"Niagara Rhodo"

Newsletter of the Niagara Chapter,
Rhododendron Society of Canada,
District 12, American Rhododendron Society

November 2019

Our Purpose: We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage and support interest in the genus *rhododendron.* Our goal is to encourage gardeners to grow and appreciate these plants, by providing educational meetings with knowledgeable speakers, access to topical publications and hosting joint meetings with other chapters'

Content

Word of Caution

By becoming a successful grower, the reader will be exposed to a contagion for which there is no cure. Once infected with an appreciation of rhododendrons and azaleas most gardeners spend a lifetime collecting these most beautiful of all plants.

H. Edward Reiley

Intrepid travellers through Canada's
North-West Passage

Tom and Sharon Laviolette during a respite from their ship in the North-West passage

History

The idea of a northwest sea route from Europe to East Asia dates back at least to the second century A.D. and the world maps of Greco-Roman geographer Ptolemy. Europeans developed interest in the sea passage after the Ottoman Empire monopolized major overland trade routes between Europe and Asia in the fifteenth century.

The North-West Passage is a sea route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean through a group of sparsely populated Canadian islands known as the Arctic Archipelago. European explorers first began to search for the North-West Passage in the fifteenth century, but treacherous conditions and sea ice cover made the route impassible, foiling many expeditions. Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen became the first to successfully navigate the **Northwest Passage** in 1906. One hundred and 14 years later, climate change has reduced the Arctic ice cover, opening the passage to marine shipping.

In summer 2007, the route was entirely ice-free for the first time in recorded history. Records kept by Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans show that earliest passage of the season happened in 2008, when the Canadian Coast Guard ship Louis L. St-Laurent left St. John's in Newfoundland on July 5 and arrived in the Beaufort Sea off Point Barrow, Alaska, on July 30.

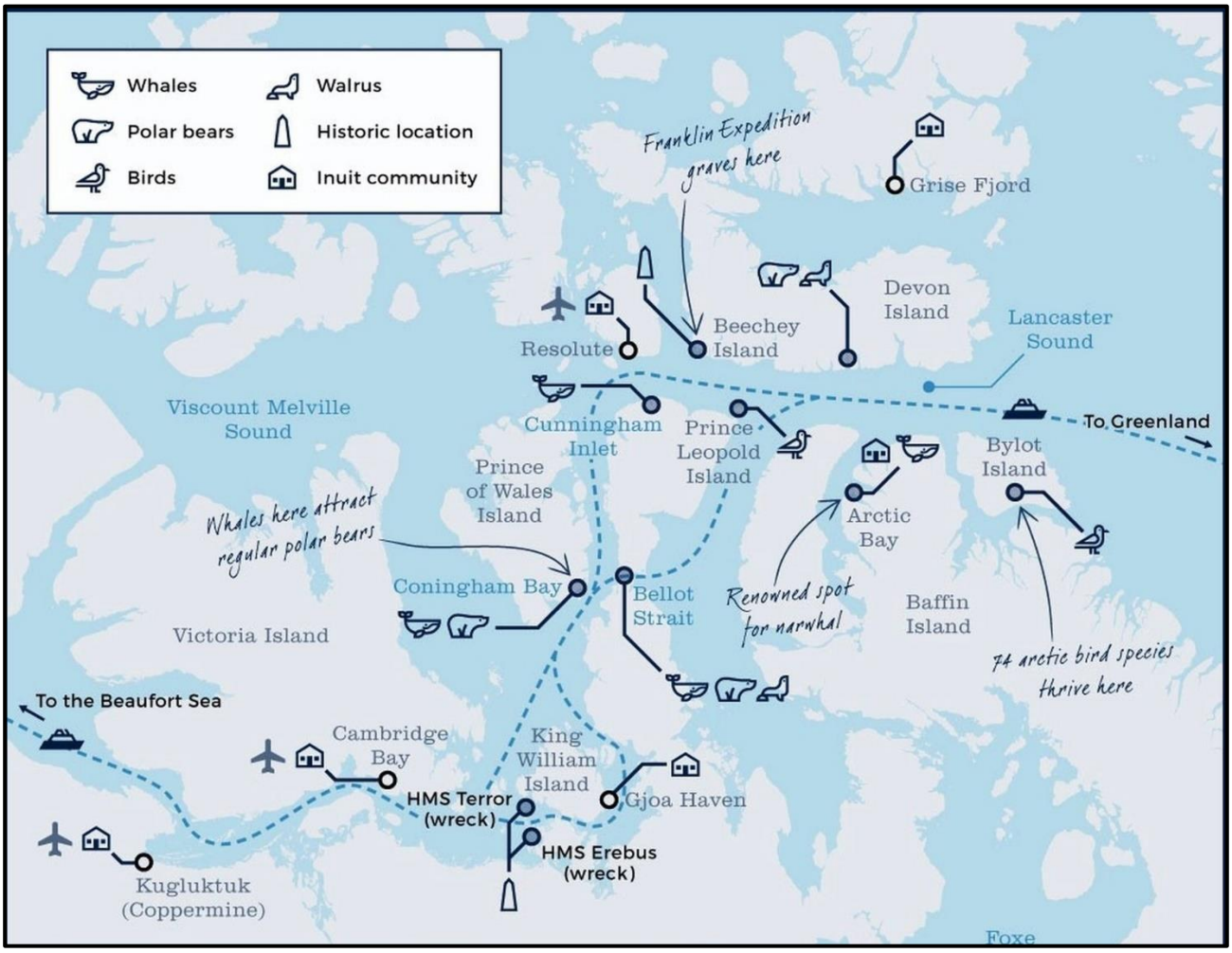
In 2016 the **Crystal Serenity**, a luxury cruise ship, made headlines when it became the first tourist cruise ship to navigate the Northwest Passage.

In 2017, The Finnish icebreaker, MSV Nordica, after 24 days traveling 10,000 kms from Alaska to Greenland arrived at Nuuk, Greenland on July 29, traversed the North-West passage setting a new record, apparently by one day, as the first to have sailed through the once forbidding route earlier than ever before. Due to climate change, the Arctic sea ice has been melting sooner every year, opening the route earlier and for a longer time each summer.

In the past 12 months, Tom and Sharon Laviolette have travelled from Yellowknife to Pond Inlet, Gris Fiord, Greenland, Labrador, Newfoundland which includes large areas of the Canadian Arctic. (The image below points to each of these locations.)

People, Weather, Plants and Animals in the Northwest Passage

Tom and Sharon Laviolette are keen observers of the social and ecological environment. Tom will provide important insights from his observations that will likely lead to a broader understanding of elements not dealt with in radio and television reports.



The story of the North-West passage is more than reporting on the Franklin, Amundsen, and Frobisher's expeditions or about Jacques Cartier's failure to reach the far north. It is about the residents who call this region home; about the polar bears, beluga whales, walrus, musk ox, arctic hare, arctic fox and narwhal, including a large number of bird species, who live in this freezer. It is also about the robust plant species that sparsely inhabit this region. In the far north, clumps of moss, lichen, and cold-hardy vascular plants such as sedge (Carex spp.) and cottongrass (Eriophorum spp.) are the dominant vegetation. Arctic willow (Salix arctica) and Dryas spp. occur infrequently, and mixed, low-growing herbs like purple saxifrage (Saxifraga oppositifolia), Kobresia spp. and arctic poppy (Papaver radicadum) can sometimes be found at lower elevations. In the southeast, the dominant vegetation is generally very similar, but, because of some milder climate, wet areas can develop up to about 60 percent of wood rush (Luzula spp.), wire rush (Juncus spp.), and saxifrage (Saxifraga spp.), with a nearly continuous cover of mosses.

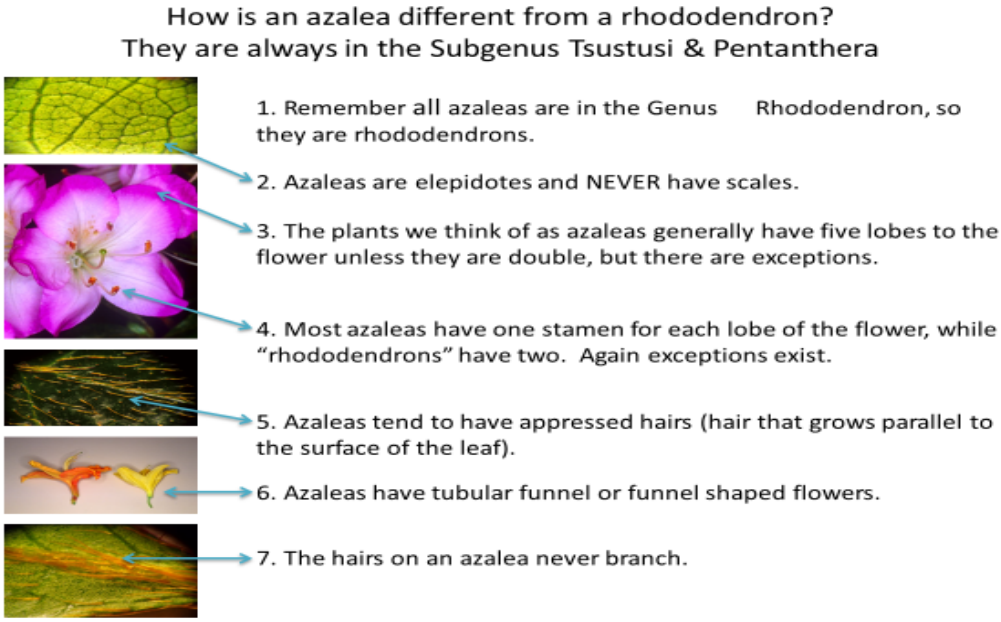
This is but a brief introduction to life in the region of the North-West Passage. Tom will provide a detailed account of his and Sharon's first hand experiences in this environment.

The Genus Rhododendron:
It's Diversity

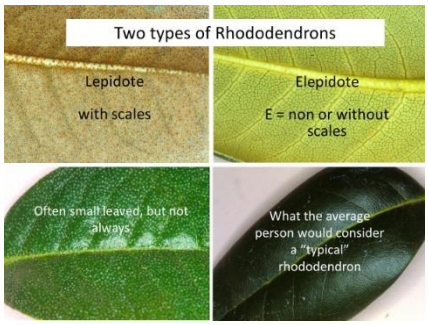
Harold Greer. October 6, 2019

On October 6, 2019, Harold Greer delivered a master class about the species and cultivars of the genus, rhododendron. He started by identifying the 5 major groups included in the genus and then proceeded to describe the fundamental ways in which members of the subgroups differ. We briefly and incompletely summarize Harold Greer's presentation.

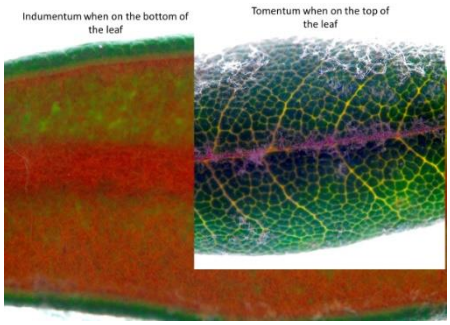
Then he answered the question, "how do azaleas differ from rhododendrons"? A clear chart contained his answer.



He continued to describe plants that are resident in each group by showing brilliant photographs of species and cultivars relevant to each of the groups. Shown here are some examples he provided from each of the five groups.



Harold also described the diversity in leaf textures, size at maturity and bark form. The fuzz that appears on the top surface of leaves of some elepidote rhododendrons is not mildew or other fungus. It is a natural occurring texture which appears on certain species. It is known as Tomentum. The fuzz that appears on the underside of rhododendrons is known as Indumentum.



Seeds Pods: R.japonicum R. columbianum

Tree Bark of

R.imberbe

R.griffithianum

R.barbatum