bruns Nursery in Gristede.⁴ This nursery has been run by the Bruns family for 140 years. It has a staff of 300 and cultivates more than 4000 species on over 1200 acres. Fortunately, we started by having a guided tour through their widespread nursery operation while remaining on our busses. The Bruns Nursery focuses on trees, topiaries, and shrubs such as rhododendrons and azaleas.

After our overview, we got onto trailers again for a hayride through the high end of their inventory. [Photo 18.] We saw a large number of very mature, high quality plants. [Photo 19.] These plants, used by landscapers for well-heeled customers, could sell for € 20,000 (\$24,000) or more.

We then proceeded through their 62-acre rhododendron park with over 1000 cultivars and species of rhododendrons and azaleas (the word “hobby” was used to describe the garden), which is open to the public. This was an extremely impressive garden by any standard. Some of their specimens have grown to over 25 feet tall. This ride ended at the park



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 15— Karel Bernady setting up a shot of a Himalyan rhododendron.

▼ Photo 16— Fred and Sandra Anderson (Vaseyi Chapter) begin their hayride through the Schroeder Nursery.



Photo Rick Bauer

▼ Photo 17—Dr. Hartwig Schepker, convention chair, providing background on the Schroeder Nursery.



Photo Rick Bauer



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 18— Dave and Leslie Nanney (Northern Virginia Chapter) ready for their hayride through the Bruns Nursery.

▼ Photo 19— High end topiary in the Bruns Nursery



Photo Rick Bauer

▼ Photo 21— Oompah Band at Bruns pavilion.



Photo Rick Bauer



Photo Rick Bauer

▲ Photo 20— Dinner at the Bruns Nursery pavilion.

pavilion, built in 2009, where they had set up a sumptuous banquet for us with more German food, beer, and wine. [Photo 20.] To top it off, they had a German Oom-pah band. [Photo 21.] It was a wonderful evening with beautiful weather, good friends, and good food.

The visit to Bruns Nursery was the last event in a memorable convention. The convention organizers, led by Dr. Hartwig Schepker, Director of the Bremen Rhododendron Park, his staff, volunteers from the various branches of the ARS and the nursery and garden owners could not have done a better job of planning and hosting this convention.⁵ They certainly set the bar extremely high and excelled in their Gastfreundschaft (hospitality). It truly was a once in a lifetime experience.

References

- 1 www.park-der-gaerten.de
- 2 www.jeddeloh.de
- 3 www.schroeder-rhododendron.de
- 4 www.bruns.de
- 5 Schepker, Dr. Hartwig. "Gardens and Lectures of the 2018 ARS Convention in Northwestern Germany." *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society*. Fall 2017. 71(4):199-207.

Rick Bauer is President of the ASA. He and his wife Susan have been members of Northern Virginia Chapter since 2002. Rick served as the chapter vice president of the Northern Virginia Chapter for four years and chapter president for five years. He also served as an ASA director for two years. He was co-chair of the 2016 ASA/ARS Convention in Williamsburg, VA. He also was a member of the team which digitized *The Azalean*. Rick was part of the team which started the 'Legacy Project' within the Northern Virginia Chapter. This project is designed to help ensure the continuation of knowledge of azalea hybridizers and their plants and maintain true specimens of their cultivars. He retired from the US Army in 1994 after 20 years of active service and retired in 2011 from Science Applications International Corporation, where he helped develop software applications for Army customers.