

Christmas 2001

It was a busy spring... It was a busy summer... It was a busy fall...

It's been another busy year to say the least... too much to do; too little time to do it in.

At long, long last the garden's been put to bed. It's now December 12th, and only just this past weekend I finished up outdoors. It's been a mild winter so far. For example, on December 5th it reached 17 degrees Celsius in downtown Toronto. We have yet to get any snow inside the city. There was one day when areas further north got about one inch of it, which you saw first thing in the morning on the occasional car. Back on November 14th through 18th, I was still working outside until after midnight using a floodlight to see. At that time daytime temperatures were a very pleasant 14 degrees Celsius. I'm exhausted - too many days of staying up to 1 AM., and then getting up at 6. However I'm glad to say that I did manage to get quite a number of beds replanted; more than I could ever hope for. There was more to do, but I suppose there'll always be more to do.

I think I've come to exhibit type "A" behavior. It seems like there's always something I have to be doing and I can't stop and smell the roses. I suppose that in truth I do take a bit of time to smell the roses, but I don't take enough time in order to get a sense of really relaxing.

Here's a summary of what's happened over the year:

Piles Of Overtime At Work

2001 has been an exceptional year at work. I managed to put in over a thousand hours of overtime. And that was up until the end of June when basically summer vacation came along. The 1000 plus hours is in addition to the 200 odd put in at the end of last year. I'm glad to say the need for overtime has died off (at least for me it did). Being tied up over last winter meant that I didn't get my 2000 bloom report finished, nor did I get any of the other work done that I had hoped to, such as putting together a CD. If all goes well I will probably be sending you a CD next Christmas (wishful thinking would suggest it might be even sooner; although as you will read different below, I'll likely be wanting to create additional content with my new "toys").

I have made a start on my 2001 bloom report but we'll have to see what I'm able to get finished, given all the things I'm working on.

I was of course glad to get the extra money (4 weeks of it was taken as time off). That will come in handy when we have our kitchen and bathroom redone - something we've looked into, but haven't yet moved forward with. Throughout all of the overtime it looked like there was only just a little bit more to do. Something more always came along, so it kept going on and on and on. The chap that took over the work is finding he's putting in overtime, though not to quite the same degree I did. I still have a hand in that work, but I have really moved off to other things. I will likely continue to be the back-up in that area.

New Hybrids In Bloom

It's been quite a good bloom year. This was the year for the 1996 Reticulata hybrids to bloom (i.e. 5 years after being planted). As I anticipated, the most interesting ones had actually bloom last year - a year early (second generation [F2] *sophenensis* x *danfordiae* [sxd] hybrids - i.e. original cross was: veined blue x lemon yellow). As a result I was keenly looking forward to seeing what 1997 hybrids would bloom. This was coupled with the fact that a large quantity of 1997 seed had germinated the first year (normally it germinates here in the second year). Of the only 6 1997 blooms, 4 were F2 sxd clones: a white, a blue, and two yellows with blue (one of which I particularly liked its shading and shape). I have great expectations for next year's bloom based on what I remember of the 1997 parentage.

There were also several new F2 sxd clones from each of 1994, 95, and 96. Of particular interest was another backcross onto *danfordiae* (95-unknown-1), which is similar to last year's (96-BN-1): lots of light greeny-blue spots and veins, with a fair yellow influence on the fall blade--quite lovely! Clearly that is indeed the parentage. The only issue was the row in which it was growing didn't make sense; nor did any of the surrounding rows.

Of particular interest is the fact that there are now six more sxd yellow hybrids, all with to varying amounts of blue. Last year and I only had one. In total, there are now eight white, seven yellow, and five blue F2 hybrids, plus the two backcrosses to *danfordiae*.

Surprisingly, I have yet to see any hybrids between my F1 *sophenensis* x *danfordiae* clones and any other Reticulata Iris. I say this because there were over 500 seeds produced in 1996 of just such crosses. They would be sterile, but I'm expecting, generally speaking, they would look quite interesting (I really not sure what they would look like; though when I see them I'll probably say, "yea, that's what I expected").

I again produce over 10,000 Reticulata seeds. Most involved F1 sxd parents, since I had just over 1000 blooms.

Canoe Camping In Algonquin Park

I again took the boys into Algonquin Park. This time we were in for 14 days. We set out from Opeongo for a change. It was certainly nice to get away from everything and hear the call of the loons. The first part of the trip was fairly strenuous after allowing ourselves an initial rest day. I was quite surprised at how busy the east side of the park was. It was on this leg that we ran into a particularly heavy downpour, and got completely drenched. It did clear up, so we were able to eventually continue on our way. Our longest portage was 5.8 km. On that day we didn't get to our campsite until about 8:00 p.m., and as it turned out, we had to share with some other campers. The bottom of Dickson lake had a couple of empty camp sites that we passed. We were hoping to stay about the middle. Wouldn't you know it, the ones we were headed for were all taken. As a result we headed a little further up the lake. We were getting desperate because there weren't many left before the next portage. So we decided we'd better see if we could share with someone. One of the reasons I thought we should be able to get a site was because there's a nice long 5.3 km portage into the middle lake. Obviously a lot of people are undaunted by that hurdle.

The second part of the trip, which was several days further on, we decided to change plans, and stayed at a rather nice site, where we had a restful, relaxing time. This worked out rather nicely with the hot weather, since there tended to be a nice breeze where we were, along with a nice sandy beach (and lake bottom) which we put to good use with lots of swimming.

Just before going into Algonquin Park I bought a new digital camcorder. It worked out quite well last year to take in my digital camera, so this year I wanted to go one step further and also be able to take movies which could be edited on a computer. I must admit however, at this point David is the only one who has done any editing (that was on movies he made with his stuffed animals). I did try it out and was quite happy with the results, but that was during in the summer when I was spending a lot of time outdoors.

Rented cottage

This year at the end of August we rented a cottage on Orr lake, which is five minutes east of Elmvale. The lake is quite shallow; about 11 ft. at its deepest. Because of this we didn't do whole lot of swimming, but it was nice being right on the lake. Though, it would have helped if we had, had warmer weather. Since we were on the southeast side of the lake, we got to see quite a few nice sunsets to the northwest.

Of particular interest this year was the re-enactment at Discovery Harbour in Penetanguishene. Battles of a type that might have occurred back in 1812 were simulated. The last re-enactment at Discovery Harbour was perhaps 4 years ago. This time some of the battle was staged in boats on the water. In addition, a small party from both sides (Americans and British) landed on an island where part of the battle was fought. Overall, there were so many re-enactors that the battles stretched out quite a distance along the shoreline -- you weren't able to see all of the things that were happening. It was fascinating to hear the roar of cannons, watch them being reloading, and seeing the safety precautions as they were fired (the possibility of something going wrong was just as real then as it is today).

If you're looking for a good restaurant in Penetanguishene, we highly recommend Arthur's. It's across the street from the main dock.

Replanting, etc.

In order to make room for this year's seeds I had to first move some bulbs that I got from Holland in 1999. They went into the new areas that were added last year, including the new bed at the front of the House (bed zero) which is just 4 feet from the road. Then I was able to move my 1995 hybrids largely into that area. They had been right beside it. As well, I cleared an area beyond that, which gave me more than enough room for this year's seeds.

At that point I dug several bulb orders, many of which came in late. I'm expecting to use the money from those sales to buy more aluminum tags. I managed to recover a further 900 tags which I will use in 2002. This includes washing them,

followed by a soaking in CLR (Calcium Lime & Rust remover), then scrubbing them with a toothbrush. They end up with a ghost image of the original writing, but they're good enough for reuse. I should be able to recover a few more next year, but without doubt all have to buy more for 2003, so I might as well get them now while they're still available / while the price hasn't increased. The reason I hadn't bought any over the past couple of years is because they're quite expensive now; it works out to about 25¢ each. It's been perhaps 10 years since I bought 5000. At that time the cost was \$220 Canadian. Now they're made by somebody else and cost almost five times that. Yikes!

Here I am suggesting I'd use the money from selling the bulbs to buy tags, when in a sense it's already been spent to buy \$1,500 worth of rare Junos from Janice Ruksans. I'm expecting to buy almost no bulbs next year. I would have said the same thing last year. It was just a case of Janis having a number of rare things available for the first time this year, and of course I don't just buy one, I buy 2 or 3 for hybridizing purposes.

I again sent some of my Reticulata hybrids to 3 Dutch growers. At the moment all three are still evaluating ones that I sent in the past. In one sense it's too bad they can't visit when the Retics are in bloom. That way they could see which ones they prefer, or which they think might do well in various markets. In general it takes two to three years for me get a sense of how well each clone is capable of doing, as well as getting familiar with particular clones (i.e. seeing which ones I like), and start to build up stock of them. This is why I was sending the growers mainly 1993 and 1994 hybrids. The best rate of increase is a doubling. That means in the sixth year of bloom, a good clone should have about 32 flowers. 32 is a moderate number. Dutch growers are interested in a thousand or more; which if all goes well, would take at least a further five years.

Without question some of my F2 sxd hybrids should be introduced. Right now though, I want to use them for hybridizing, and at the same time I need to build up stock. This year the lovely cream 94-HW-1 with it slight touch of yellow and blue, had 6 flowers (its 3rd year of bloom). I'm expecting 12 to 15 next year.

After getting the orders off, I was then able to plant this year's seeds. You may not realize it, but even when I have the tags prepared it takes six to seven days to plant 10,000 seeds and make up a map of the site. I also planted over 1000 Juno seeds.

I was unsure how much more work I was going to be able to get done. The next highest priority was to replant the 1994 hybrids. Ideally they should've been replanted last year. Partly because of having the extra space I was able to replant them at the end of the seed area. This gives them a room they need, plus it cleared out the space where they had been, which I will potentially use for next year's seed. I expect I'll need to move a couple of the surrounding tall bearded iris, to give me just a bit more room.

I also got various 1989 hybrids replanted (non sxd clones). They have bloom quite well for last two years and I was afraid to they'd be getting too crowded. Keep in mind that when I replant, I need to essentially double the area that I give the bulbs. In this case I was able to do that by moving some bulbs to last year's new bed, and moving some bearded iris elsewhere. Additionally, because of the mild conditions I had time to replant my 1990 and '91 hybrids. I must say the 1991's didn't fare as well with last year's wet conditions.

I was quite pleased with having gotten as far as I had, but some of the 1989 F1 sxd hybrids were left untouched; including ones that didn't get replanted last year. I'm running out of room. I've said that before but largely I have been able to dig up lawn and add more gardens (at the front of the house). It's also a matter of using the space effectively (e.g. deciding what plants you really want). I do have some areas with coarse sand available, so next year I'll put some of the 1989 F1 sxd hybrids there. Hopefully by then I will know whether any of the Dutch growers or Janis Ruksans are interested in the F1s. Over the next couple of years I am expecting to get rid of some of the hybrids in order to build up the stock of others, and in the case of the sxd clones, build up stock of the F2s at the expense of the F1s.

What happens after that depends on what future results I see from my work.

In spite of not getting my seedlist up on my web site I did manage to sell quite a few seeds. Anyone who inquired got a copy of the latest list. Hopefully I will get my CD produced plus the web site updated. It's just a matter of how much time I have left given whatever other things I might get involved in.

Smile. This is why in some ways it would be nice to be retired.

Scouts

The first 1/3 of the year saw me complete my 2nd year as the Cub Akela (main leader). I was pleasantly surprised to have two boys in addition to David finish their year with all 6 stars. They each received a plaque marking the occasion.

Now I'm the key Scout leader. It's quite challenging to work with the boys ranging in age from 11 to 14. The difficulty in one sense is they tell you they're bored, however when you try and ask them what they want to do, they don't really have any ideas. They certainly aren't into earning badges the way the Cubs were, though Jeffrey in his first year as a Scout earned quite a lot of badges. It's too bad I was unable to work with him last year, however I had to be the Cub leader so David would have a program (in each of those previous years I started out as the only Cub leader).

In one sense Jeffrey is ready for a Ventures, but in another he has a lot to learn first. For example, he needs to learn how to plan a program, plus budgeting to run the group, to run the camps, etc.

Many projects on the go.

My digital camera has been quite handy. I have again taken some 4000 pictures this year.

Now I'm into working with Quicktime VR movies on my computer, cataloging my photographs using Cumulus, and working with IBM ViaVoice to have my speech translated into text. Of course all these things end up taking more time to learn and work with. One of the goals I'm working towards is creating a multimedia CD.

QTVR

Quicktime VR (Virtual Reality) allows you to create panoramas as well as objects movies. Several panoramic nodes can be put together to give a virtual tour. The idea is users could for example, tour my garden. Conceivably this could be extended further to allow you to view the garden through different seasons. You could look at the garden in spring, then move to summer and fall followed by winter and back to spring. At the same time you could move to different positions in the garden, and again cycle through the seasons.

The paradigm is when you're standing in a given spot you can turn your head and look all around you. Quicktime VR gives you the opportunity to do just that with photographs. It has recently been extended one step further with something called cubics (yes the reference is to a cube). The pictures are stitched into a ball and then projected onto the walls (faces) of a box. Cubics add the ability to look up, including straight up, and look down, including straight down. The idea is to make the user feel as if they were actually there when you took the pictures. If you not familiar with Quicktime VR, stop for a moment and look all around yourself. What if you could let someone else see all those things around you? This is accomplished by taking a series of overlapping photos and stitching them together. You could lay the resulting image out flat, but using a computer can give the user a window into the picture, and let them move around in it the way their eyes would if they were there.

You could do something similar with a camcorder, but you end up with a linear movie. With Quick time VR the user is in control of where they go next (an interactive experience).

It's by adding hotspots that users can go from one "movie" to another. By clicking on the hot spot the user is taken to what ever the hotspot is mapped to, such as another panoramic node, an object movie, a regular movie, a sound or narration, etc. ...making it rich with multimedia.

It would be kind of neat to be looking at one of beds, see a particular flower, then click on it and then view the flower as an object movie where you could turn it around and see the flower from all different angles. The idea is to make you feel as if you're actually there holding it. The next step to making the experience come alive, would be to add sound. For example ambient sound, or sounds such as birds coming randomly from various specific directions.

Panoramas and cubics allow you to look outward; object movies on the other hand look inward at a specific item. Object movies are created by taking a series of pictures either around an object, or over a period of time. They don't stitched together but they do get compressed. When you are viewing the object movie and you move your computer's mouse to the right, the software displays the next picture in that direction almost seamlessly. If you continually indicate a motion to the right, the object appears to rotate. If you additionally take a set of pictures up at 45 degrees from underneath the object, and down at 45 degrees from above, as well as one picture looking right over top and perhaps one looking straight up from the bottom, then you can essentially see the whole object -- effectively rotate in your hands. When I was replanting, I planted two bulbs of 94-HW-1 in separate small pots specifically so I could try to make an object movie of it in the spring when they bloom.

Another way of using object movies is to take a series of pictures of a flower opening. The user would be able to sequence through these pictures and make the flower open and close on demand, simply by moving your mouse. This could even be done in conjunction with being able to circle the flower. Time lapse photography can of course be done

with a digital camcorder. It would give few you the same effect, though not with as much detail / resolution, but when you start the movie playing you have to watch it from start to finish. With Quicktime VR you have of much fuller control over the different frames/pictures a you're looking at and the rate the you see them.

Apple Computer's Quicktime VR provides the capability to play these movies. However you need tools to actually stitch the panorama and object movies (VR Worx \$500), make cubics (Real Viz Stitcher \$800), add sounds (SoundSaVR \$300), etc. Not to mention a special tripod head which costs between 700 and \$1,200 which is required to allows the camera to the rotated around it's nodal point (where the image going through the camera's lenses come to a point and flips upside-down, etc.). Precision is critical otherwise when the pictures are stitched together there can be a lot of distortion.

The one issue I am looking into right now he is how to integrate the VR movies with other multimedia aspects of a CD. It appears that for some reason the programs have been designed with the Internet in mind and don't allow relative addresses to be specified, which is what I would need for working with files on CD; especially if there are a lot of files. They allow URLs like www.Reticulatas.com/mytestmovie.mov (note: this file doesn't really exist!).

It took me a while to work out the horizontal and vertical lense distortions of my camera. Now that I know those, stitching pictures for a panorama can be reasonably quick. I did however run into one problem recently were my tripod was slightly tilted. The software has adjustments to handle this, but in the process of taking the pictures I also banged the camera slightly (i.e. it shifted), which made the stitching a painful, time-consuming process. Things had changed, so I couldn't just go back and take the pictures again.

The one other thing of learning about is getting the exposures between the picture is more even. Often in the panorama there might be a lot of sunlight on one side, and a lot of shadows on the other.

IBM ViaVoice

Back in a 1998 I bought IBM ViaVoice to be able to dictate speech into my computer. Unfortunately it didn't seem to work all that well. I recently bought the Release 9 Standard Edition (it should be in stores by the time you read this), and I am much more happy with how well it works (I am using it to write this). I expect that once I really get used to just talking and not writing on paper, it will be quicker end easier to get my thoughts down. Of course I've been trained all my life to having moments to think about what I'm in the process of writing, so it's a little hard to adjust to not having that time to get myself organized. I'm sure I'll get used to it. In a sense it's just like talking to another person. The main difference is you have to pause a little bit just to make sure that the computer has interpreted you correctly. A drawback, only from a point of view of it being a slight distraction, is you still have a chance to read over what you've just dictated in order to adjust the wording, to get the right emphasis, and good flow.

Is it more productive?

At this point the answer is no.

Smile: and it sure doesn't help when you go to save and the program crashes -- lucky you, you've just lost all the work you've done over the past 15 minutes. So much for increasing productivity!

Multimedia CD

This is the beginning of a new era. I can now create multimedia CDs with all sorts of things about my gardening hobby. The smile is this isn't necessarily a hobby it's a job that doesn't pay any money. I say that of course because of the amount of time I spend at it, staying until midnight working outdoors with floodlights, etc., isn't really a picture of someone relaxing at a hobby.

This past summer I modified the software I used to generate Web pages so that they would use relatives addressing. My goal was to create a CD that could be played on both Macintosh and Wintell computers. Previously I was simulating my Web pages on a computer hard drive using absolute addressing. Of absolute addresses wouldn't work for a CD, since the CD may be a different drive letter on different computers. One of the key things now is to create the content. This has always been the case but I now have the tools to do even more. Two years ago I got a good SLR digital camera (Olympus 2500L), and I'm quite glad I did. Yes, they are less expensive now but I've got two years worth of good pictures. Before having a digital camera I might take 800 slides per year, with many of those being of flowers in spring. Now I take perhaps 4000; and in a sense I should take more. Of course the challenge at the moment is to get them all organized. I purchased a product called Cumulus to do this. It works on both Macintosh and Wintell computers (\$169).

Have a very Merry Christmas, and a wonderful New Year.