Acknowledgements
To this Online Edition

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Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

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All professional plant hunters have had to discover within themselves a standard of dedication to their work far beyond that required for most other vocations. All the great plant hunters of the past proved to be people capable of getting themselves out of the most desperate situations by sheer fortitude and being able to keep calm when to panic might have meant near certain death.

These explorers were usually selected by the then leaders in the botanical or horticultural world from among their own staff and they often had great foresight in their choices. Who could have picked more successful collectors than Robert Fortune, George Forrest and Ernest Wilson? Others, like Joseph Rock, achieved what they did by sheer determination, arrogance and daring. A few like Reginald Farrer and George Sherriff were sufficiently well off to pay their own way and hunted plants purely for their own amusement. Perhaps the most dedicated of all was Frank Kingdon-Ward who spent his whole life exploring, and then gave us the pleasure of being able to read of his travels in his books and articles. The chief reason he had to carry on into old age was because he was paid so little for his efforts and could not afford to retire.

Often two or more years were spent on one trip out East, usually with a break or two in some town in the foothills or on the coast. With only ships to travel out to the East (or elsewhere), river boats to take them part of the way into the interior and rough tracks onwards, travelling was slow, often very uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous.

Nowadays there are no full-time professional plant hunters, though a few still pay their way by selling what they collect (often in the form of shares of seed). Visits to good plant areas are short, the plant hunters are usually in and out within a
month; very often little serious trekking is done and only hotels and guest houses used for accommodation.

The methods of collecting have, of course, also changed and the results have not necessarily changed for the better. Some of the great collectors of the past will be described here and their methods compared with plant hunting today. As we rarely have to suffer the same degrees of hardship, solitude or danger, it is not easy to select those of today who would have equalled the great achievers of the past. The great majority of rhododendrons (other than Vireyas) are found wild on the mainland of South-East Asia: therefore I will only cover this area.

Robert Fortune
Robert Fortune was a gardener by trade and had a thorough apprenticeship. He joined the staff at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE) under the famous William McNab and after only two and a half years was recommended for the post of superintendent of the hot-house department at the Royal Horticultural Society’s garden at Chiswick. He was soon appointed as the Society’s collector in China where he collected over the period from 1843 to 1862. He proved to be a first-rate choice for the job. Not only was he skilled at transporting plants but he was able to recognize a good plant and introduced few poor ones. He was a great correspondent and made copious notes and diaries but sadly, most of these were destroyed by his family on his death.

Very little was known about the plants of China in 1843. Fortune was asked to look out for one particular rhododendron in what is now Guangdong province in south China, but he was also told to search for yellow-flowered camellias, which in the event were not to be introduced into cultivation until over 100 years later. Packets of seed were to be large enough for general distribution wherever possible.

Peace had only just been made with China, so Fortune was unable to travel far away from the treaty ports, especially on his first expedition. Many plants were acquired from local nurserymen who at first locked their gates as they were frightened that he would take their plants without paying. In the end he gained their confidence and was offered every plant in Shanghai! He introduced some evergreen azalea cultivars including R. ‘Amoenum’ (which he named himself) and, subsequently of course, R. fortunei which he found in the mountains where he was able to collect a quantity of seed. He remarked on the wide-spread azaleas in the wild, mostly R. simsii (see figures 15 and 16).

Fortune took live plants with him from Britain to Asia, partly as presents, but partly to gain experience in looking after plants collected in China. Similarly, he took vegetable seeds, for presents and to see how they would travel. He remarked that there were great difficulties in preserving the seeds of trees and shrubs in south
Wardian Case. A miniature greenhouse of wood and glass sealed with pitch. Plants were established for 10 days in soil. Fortune sent his plants home from China in these cases strapped to the deck. After a voyage of four months 215 out of 250 plants survived.

China because of the attacks of maggots and we still have this problem in the present day. All his live plants were sent home in Wardian cases, designed by Mr N B Ward of London. These cases were constructed of wood and glass and made as airtight as was possible by sealing with strips of canvas dipped in boiling tar and pitch. Before the journey, the plants would be established in the cases for 10 to 14 days in 23-26cm (9-10in) of soil and this was often covered with moss. During this time the plants would be watered frequently. A promise had to be obtained from the ship’s captain that the cases would remain on the poop deck for the whole voyage where they would be least frequently washed by sea water in rough weather. It was also important for the cases to be raised 15cm (6in) to allow water used for washing the decks to pass underneath. Water condensed on the glass when the sun shone and then dropped back on the plants in the evening like dew. If the cases were not accompanied by Fortune himself or anyone else expert enough to inspect them regularly, they were kept closed for the entire four months’ voyage to England. If expertise was at hand, they would be opened during the day (not at night), using sliding doors in calm weather to allow a good clean-up. On one voyage, Fortune left China with 250 plants in 18 cases and 215 arrived in good condition. He sometimes took the precaution of splitting a consignment between two ships to spread the risk. On one occasion he took with him two little hand cases containing very special plants, on a partially overland route.

Fortune was obviously very level-headed and could keep calm in the face of danger. On one trip he was twice attacked by pirates. He told the crew to shelter as best they could from the shots from the pirates’ guns and waited until their ship was near enough for his shotgun to be effective. He then let them have it and on both occasions they were beaten off. But for all his virtues, apparently Fortune lacked a sense of humour.

Sir Joseph Hooker

Sir Joseph Hooker started with the great advantage of having an illustrious father
who was also director of Kew. Hooker junior had had the best available training as a taxonomist and geographer and few people to this day have been so well prepared for the job as he was for Sikkim. He fully understood the possible variations to be found within a species, and also the importance of distribution, which some later taxonomists seem to have forgotten. He was also quite a competent artist.

Hooker's first expedition had been to Antarctica so he had some experience of roughing it before setting off in 1848 for his famous travels in Sikkim and district. His friend and helper, B H Hodgson, had studied ethnology and zoology in Nepal for 25 years and had completed a natural history of birds and animals in the region. As a consequence he had a considerable influence on Hooker's travels and studies. Hooker's first collections amounted to 80 porter-loads taken to the foot of the mountains, then for five days by cart and then to Calcutta by river. On his second expedition in 1850, food had to be sent to the party at intervals, because the country's resources were not capable of feeding 40 or 50 men. Compared to nowadays extra porters were needed due to the bulk and weight of the equipment, instruments and clothing. Hooker subsequently spent two months in Calcutta arranging the shipment of his collections and completing manuscripts, maps and surveys.

Missionaries
The first westerners to travel into the rich-
est rhododendron areas of Sichuan and Yunnan were either not interested in plants or else collected very little. The first to collect plants were not professional collectors but were there for other purposes, notably to convert the natives to Christianity.

The most famous of these missionaries were the Frenchmen, Pères Armand David, Jean-Marie Delavay, Paul Farges and Jean Soulié. All collected herbarium specimens, most of which were sent to the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, to Adrien Franchet the only taxonomist to do any serious work on them (see Chapter 3). Many of the specimens disappeared or were left unexamined. Most species were subsequently rediscovered and successfully introduced as seed by such collectors as Wilson, Forrest and Rock. However, these missionaries had one positive advantage over later collectors in that they worked from an established base in China. Whether one approves of missionary work or not, undoubtedly these dedicated men must have suffered loneliness, depression, discomfort and some were tortured and murdered by Tibetan lamas.

Armand David (1826-72) was a trained naturalist and it is for his work on the fauna of China that he is best known. Jean-Marie Delavay was a model collector making excellent herbarium specimens and field notes, most of which he accomplished single-handed. He was reputed to have collected 200,000 specimens. W G Bean saw a large number of rhododendron
seedlings from Delavay’s collecting in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in October 1889 and he brought back a few tiny plants to Kew. According to him, nearly all had perished at an early age from being kept too hot. Paul Farges discovered some fine rhododendrons and other plants in an area not renowned for its richness in rhododendrons. Jean Soulé was especially popular because he was a skilled physician. He had little opportunity to send back seeds and was finally murdered along with one of his assistants.

Augustine Henry
Augustine Henry went to China as a maritime customs official and was stationed at Yichang. He then became a medical officer. He took to collecting plants only out of boredom and trained two natives to help him. Many species he discovered were collected later by Wilson.

Ernest Wilson
My father, E H M Cox, considered Ernest Wilson to be the best of the collectors, but he is not my favourite. He studied botany for which he won a Queen’s Prize Award and then went on to teach the subject. In 1899 at the age of 23 he was picked by the Director of Kew to collect for the famous nursery firm of James Veitch and Sons. He was told by his employer to concentrate on finding *Davidia involucrata* as almost every other worthwhile plant in China had probably already been introduced!

Wilson proved to be an excellent collector. He liked the Chinese, was very diplomatic and always got on well with people. His memory was excellent and he was very knowledgeable on trees and shrubs. Although his books are interesting and informative, it is difficult to follow his actual itineraries. He disliked heroics and was very modest, so little is known about his adventures.

His early days in China were spent in the company of Augustine Henry, from whom he learnt much. He travelled lightly compared with other explorers of his day, but he always used a full-plate camera. His first expedition was so successful that Veitch sent him out again in 1903 to collect *Meconopsis integrifolia*. Alas, not long after he returned from another very successful expedition, Veitch’s Coombe Wood nursery was sold up and a huge clearance sale took place. Thus the plants Wilson collected were not as well distributed as those of Forrest and Kingdon-Ward a few years later.

Wilson was then appointed by Professor Sargent of the Arnold Arboretum, Boston, to carry on collecting until 1919. He eventually settled in the USA to work on his collections with Alfred Rehder, a skilled taxonomist. Sadly, Wilson and his wife suffered untimely deaths in a road accident. Splendid old specimens of Wilson’s original introductions are still growing in the Arnold Arboretum.

Wilson covered an amazing amount of ground in north-west and north Sichuan in areas I have myself driven
through, so I can vouch for the distances involved. Although some new rhododen-
dron species have been discovered in areas covered by Wilson, he did not miss much.

A team of eight helpers assisted Wilson to press and dry his herbarium specimens, prepare and pack his seeds, roots and bulbs for shipment to England and the USA. More than 13,000 seedlings of *Davidia involucrata* germinated which, with one assistant, he potted himself. At the end of his first expedition for the Arnold Arboretum he had collected (by native collectors) 18,237 lily bulbs, something that fills us with horror these days. If only 837 arrived in America in good condition, it was because he tried to save money by not packing every bulb individually in clay as he had done for Veitch. The following year he repeated the exercise, sending 25,000 bulbs. This time each bulb was coated in moist clay which was allowed to dry before being packed in a crate and surrounded by pulverized charcoal. Vulnerable seeds and cuttings were packed in moist sphagnum and wrapped in oiled paper. Wilson also wrapped beech seedlings in sphagnum and packed them in a ventilated trunk. This shipment accompanied him home and arrived in excellent condition.

**George Forrest**

George Forrest was a man who knew what he wanted to do, determination being stamped all over his somewhat grim features and sturdy frame. He was always very much a countryman, fond of shooting and fishing. Several years in Australia, partly looking for gold, toughened him up. Returning to Scotland, he worked for two years handling herbarium specimens which he always did standing up. This taught him the importance of good quality herbarium specimens.

When A K Bulley of the firm of Bees was looking for someone well-qualified to undertake botanical exploration, Forrest was recommended by Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour of the RBGE. One reason for his success was his personality. He always had friendly relations with the Chinese and minority tribesmen. He was genuinely interested in their well-being and made use of the brief time he had spent as an apprentice pharmacist to doctor them and help them in other ways. He took out lymph for inoculating the locals against smallpox at his own expense. Forrest’s great organizing ability was another reason for his success. His excellently trained native collectors helped him to cover more ground and collect quantities of good specimens and seeds. This produced many mule-loads of seed weighing many pounds. Such quantities were unnecessary and resulted in much unsown seed and many unwanted seedlings. I well know how far even a small packet of rhododendron seed can be divided up and still give ample for everyone, even a nurseryman. But conservation was hardly considered in those days. Collecting enormous quantities of rhododendron seed has little or no
Forrest in China with his dog and gun. He never shot for sport, only for the pot.

George Forrest's HQ at Tengyueh (now Tengchong). Seed bags hang from the rafters. The campbed, collapsible chair and bare boards reveal the austere and comfortless conditions in which collectors lived for months on end.
A group of Forrest's trained collectors in the field. Note the dog, guns and plant presses, essential tools of their trade.
impact on long-lived rhododendrons, but stripping hillsides of all available seed of, say, a monocarpic meconopsis with its localized distribution could have dire consequences for the future of that species.

Over 30,000 herbarium specimens were collected by Forrest, the most important contribution to the flora of Yunnan ever likely to be made. He also made fine collections of mammals, birds and insects and studied geological formations and soil character. Nor did he leave his loyal staff to do all the collecting: he himself saw nearly every plant he collected and he took all his own photographs. He was a keen observer with an eye for beauty, also self-disciplined and a man of his word; he always did his best for his sponsors.

In a letter written while resting in Bhamo, Burma, Forrest gave the only clear account of how he organized his collecting. If he wished to collect seed of any plant seen in flower, he would select a good herbarium specimen, noting in his field notes that it was desirable. When returning to collect seed, he would show the flowering specimen to his collectors, giving its location. From the combined flowering and fruiting specimen he would then draw up a full botanical description. His chief collector was evidently so good that he was able to remind Forrest of the
details he had forgotten (see Chapter 3).

**Reginald Farrer**

Reginald Farrer's early interest in plants started in the Ingleborough hills of Yorkshire behind his home. His was a curious, complex, strange and fascinating personality; he was a tireless traveller, great walker and fearless climber. His eye for a good plant was usually sufficient to spot its potential garden value. Though he introduced enough good plants to be classed among the great collectors, he tended to be over-optimistic about his finds succeeding in gardens at home. Farrer was well-read and had a great memory. He had a peculiar power of living within himself and a fertile imagination that stood him in good stead. He adored the work of plant collecting and liked to take all the credit for himself. The names of Purdom and my father who accompanied him on his Gansu and Burma trips respectively were never included in his field notes or seed numbers.

Farrer and my father found it difficult in the monsoon period to stop herbarium specimens from becoming mouldy and had constantly to search for maggots and wood lice. The seeds were dried on racks, but they also sent home some plants. During the autumn they were hard at work from first to last light sorting and labelling seeds and specimens.

**Frank Kingdon-Ward**

Frank Kingdon-Ward has always been my idol as a collector. He accomplished almost everything alone, only occasionally having another European or, latterly, his second wife as a companion. He travelled through more difficult and wetter country than any other collector. He had the temperament to endure solitude and was obsessed with the wilderness. His ambition was to be an explorer and he accepted the career of a plant hunter only because there appeared to be more money in it. He started with little interest or knowledge of plants and this is borne out in his earliest book, *The Land of the Blue Poppy* (1913). Although he received medals for exploration, he did not reach the top rank of geographer-explorers, finding surveying and map-making irksome and being happy in his latter years to hand the job over to others.

Like most collectors, Kingdon-Ward had an excellent eye for a good plant and would go to extraordinary lengths to collect seed of outstanding plants that he had seen in flower. Like Farrer too, he had an unerring memory for the exact position of a plant, even if buried under snow. Examples of his tenacity were in his collecting of *R. cinnabarinum* subsp. *xanthocodon* Concatenans Group growing in impenetrable thickets and finding *R. cephalanthum* Crebrelorum Group after endless searching on cliffs in snow.

Kingdon-Ward had two methods of collecting. The first was to stay in one valley, covering the ground thoroughly and the second was to be constantly on the
move. He used both techniques with great success, but on the whole the former seems to have been more satisfactory. He found many new species in the autumn in the Tsangpo Gorge when he collected ‘blind’, that is, without seeing them in flower.

He did not get on as well with the local people as Wilson and Forrest did, and he had many difficult moments especially with the notorious Mishmis in what is now eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

I had the good fortune to meet Kingdon-Ward briefly at an RHS show in London when my father introduced me to him. I shall always remember this tiny wizened old man who looked so frail that a puff of wind could blow him away.

**Joseph Rock**

Joseph Rock was perhaps the most extraordinary of all plant collectors. From a humble background in Vienna, he escaped from his father to turn up penniless in Hawaii in 1907. He had by then learned several languages and proceeded to investigate the wildlife of Hawaii, becoming the acknowledged expert on the flora. He could be very moody and had peculiar reasoning but nevertheless usually got his way. He was always restless, never making any attachments that could tie him down.

He was sent to China as an agricultural explorer and soon learned to travel in style with two cooks and a butler, using a clean table cloth, silver and napkins and maintaining an Austrian diet. On his return to civilization he would indulge in operas, fancy hotels and haute cuisine. Staying with an elderly friend of mine Rock insisted on being fed on lily bulbs every day, much to his host’s annoyance. It is surprising that he could afford such a life, but apparently his exploring paid handsomely. His scholarship did not and in his old age he had to live off his savings.

Rock organized his collecting largely by using trained native collectors, although not to the extent that Forrest did. He tended to collect many consecutive numbers of one species, with what purpose I am not sure, but presumably to show the variation within certain populations. These collections aggravated gardeners who could not be bothered to grow say, 14 almost consecutive numbers of *R. crinigerum* and the sheer bulk of his collections put growers off. Rock collected in China from 1923 until the Communist takeover in 1949 forced him to leave his beloved Lijiang for ever.

He once made the dreadful blunder of claiming Minya Konka in Sichuan to be the highest mountain in the world, when it proved to be only 7,590 metres (24,900ft). My own observations indicate that he invariably overestimated the altitudes on his herbarium specimens. His photographs must be among the finest monochrome photographs ever taken and a unique study of China as it was before the Communist revolution.

I once met Rock when he came to see our garden. At that stage, little had been
done to it since the neglect of World War II, and it had also suffered from a particularly damaging spell of weather. I well remember his remark that our garden was not as good as that of Windsor Great Park. I did not take to the man.

**Ludlow and Sherriff**
Frank Ludlow read botany under Professor Marshal Ward, Kingdon-Ward's father, and on leaving university, became a teacher in Asia including Tibet. After some years in various posts he went to Kashgar where he met George Sherriff. Ludlow the biologist and Sherriff the soldier soon found they had much in common and went on shooting trips together. They became great friends and planned to explore Bhutan and Tibet in the years ahead. Oddly, they always called each other by their surnames.

Their expeditions were precisely planned and Sir George Taylor, later Director of Kew, acted as their home agent, apart from the 1938 expedition when he accompanied them. Like Rock, Sherriff was an accomplished photographer and took unique films of Tibet before it was changed for ever by the Communist Chinese. Sherriff was a great organizer, due to his temperament and military training. He even had vegetable seeds sown at intervals along their proposed route and arranged for the produce to be collected and brought to their camps. They had an excellent Turki cook and all, including their staff, lived in style. They even carried a small library with them.

Ludlow and Sherriff systematically explored Bhutan from west to east and then, similarly, south and south-east Tibet, collecting hundreds of bird skins and herbarium specimens. In 1936 they sent four crates of living plants in the cold room on a P&O liner. In 1938 they made what was possibly the first ever air transportation of live plants from South-East Asia to Britain. Alas, World War II led to the loss of many of these introductions. Their 1949 trip to Bhutan produced enough seed for 20,000 packets. It was amazing that they collected so much since they were often frustrated, as when most of the seed was devoured by grubs or when browsing yaks had eaten all the flowering shoots on the meadows or, to crown it all, early snow had obliterated everything.

I knew Geordie and Betty Sherriff very well and loved visiting their beautiful garden at Ascrevie, Angus, where they grew primulas and meconopsis so successfully. It was the Sherriffs and Frank Ludlow who inspired me to take up plant hunting. Once my wife and I visited Ludlow in his cubby hole in the Natural History Museum's herbarium where he gave us advice before our 1965 trip to north-east India. He told us that Sherriff always wore gym shoes but that he always wore boots and that we could take our choice! We chose the latter.

**The End of an era**
The final expeditions of Kingdon-Ward,
Rock, and Ludlow and Sherriff, in 1956, 1949 and 1949 respectively, could be called the end of an era, as both China and Burma closed their borders and Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh became harder to get into. There was a time when the only great plant hunting area open was Nepal. China did not reopen its doors until 1980, but Arunachal Pradesh and Burma remain almost out of bounds to the present day, as do most of the frontier areas between India and Tibet. It is these parts that are still the least botanically explored of all South-East Asia. In this interval of around 30 years many changes have taken place in the world, not the least being the vast increase in air transport and in the number of people who can afford to travel long distances. Although many people have at last become aware of the need for conservation, natural resources are alas being plundered without a thought for tomorrow. All these events have completely revolutionized the way we now set about plant hunting, often with a self-imposed ban on collecting any plants. Many countries make some attempt at conservation, such as banning all collecting of plant material. Unfortunately, despite these rules, the illegal collecting of whole populations of plants like orchids, bulbs and corms continues apace.

1956 to the present day
My first trip to South-East Asia in 1965 took place at a time of transition between the year-long plus expeditions of old and the whistle-stop tours of today. By pulling strings with Indian authorities, my wife and I managed to get briefly to the Subansiri division of Arunachal Pradesh, in an area not previously explored by westerners. We flew out, while our luggage, including food for the mountains, went by sea. Although we spent two and a half months in India, most of this time was wasted arguing with officials about our permit for entering Arunachal Pradesh (known then as the North-East Frontier Agency). But we were able to collect plants, and this can make all the difference to the success of a spring-only trip when seed can be very scarce.

On our way we stayed with a retired tea planter in Shillong and, while waiting to go on to Darjeeling after leaving the Subansiri, we wrapped some hundreds of our rhododendron seedlings in little balls of moss tied on with cotton and bedded them down in a shady place in our friend’s garden. For the journey, our plants were put into baskets. Luckily our agents in Calcutta had an air-conditioned office where we were able to leave the plants until near our departure. Before finally leaving, the baskets were thoroughly searched and then surrounded with sacking, so we were not able to check their well-being until our arrival in London. The arrangement was that the plants would be cleared at Kew and they would keep a selection and pass the rest back to us. I had to stay on in London to collect them, and so far so good, but rounding a
corner in a taxi in Hyde Park, the basket slid off the shelf next to the driver on to the street and the plants were scattered all over the place. Luckily there was little traffic and I was able to collect every one, little the worse for their experience. The plants had travelled very well and losses were small. To our disgust, our collection of *R. grande*, the bulk of our seedlings, proved to be early into growth and hopelessly tender.

In 1966 James Keenan of RBGE went to Burma, the last person to get in on a collecting trip from the West. After months of wrangling with the Burmese government, he was finally given his permit in December to go to Bumpa Bum, a mountain that had not been previously explored. The forest proved to be almost impenetrable so Keenan had to scramble up river beds. He made some interesting collections, both herbarium and seed, and flew home, leaving his collections to travel by sea. This proved to be a disaster for only one seed lot germinated and that was a berberis. Undoubtedly the seeds had either been cooked or rotted off. It was a lesson I have never forgotten.

After years of effort at attempting to get into China we succeeded in 1981. The Kunming Botanic Institute put a tremendous effort into making this expedition a success. Five of us plus our hosts spent a month on the Cangshan, central-west Yunnan, from late April to late May camping at four different sites. It would be fair to say that this was the first ever successful spring seed collection as most, if not all, earlier collections had been made in the autumn when most seed ripens naturally. We were undoubtedly lucky that the previous season had been a bumper one for flower and also that the spring weather had been kind and had not knocked all the remaining seed out of the capsules. Fairly plentiful seed was had off nearly every rhododendron species we found, giving an adequate amount for a good distribution. There was no question of the pounds of seed as collected by Forrest; just one small fairly full packet of many seed numbers.

In those days, there were no restrictions on collecting plants. Two of us were put in charge of the plant collections while the rest of the party looked after the herbarium specimens. After each camp we returned to a base where all the plants were stored in a small outhouse with some light but no direct sunlight. We had to be exceptionally careful not to over water as rot could have set in and rapidly spread. Losses were small and mainly restricted to primulas, notoriously difficult to transport when in growth. The plants were packed into baskets with part of a basket for a lid. It took the two of us until 2am to finish the job. On our first leg of the journey to Guangzhou we had the baskets in the compartment with us but in Hong Kong, where we knew the governor and his wife, it was better still. Talk about VIP treatment! Into the first-class lounge; escorted onto the plane where our plants were
handed to us and placed with us in first class on the upper deck. Eventually all, including ourselves, arrived in excellent condition at RBGE where the plants started their six-month quarantine.

Seeds were easier to handle. On fine days they were laid out by our tents or hung up in cotton bags to dry and were given a rough cleaning before packeting for the journey. Spring-collected seed is never as clean as that collected in autumn due to all the rubbish associated with old seed capsules. Germination was excellent and seed of the larger species kept its viability for up to five years in a refrigerator.

After four years of trying to get back into China with no success, three of us went on a private trek to Nepal in May 1985. This time I was allowed to make my own quarantine arrangements, provided I collected certain plants only and kept them for six months in an insect-proof frame away from any other plants. The plants were tied to round woven bamboo mats in a layer of moss and these mats were wired into a basket. One day I was horrified to see polythene tied over the top of the basket: the heat that might have built up under the polythene if the sun had been out could have killed the lot. The polythene was promptly replaced with an umbrella (see figure 6). Despite the roasting trek back to the roadhead by way of the Arun valley, all went well until Delhi Airport. An Airline official, no doubt hoping for a backhander, refused to allow the plants on to our plane, the excuse being that the plane was full. We telexed from London to Delhi and they actually arrived the next day, looking rather the worse for wear. On arrival at my home they were nicely bedded into the frame and most made a good recovery. Alas, this was not the end of their troubles. There was one of the rare plagues of field voles that year and when I came to open the frame again after two weeks of snow almost every plant had been mown off just above ground level; luckily some did recover.

Our seed collections in Nepal were the poorest I can remember on any spring trip. On our trek we were constantly soaked by either heavy rain or violent hail storms, once bad enough to knock (locally) all the leaves off *R. thomsonii* and tear the tough leaves of *R. hodgsonii* to shreds. This sort of weather can also knock off any remaining seed capsules. Autumn seed collecting is invariably more certain, particularly after a poor flowering season. On several occasions, I have collected very green capsules in early to mid-September, and with just two or three exceptions, the germination has been fine. Also, in the autumn, just one or two large, or a handful of small, capsules are ample, while in the spring, to obtain a few seeds, every available capsule has to be grabbed.

In recent years seed from South-East Asia has been coming in from various sources. With a few exceptions, seed collected by other people does not germinate as well as my own. Often the seed looks
good and yet proves to be dead after sowing. Some seed may have been stored in a drawer for some years but most has undoubtedly been killed by over-heating. I prefer paper seed packets to polythene for collecting in the wild, although in wet weather paper packets can disintegrate. Some people use little polythene packets but I reckon they could end by losing their seed from sweating in heat. Viability can also be lost by being crushed in non-padded envelopes in the post.

Herbarium specimens also need to be treated very carefully. The best specimens are those where the drying paper has been laboriously changed day after day until the specimens are dry. These days many people are in a hurry and cannot be bothered with this paper changing. So they rig up a sort of oven where the specimens are cooked, supposedly very slowly, over very gentle heat. Invariably the specimens end up partly shrivelled and on occasion, I have even seen the drying paper singed.

However expert plant hunters may be, many seed batches reach their recipients either as *Rhododendron* sp. (short for species) or wrongly named. Naming plants in the field can be tricky, even for the most knowledgeable, and I have certainly made mistakes myself, though I will not put ‘sp.’ on a rhododendron packet.

Present-day plant hunting trips to South-East Asia can be roughly divided into three categories: 1 Parties of up to 20, or even more, organized by travel companies. These rarely camp, making use of any local accommodation available, and are not necessarily entirely botanically orientated; 2 Smaller groups from two to eight in association with local botanical institutions; 3 One or more persons travelling on their own, making use of public transport, and often roughing it in the worst accommodation. This third group may have difficulties in reaching the most remote areas, but has the advantage of flexibility on time spent in each area. There are, of course, variations on these categories, according to country. Some spring trips are now being followed up by autumn trips for seed.

Post-1949 plant hunters are numerous and many have been on only one or two trips. The question arises, who among the present-day plant hunters could have accomplished what the likes of Fortune, Forrest and Kingdon-Ward did? I like to think that people such as Roy Lancaster, Ron McBeath, Tony Schilling and Chris Grey-Wilson would have achieved just as much.

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Figure 5 (top left): W Fitch's engraving of R. roylei (cinnabarum) in Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya (see below). Figure 6 (top right): plants collected by Peter Cox in Nepal in 1985 were tied to woven bamboo mats for transportation back to Britain. Here they are protected from the sun by an umbrella (see Chapter 8). Figure 7 (above): Joseph Hooker's drawing of R. roylei (cinnabarum) made in the field from the same plant as his herbarium specimen preserved at Kew (see Chapter 5).
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