

# Siuslaw News Community Voices

## NATURAL PERSPECTIVE —

### A look beyond the blooms



By EMILY J. UHRIG, Ph.D.  
Special to Siuslaw News

Rhododendron Festival celebrating those charming shrubs that not only adorn our gardens, but also grow wild throughout our area.

With around a thousand species, rhododendrons are a diverse group of plants. Most species are found in Asia, but their natural range spans a large portion of the globe, including Oregon.

The most locally familiar species is undoubtedly the pink-flowered Pacific rhododendron that graces the sides of Highway 101.

For residents of Florence,

the City of Rhododendrons, the shrub we affectionately call the 'rhody' is a source of community pride. However, in some areas of the world, rhododendrons are unwelcome pests.

The British Isles, for instance, spend millions of dollars fighting invasive rhododendrons that, despite their beauty, are harmful to native plant ecosystems.

Another aspect of the rhody's darker side is its toxicity. As a natural defense system, many rhododendrons produce grayanotoxins which affect the nervous system and muscle

function.

Found in all parts of the plant, the toxins can be fatal to livestock. This may seem of little concern for human health as few folks tend to snack on shrubbery.

However, grayanotoxins can be found in honey made from the nectar of rhododendron flowers. This so-called 'mad honey' has hallucinogenic, toxic effects known since ancient times. Over 2,000 years ago, Persian troops intentionally gave mad honey to their Roman foes who consequently became incapacitated and were easily

overwhelmed.

Today, mad honey is eaten for its purported therapeutic properties. Folks believe it alleviates a variety of ailments from gastrointestinal issues to diabetes.

One of its most popular uses is for sexual enhancement. While people partaking of mad honey occasionally end up in the hospital, there have been no recent recorded fatalities thanks to modern medicine.

Local honey lovers need not be overly worried about products found in stores or farmer's markets. Outside of regions

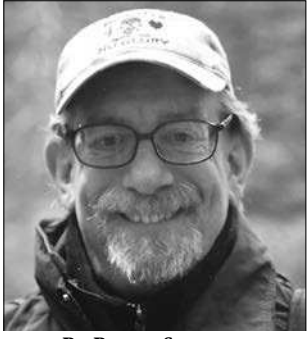
where mad honey is intentionally produced (Turkey, for instance), poisoning risks are quite low.

As bees in most areas visit a variety of plants, they are unlikely to gather enough rhododendron nectar for their honey to have notable toxin levels, and commercially produced products tend to blend honey from different locations, further diluting any potential toxins.

So, as you enjoy the upcoming rhody festivities, admire the blooms, but know they do have a somewhat darker side.

## NOTES FROM THE SILTCOOS —

### Driving to distinction



By BARRY SOMMER  
Special to Siuslaw News

highway, real highways have three numbers, like Oregon's own Highway 101.

Before the interstate highway system was built, getting to your destination meant travelling over anything from an old logging road to what used to be a foot or animal trail. America's roads were mostly a patchwork of connectors until after World War II, when President Eisenhower decreed the building of the interstate road system we know today.

Prior to the interstate road system, the connecting of America via the automobile (or horse cart) started way back in 1806 when Thomas Jefferson assigned surveyors to plot a route

between Cumberland, MD and Wheeling, WV. This was just fine until people decided they wanted to travel beyond Cumberland and Wheeling, so the National Road was built in 1916, the first road project done specifically for the horseless carriage and the first highway to bisect six states.

Soon to follow were the demands for better roads, so the Lincoln Highway was constructed, a paved two-lane road that spanned shore to shore, some 3,389 miles through no less than 15 states.

Business grew and thrived as the conquering automobile created opportunities and jobs in every hamlet and town they

roared through. The west coast was ripe for the intrusion of two lanes along the water but the first road along the Oregon coast had yet to materialize.

To be named the Roosevelt Coast Military Highway, it would have been the first continuous road along the Oregon coast. But the feds did not match the 2.5M bond measure passed by the people's vote, thus it died before it was even born.

Forward to 1921 and construction of what we know today as the Oregon Coast Highway begins. Finished in 1931, it was 400 miles of two-lane blacktop (or packed gravel) that connected all the coastal towns between

Gold Beach and Astoria.

Eventually all the parcels and pieces for a continuous coast road were connected into one grand south to north highway.

Now it was time to promote those things that attract the traveler and get them to empty their wallets and purses.

Route 66 has the Uranus Fudge Factory, we have Mo's Famous Clam Chowder. Pacific Coast Highway, aka El Camino Real has the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Beach, we give our sea lions not just a beach but their own cave. One aspect of Highway 101 lore that sets us apart from all the other famous roads is that if it gets too congest-

ed with traffic, you just turn towards the beach and drive on the sand. It's true, the Oregon coast itself is designated as a highway. Just get an Oregon ORV pass, a flag and you're good to go. Also, our Highway 101 hugs the water for more miles than any other west coast road, providing beach views along almost its entire length.

Four hundred miles of wonderland sliced by bridged rivers and creeks.

One word of advice; spend more time out of the car than inside it. There is just too much to experience to be endlessly strapped into a rolling computer.

## 2018 Rhododendron Festival Court




**Coronation: Thursday, May 17th, 6:30pm**



Florence Event Center 541-997-1994  
Tickets \$10 Adults, \$6 Students  
eventcenter.org



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