

Walk on the wild side

Magnoliaceae on Mt. Kinabalu

by Frank D. Mossman

Mt. Kinabalu is the highest point on the earth's crust between the Himalayan Mountains and New Guinea. It is a granitic upthrust of the earth's plates, not a volcanic formation, and is situated in northern Borneo, in what is now the state of Sabah just 6° north of the equator, and about 35 miles from the town of Kota Kinabalu, reached by way of a rough gravel road which can be readily traversed by ordinary automobiles, certainly by four wheel drive vehicles.

Sabah is a state in the federation of Malaysian states and since it was formerly a colony of the British, there are many English-speaking people therein. The forward looking government of this state has set aside several hundred square miles on this mountain as a national park. Most of this area has never been trod by any human being and awaits botanical exploration. There is a park headquarters at an elevation of 5,200 feet on the south side of the 13,455 foot granite massif. A classic trail on the south side of the mountain ascends along the ridges where some really fantastic botanic material is to be seen. Dr. David Goheen, my wife Doris, and I were hiking on this mountain in January 1980. A complete account of our explorations will be found in the American Rhododendron Society Bulletin for late 1981.

There are about 26 species of rhododendrons on the mountain, 9 of which are endemic, that is, are found only on this mountain and nowhere

else. The mountain is a meeting place for western plants of Himalayan and Chinese genera, and for southern plants of Australian, New Zealand, and even American affinity. They mingle, of course, at all altitudes with Malaysian upsurgers.

Magnoliaceae are well represented. In the discussion of the results of the first Royal Society expedition to Kinabalu in 1961, held at the rooms of the society, the authority on this family, J. E. Dandy, remarked, "I know of no other massif of comparable size which has so many species of this family." This quotation is taken from E.J.H. Corner in his article on the plant life of Kinabalu in the monograph, 'Kinabalu, Summit of Borneo.' The genera *Magnolia*, *Michelia*, *Elmerrillia*, and *Talauma* are found on the mountain with about 7 or 8 species.

At an elevation of about 5,500 ft. as we walked along the paths beneath trees 70 to 100 feet tall, we found occasional creamy white cupuliform small flowers, very much resembling *Magnolia wilsonii* in form and size, as well as color. The trees were tall enough that we were unable to identify the exact source of these flowers. At 8,900 feet elevation on this south or classic trail, we ran across something that appeared to be in the Magnoliaceae; probably not *Magnolia* itself, but more likely *Talauma*, I believe. The leaves are large and very stiff. The seed pod was about 5 inches tall and 4 or 5 inches broad at

the base and contained apparently not quite ripened seed which looked very much like our usual Magnolia seed with a fleshy, pinkish-red outer covering and an inner black soft, shell-type covering.

The seeds were collected and brought back, but none have as yet germinated. We also brought cuttings but the leaves were removed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection people at Honolulu where re-entry to the United States was made. Our guide, Sopinggi Ladson, instructed us that the flowers of this particular tree are up to 10 or 12 inches in diameter and of a pink color, all of which intrigued us and inspires our effort to succeed with seed. The new leaves of the continuously growing plant had a purplish color before they had fully unfurled.

Securing the branch with its seed pod was the result of some rather tricky maneuvering on the part of Dr. David Goheen, who had to climb out over several branches to what appeared to be a small shrub but what was actually the tip of a very tall tree coming up alongside a precipitous-sided ridge. Several rhododendrons were found in the area just below and above this area. About 100 yards off the main trail, we also ran across *Nepenthes villosa* which has a pitcher that holds at least 2 quarts of water, we estimated. A very interesting sight. Collected seed has germinated for us and has been distributed to several interested growers.

Editor's apology: The author sent a photograph of the seed pod he describes, but unfortunately we've mislaid it and searching hasn't yet turned it up. If we can flush it out of its hiding place, we'll run it in a future issue.

Needed: More Ways Of Looking at Magnolias

Those who get *MAGNOLIA* are members of a society, not subscribers to a periodical. They have demonstrated interest in magnolias by banding together for the precise purpose of exchanging information about them and promoting wider appreciation of this loveliest of flowering trees.

The more exchanges that go on, the better the Society is working in carrying out all its aims and accomplishing its purpose. *MAGNOLIA* is a focal point for this collecting and redistributing of information but it's also a sounding board where ideas, methods, opinions, even feelings, are placed on view for evaluation and enlightenment.

But we need new viewpoints, new ways of looking at magnolias, still other ways of skinning a cat. Every member of this Society knows something about magnolias that other members don't, but ought to. Not putting it into an article and sending it to *MAGNOLIA* is depriving the Society's members of good information they could use and enjoy, and it robs the potential contributor of the feeling of accomplishment and due recognition for passing it on.

We're just scratching the surface of the immense store of knowledge possessed collectively by our membership and it's a crime not to document it. The good word about the tree we're stuck on ought to be spread. Look within, and see if there isn't something that needs saying under your belt! Knock it out with typewriter, pen, pencil, or quill—and get it into the mail! And if there's something about magnolias, you'd like to see in your Journal, write and tell us about it!