

Travels with Magnolias in England and America, 1973-74

by J.C. McDANIEL

On the late November trip we joined forces with member Carl Amason of Calion, Arkansas to look up *Magnolia acuminata* in its most western native outpost, on Rich Mountain which extends across the Arkansas-Oklahoma border above Mena, Arkansas. Some of the herbarium collections of *M. a. var. ozarkensis* Ashe have been made there in the Ouachita Mountains, in addition to the larger area of Ozarks farther north in Arkansas and Missouri. We first visited Miss Ruth McWilliam, 711 Magnolia Avenue, Mena, who is the local field botanist who knows most of the plants around there. She had earlier seen the *acuminata* trees with much fruit in 1973, high on Rich Mountain, just below the hotel in Queen Wilhelmina State Park. (Dutch capital financed the railroad through Mena.)

Miss McWilliam knew of one *M. acuminata* transplanted many years ago into Mena, at 1107 Magnolia Avenue, so we looked at it before leaving town. This tree, about 50 ft. tall, also had much fruit, apparently from self-pollination, but squirrels and birds had taken the seeds. With the consent of the owner, some scion wood was taken there.

The 1107 Magnolia Avenue tree, and others from which we later collected in the forest, on very steep north-facing slopes below the recently burned hotel, may be *var. ozarkensis*, but do have some pubescence, most visible in the internodes below terminal buds. Their flowers are said to have the blue-green shade, with little yellow, as described for *var. ozarkensis*.

The fertile Mena tree (from which Miss McWilliam probably can collect seed next September) and those on the mountain all have less widespreading branches than are seen on some *M. acuminata* trees in cultivation.

We paid a late evening call on the largest *M. grandiflora* tree in Arkansas, which has grown since perhaps 1820 in the small town of Washington, 6 miles west of Hope. Like other ancient *M. grandiflora* trees in the south; it has branches that sweep to the ground. It is in prime condition and promises to remain so. The lot on which it stands has recently been deeded to the State.

On another day, en route to Ferriday, Louisiana, we saw an extensive stand of *M. acuminata* on a ridge in Catahoula Parish, part of the area of its growth which the distribution map (p. 11 in April 1973 Newsletter) shows extending west and north into two adjacent parishes. We came on seedlings, some of which Carl collected, before seeing numerous mature trees a little farther along the road.

The next day we saw more *M. acuminata* trees native in woods at the Gloster Arboretum (near the south end of the largest area shown wholly within Mississippi on the same map). Gloster natives also are 3 other magnolias: *grandiflora*, *virginiana* var. *australis* and the all-white petalled form of *macrophylla*, which is abundant in parts of the Arboretum. Some Oriental magnolias have been grafted on small *acuminata* stocks there, and are doing well where the shade is not excessive. On a previous visit in Late May, 1972 Carl and I had chip-budded some *M. grandiflora* selections on several seedlings of that species in the pine woods, and most of these have succeeded. On that earlier trip I had also brought back and established at Urbana a graft from the longest-flowering all-white *M. macrophylla* tree in the arboretum. It may flower here in 1974.

Another tree that caught my eye at Gloster in 1973 was a young *M. grandiflora* 'Little Gem'. The U.S. National Arboretum is making some distribution to propagators of this clone which was originally selected by Warren Steed in his nursery at Candor, North Carolina. 'Little Gem', with its small, shiny, well-indumented leaves and tight growth, looks like one of the very select *grandiflora* cultivars, especially for planting where space is limited. It seems to flower early and well in suitable climates.

The Mediterranean and Irish *Arbutus unedo*, a tree which (with its hybrid *A. × andrachnoides*) I had admired in August at Kew, was coming into bloom at Gloster. In Ferriday, Louisiana, besides the giant *Agave* previously mentioned, were some later-generation trees of *Quercus × comptonae*, a vigorous hybrid between Live Oak and Overcup Oak, which originated in nearby Natchez after Live Oak was introduced there from farther south.

The Compton Oak hybrid had been bred also by the late Helge Ness at Texas A. & M. University, and other scattered occurrences are known as far as Williamsburg, Virginia. It generally has a more upright growth than pure Live Oak (*Q. virginiana*). This, plus its greater vigor and hardiness, have recommended it for shade tree use to somewhat farther north than where Live Oak succeeds. England, too, I recalled, from my Kew Gardens visit, has a beautiful near-evergreen hybrid oak, *Q. × turneri*, a hybrid between the native *Q. robur* and the *Q. ilex* (Holm Oak) which was long ago introduced to southern England from the Mediterranean region.

I thought that it is good to travel occasionally, to see what is growing and doing well in other parts of our own country, if not in foreign lands. Nearly everywhere, if we look, we can pick up new ideas, if not exchange new plants, to enhance our gardening back home. And most of the natives are friendly! ***