SEPTEMBER IS PLANT SALE TIME

Gentiana septemfida

It seems like it was just last week that the crocuses were first pushing their little flowery heads out of the ground, but both my calendar and my tomato plants say otherwise. I have been harvesting cherry tomatoes for over a month, and now the first of the sandwich size ones is starting to ripen, a deep purple variety I think from Russia (why should my rock garden be the only place I like unusual plants?).

And what does this mean to the garden? It means a couple of things. First, it means that the BNARGS Big Plant Sale of the year is right around the corner on Saturday, September 3. Second, we are starting to head towards the cooler days of Fall, which means it is a great time to plant perennials so they are already established when next Spring rolls around. For those of you that have attended the Big Plant Sale other years, you know that the selection of plants available is truly spectacular, and that it relies, on you, our members, to be that way. I encourage all of you to pot up a few of the most interesting plants that have grown well enough to share with others.

Next Meeting:
Saturday, September 3, @ 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge, MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

AM: Members Potpourri

Lunch – BYO
We welcome dessert contributions Lunch will be followed by
THE BIG PLANT SALE

The Members Potpourri consists of a small but select number of our Chapter members showing a small but select group of images that they believe will be of interest to all of us. That could mean plants, or gardens, or troughs, or pretty much anything that is of relevance to a group of rock gardeners spending a late summer Saturday in West Stockbridge.

The BIG Plant Sale is, as most of us know, the culmination of a spring and summer of nursing choice seedlings to ‘plantable’ size, or bringing to the group a few of our exceptional volunteers, or simply offering a few choice plants that we want to share with our Chapter friends. So, bring what you can and be prepared to take advantage of the Fall planting season. See you on the 3rd!
Some of the plants that have shown up in years past include Phlox Herbert and Phlox Betty before they were available in any nursery, variegated *Convollaria*, hardy cyclamen, hardy cactus, different types of Epimediums, Penstemons, Lewisias, several types of dwarf and species bearded iris, etc.

Let’s all do our part to make the **2011 Big Plant Sale** a sale to remember!

*Erica Schumacher*

**THE QUEST FOR EMEMION FLOWERS AT TABLE ROCK**

**TEXT AND IMAGES BY TANYA HARVEY**

Yesterday (July 29), my husband Jim and I were invited to join Ed Alverson of the Nature Conservancy on a trip north to Table Rock Wilderness to meet up with Daniel Mosquin of the UBC Botanical Garden. I’ve been wanting to get Jim up to see Table Rock’s huge cliff for years, and I couldn’t pass up the chance to head up there with trained botanists, especially if I didn’t have to do the driving. Neither Ed nor Daniel had ever been to Table Rock either. Daniel was on a mission to photograph the rare *Enemion hallii* that grows there. He was down in Oregon on other business just for the weekend, so we were crossing our fingers that we could find it in bloom.

Last year it was blooming beautifully on July 22. We were a week later on an even later-blooming year, and I’d seen it blooming well earlier in July on a drier year, so I had high hopes. I started to get a little nervous as we walked along the old road that now serves as the beginning of the trail. The *Penstemon serrulatus* that was blooming so profusely last year was just beginning. Are we still several weeks later than last year, already a late year? One bonus was that we found the last blooms of another, even rarer plant, Clackamas iris (*Iris tenuis*), which was completely finished on last year’s trip. This Oregon endemic is found almost entirely in Clackamas County. It reminded me a lot of some *Iris japonica* I have in my garden, with its wide leaves and spreading habit. It turns out it is the only western American species in the crested iris group (section Lophiris), which includes most of the prettiest irises in my garden including *I. gracilipes, I. lacustris, I. cristata*, as well as *I. japonica*. The rest are Asian or eastern North American, so Clackamas iris is a real anomaly.

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Cute bumblebee enjoying the masses of little green flowers of devil’s club (*Oplopanax*)

It was a much longer drive for us, so we met Daniel on the trail at the talus slope looking for the *Enemion* where I’d told him I’d seen it, under the devil’s club on the talus slope. There was quite a bit, but, unfortunately,
The cool, usually shaded cliff has a wonderful variety of plants growing in the vertical joints and the little shelves that are formed when the rocks break off. It was all just in bud. It’s a tricky plant to locate in this area. Not only is it hiding under the shrubs—and thorny ones at that—but its leaves look like a cross between columbine and bleeding heart, and both grow in the same area. We searched in vain for some white flowers that looked fuzzy from having so many stamens. The false bugbane (Trautvetteria caroliniensis) was just opening. There were some baneberries in bloom. Quite a few false Solomon’s seal (Maianthemum racemosum) were hiding under the shrubs. Was there anything that wasn’t white and fuzzy?!

I left Ed and Daniel to continue their search. Jim headed up to the summit for the fabulous view. My goal for the day was spend more time looking at the cliffs. The cool, north-facing rock is home to numerous wonderful species. There were five species of saxifrages, all at different stages of bloom. Micranthes (Saxifraga) rufidula was all done, Saxifraga cespitosa finishing, Saxifraga bronchialis starting, and Micranthes (Saxifraga) ferruginea and Saxifraga mertensiana were blooming. I was surprised to see the latter with the red bulbils always mentioned in the flora. While this is the norm over most of its range (I’ve heard), in the Western Cascades, it rarely ever has bulbils. There were a few lovely bronze bells (now Anticlea occidentalis) in bloom, some lingering Phlox diffusa, and some Arnica amplexicaulis and Packera (Senecio) bolanderi opening their yellow composite flowers as well.

The base of the cliffs is also where the majority of gentians grow. These are stunning later in the season, but this year, that looks to be much later in August or into September. I’ve long wondered about the difference in habitat between these rock-loving Western Cascade plants and the typical bog-growing Gentiana calycosa described in the books. It looks like I may finally have the chance to make some progress on this question. Dr. Jim Pringle, a plant taxonomist at the Royal Botanical Gardens of Burlington, Ontario, is working on Gentianaceae treatment for the Flora of North America. He’s actually interested in my speculation that it may be something different, or perhaps it is in the process of separating itself from other Gentiana calycosa. He’s recently teamed up with Dr. Adrien Favre in Europe who is working on genetic studies of gentians. This is a wonderful case of different interests all converging in a mutually beneficial study. I’m going to collect and dry some leaves of different gentian populations in Oregon, including those High Cascade bog types, and send them off to
Adrien for DNA extraction. Hopefully, we’ll find out something of interest, even if it doesn’t turn out to be as exciting as the discovery that ours are a different species. Whatever, I’m learning a lot, and that always makes me happy.

How much more beautiful these false rue-anemone (Enemion hallii) flowers looked after hours of searching!

We eventually all got back together and headed down the trail. Ed and Daniel hadn’t had any luck in finding any Enemion in bloom, so we stopped at some damp spots in the woods where there were more leaves. These were even farther behind, with only one or two early budded plants. While Daniel photographed the lovely Iris tenuis he’d missed on the way out, I listened to the adorable vocalizations of pikas on the nearby talus below the old road, and finally one appeared! We returned to the cars after our pleasant day, but there was no question it was rather disappointing not to have found what Daniel was looking for, especially knowing what a big deal it would be for him to come all the way back to Oregon from British Columbia later in the summer. But while we were packing our things back in the cars, Ed was still holding out hope and poking around nearby. Suddenly, what I’d hoped to hear all day—he’d found some! Just a couple of hundred feet down from the parking area, up on a damp spot on the road bank, he’d miraculously spotted three Enemion plants in perfect bloom!! I don’t know how he managed to see them up there. Although it was getting late, we all went up the bank with our cameras and got our photos. It couldn’t have been a more Hollywood ending. I wish every quest ended this well!

Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared on Tanya Harvey’s Website/Blog called ‘Mountain Plants of the Western Cascades.’ Tanya is Chair of the Emerald Chapter in Eugene, Or, and if you really want to know more about her (which you should!), simply go to her website, which is found at http://westerncascades.com/

REPORT ON THE AUGUST 13TH MEETING

The meeting was well attended. Unfortunately, Steve Whitesell had to cancel his presentation at the last hour.

Peter George gave us his views on the upcoming NARGS seed exchange. In recent years the SeedEx had lost some of its luster: fewer orders, fewer donations of seeds, fewer entries in the seed list and somewhat less exciting. There was not much need to speculate then and there about the causes of this decline, although one can suspect that the difficulties in importing seeds into the USA are a contributing factor. Yet, the NARGS seed exchange remains one of the important services it offers to its members, and more so nowadays than in the past. Rumors circulate that some of the best providers of seeds collected in the wild in the USA will cease to operate. If members do not make a special effort to collect and distribute seeds -and many can- it will be getting more and more difficult to legally access anything other than what big firms (Jelitto, Burpee...) will offer. This echoes some recommendation made recently in the UK that these who received recently introduced plants (and grow them successfully) should try to collect seeds and distribute them, lest these special plants soon get lost to cultivation. For its part, NARGS this year will boost the SeedEx, making seed purchases available through the NARGS website as well as by mail. Details will follow.

Meanwhile, NARGS still needs people to work on Phase II of the SeedEx (sorting the seeds into individual labeled packets ready for
distribution). Would our Chapter, or some of its members volunteer?

Ron Rabideau talked about a trip he took in SW China in few years ago. It was not the banal travelogue but the memories of a learned horticulturist and a nurseryman: be it the heavily terraced hills, the special ways the Chinese nurseries collect trees and stock them for urban plantings, or the humble house from where Joseph Rock conducted much of his work, there was much which caught his attention. And plants, of course. Although the trip was organized by a Camellia study group, we saw only a few camellias. It seems that Ron had more interest in rhododendrons and he did show quite a few species rarely, if ever, seen in our gardens. *Rhododendron spinuliferum*, 10' tall covered with unusual tubular flowers would be of doubtful hardiness here, where it is known through one good hybrid with *Rhododendron keiskei*. Ron was much taken by *Illicium simonsii*, a plant of great horticultural value, shaped like a Christmas tree, with yellow flowers, which has everyone who sees it wondering why it is not grown more often. Hardiness perhaps?

At the end of his talk, Ron produced 5 outstanding plants which were promptly auctioned off: an *Itea*, 3 *Rhododendrons* and, yes, *Illicium simonsii*. The rhodies were 'dwarf', ie, suitable for the rock garden, and fantastic foliage plants. Even if they never bloom, *Rhododendron 'Jade and Suede'* with its thick tan indumentum, and *R. anwheiense x. roxieanum*, are interesting all year round.

**BNARGS 2011 Program**

**September 3** - Member's Potpourri

**October 8** – Morning Program to Be Announced - Joyce Hemingson - Rock Garden Bulbs

**November 5** - William Cullina - Woodland Gardening

**SQUISHABLES**

**OR**

**DO WE REALLY NEED TO WALK ON PLANTS?**

Recently in the wide world of horticulture there seems to be an explosion of persons wanting to walk on their plants. They come looking for plants expressly so that they can step on them. As a hardworking grower who does her best to produce thriving pretty plants, this is a perplexing phenomenon.

You would think we would all have learned our lesson with grass. Lawns I mean. We, in New England especially, seem to come from a long line of turf worshippers harking back I’m sure to the homeland of the pilgrims. England is by nature a damp and misty land of glorious emerald swards. I can actually see why homesick pioneers would want to transplant that aspect of the landscape onto these shores. But just think what it entails. We have acid soil so we apply lime. We walk on the lawn so we need to aerate. (Have you seen those sandals for the purpose with spikes on the soles?) We edge, we feed, and we water. Boy do we water, And as these plants, these little blades of grass stretch and reach upwards, tender young and green, that is the moment we come along and chop their
heads off. Well, more accurately, we cut them in half. Not once. But many times over the course of a long, long growing season. Not only that but we keep feeding and watering just to keep cutting the poor things in half. And we use dirty, noisy, smoke spewing machines to do it. (As a practical aside, and as an eco plea; cool season grasses will go happily dormant for the duration of the long hot summer. They will revive like magic with the cool autumnal rains.)

Back in the British Isles they used to let sheep and cows do the cutting. They did a very good job of trimming the grass. But these animals didn’t stop there. In order to keep the livestock from eating their other ornamentals they had to invent the Ha-ha. Or, more specifically, a man named Charles Bridgeman did (according to Horace Walpole.) The Ha-ha is a trench in the landscape that functions like a moat protecting part of the garden from the munching teeth of the animals on the other side. One side of the trench is merely sloping, but the other one is so tall and steep that a cow or sheep cannot climb out. This trench is also pretty close to invisible from the house or garden; sometimes looking just like a little fold in the meadow if it is visible at all. They say it was so named because of the reaction of guests at having their walk interrupted by this ingenious folly.

In the 1830’s a man named Edwin Beard Budding from Stroud, England invented the first mechanical lawn mower. He worked in a textile mill, which had in use a machine to shear the nap on velvet. Which reminded Budding of grass, and the rest is history. And it seems poetically correct somehow that the lawn mower should have come from Britain, the home of tennis, while Scotland claims golf; both sporting pastimes intended to happen on grass. The English also cherished their “bowling greens” and games of croquet. I personally suspect that this was the time period when all of this cultivating of plant life simply in order to trample it began.

Back here in the twenty first century people already have grass to abuse, and, tiring of that, have been thrashing about looking for another target. They like the idea of beautifully paved surfaces with nice crevices and cracks in which they can plant precious blooming things so they can invite friends over and have a cocktail party on top of them. They look at a cute, diminutive plant, an alpine for instance, and ask: “How much traffic can it take?” This is indeed a very strange part of my job; explaining to people that miniature plants from the mountains don’t prefer high heels and tables and chairs scraped over their crowns. People, in their turn, are bewildered why this should be so. They believe that “plant material” should welcome the repeated pressure of our feet since we are offering them a lovely home. Maybe humans have been living with wall-to-wall carpeting for too long a time. When my foot comes down on something unexpectedly soft I leap back, fearful that what is beneath me is alive, like a cushion
plant or a pet’s tail. This built in reaction of mine seems to be out-of-date.

But even worse than this there now appear to be sellers out there who have latched on to this new proclivity of homeowners who want to walk on plants. Anything, it seems, that is cute and small goes on the list. Things that aren’t hardy, things that are brittle or too big, things that will prove to be invasive, things that will squish. Does anybody do a “squish test?” Succulents get slimy once squashed, sedums and sempervivums turn to jelly if stomped. On this list you will find Armeria, Draba, Dianthus, Erigeron, Erodium, Gypsophila, Isotoma, Hutchinsia, Leontopodium, Leptinella, Petrohagia, Potentilla, Raoulia, Scutellaria, Trifolium and Veronica among many, many more. If you go ahead and imagine any tiny plant in flower subjected to foot traffic, well, it is hard to imagine a blossom surviving. I once had a customer pester me for a low-growing plant to fill a very shady and rarely used path. Apparently grass would not even grow there. After going over and exhausting countless options he suddenly latched onto the idea of English Ivy. Turned out, though, that twice a week he needed to drive his riding mower through there. Took me a little while to explain why wheels and vines are not compatible. I told him he may have to be content with bluestone paving. He pondered that for a moment, then came back with: “How thick would the bluestone have to be, to handle the weight of my riding mower and me?” Not knowing the weight of his mower or him, and not having taken any classes on the tolerances of bluestone paving, I had to admit I had no idea.

For better or for worse I know of 2 plants that do fairly well with a limited amount of traffic on or near them. For full sun it is the tinier thymes. If Bees make you nervous, there is just nothing to be done about that. For shade, part shade, and even sun: Lysimachia japonica ‘Minutissima’ cannot be beat. It even covers itself with little lemon flowers, is perfectly flat and tight and will seed about, helping to fill in the cracks. It has one drawback that is sometimes a deal breaker for people. It greens up relatively late in the spring. Just when everything else has been bursting with exuberance and growth this ground cover remains obstinately brown. It stays brown just long enough to convince you that you have completely lost it. Then it surges forward. You will simply need a little patience for that moment in time.

Against my better judgment, here is a trick when planting path and patio crevices. If you position the plants so that their crowns are below the level of the paving then the full weight of a footstep will not be landing on the crown. The foliage will still progress in the cracks and spill over onto stones, so the latter will remain vulnerable to heavy trampling. But this way the core of the plants will remain relatively unscathed. When you plant so that the crowns are at or above pavement level they will be forced to bear the full brunt of damage. Another little fact worth mentioning: plants grown in full sun will probably be sturdier. They will stay tighter and denser compared to plants growing in a shade or half shade environment which will tend to become etiolated and thus more tender and vulnerable to squashing.

A couple other candidates, not necessarily for walking on except, perhaps, by accident now and then, are as follows: Arabis x sturii, Dianthus freynii, Stachys densiflora ‘Alba’, and Veronica allionii. These are reliable, sturdy, uncomplaining little groundcovers that are very attractive all season long, in flower and out.
You see, I do actually understand the desire to have plants adpressed to rocks and picturesquely filling in crevices. I am a rock gardener, after all. But this appetite for bending living things to our designing needs smacks to me of the worst kind of consumerism. Like someone ordering stain resistant fabric or washable paint. We share the planet with living things and they deserve our respect. Far from accepting our footsteps, many rare plants only some of the time agree to cohabitate with us, and that, after much bending and accommodating on our parts to meet their requirements.

And something else, what if we did live in a “perfect world” where everything lovely could be stepped on? What would that say about our ability to appreciate beauty? Funny, I receive practically no calls from people who want to sit on their shrubs. Why should so many want to stand on their alpines?

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Lori Chips © 2-5-2011

**GROWING PEONIES FROM SEED**

**TEXT BY HARVEY WRIGHTMAN AND IMAGES BY ESTHER WRIGHTMAN**

We started growing peonies from wild collected, Josef Halda seed ~ 15 years ago. Regardless of the species, they can be handled in a similar fashion. Early on I would soak the seed in 35% hydrogen peroxide – a very strong bleaching agent that will soften the seed coat. Leaving the seed in for ~ 10 – 30 minutes is sufficient. Planted in a some standard seedling mix, the seeds will swell, forming a a small radicle (root only) during the cold months of fall and winter. Germination will happen the following spring. In later years, I have changed over to the standard I use for almost all the seed I receive – soaking in GA-3 until the seed swells. The only extra step is rubbing the coat of the peony seed on sandpaper to break through the hard, waxy cuticle. I’m not sure if the GA-3 is necessary, but it doesn’t hurt. Germinating seedlings should be left in their pots for at least 1 full growing season – meaning they can be transplanted into individual pots in the fall if so desired. Otherwise, leave them in the original pots, but fertilize with some slow-release pellets for another season. The larger the roots are, the better the transplant will be. Like peony divisions, you can handle them easily in the autumn, leaving them bare-root for hours, even days, without harm. Like other Ranunculaceae, peonies do not like pot-growing. A mix based on composted bark with added grit and sterilized loam works best – addition of loam really helps. They are “feeders” and will respond to fertilizer. Such as a general purpose 15-15-15, preferably in slow release form. Pot grown for ~ 2- 3 years, they will be big enough for garden planting. In the garden, heavier, loamy soils are definitely preferred. From pots, they can be planted almost anytime as conditions are favorable.
Collecting your own seed is lots of fun, but be aware that hybrids may occur. With the woody peonies this is less a concern as most are derivatives of *Paeonia suffruticosa*. The herbaceous species are more of a problem; indeed in nature hybrids occur between different species growing in proximity. In the garden you may have to take isolation measures if you wish to have pure seed.

The seed pods themselves are very decorative, having a thick, corky capsule that splits open to reveal the shiny, black (or dark brown) seed. Brilliant red “seeds” are barren. Don’t keep them. They do add a splash of color.

Besides the pleasure one derives from growing plants from seed, there is the added knowledge that they will be virus free — this is a big problem in the industry. Josef Halda, whose numerous trips to China were funded by specialist growers in the Netherlands, commented once that these growers told him that the seed grown stock was so vigorous that they went on a crash program to clean-up their old “named cultivar” stock. They kept only the best of the old stock, putting it through tissue culture. Inferior varieties they simply trashed. The new stock was that much better.

PFG

PUTTING IN A ROCK GARDEN WATER FEATURE

TEXT, IMAGES AND WATER FEATURE BY JOE PAWLAK

Joe sent me 4 photographs of his project, which you will find below. I thought that such an impressive result deserved a bit of enhancement, so those of us for whom hanging a painting is a huge challenge could really appreciate what Joe had to do to get this job done, and done well.

Peter,
At this point, I'm relieved it's over. Started out with 2 formal quotes from water specialty contractors, $4,000.00 and $5,000.00. NO! Plan B was ME. Took the old water feature apart, leaving only the pond. Then I bought 4(8’x6”x6) pressure-treated landscape timbers and started to visualize how I wanted it to look and what it would take, materials-wise, to construct. Also bought the rubber liner and another, higher-capacity pump to move the water.

I cut, notched, and assembled the 6x6’s to create the back corner wall which holds the upper pond and the twin spillways for the two water courses,
one going left and the other right. Then I went to
the local landfill to get the fill material I needed
to create the upper pond and the water courses,
about two trips. Of course, there was also the
scavenging process for all the rocks which went
into the center section, the spillways, and the
water courses themselves. They required several
trips to my daughter's house and the landfill, in
addition to frequent roadside stops.

After the two watercourses were laid out,
formed up and the rubber liner cut and put in
place, I decided I didn't like the left water course
so I took it apart, went back to the landfill for 3
more loads of screened material and re-
positioned and lengthened it. Then I re-installed
additional rubber liner, filled the whole thing
with water, installed the two pumps and turned it
on to look for leaks...which I found, through
process of elimination. Fixed them, mostly, and
installed all of the rocks and small stones,
pebbles in the water courses and the larger
stones and dirt/fill on the sloping exterior banks
of the water courses and stuck in/planted various
specimens in crevices and openings wherever I
could fit them.

At this time, it's about 95%+ complete with only
some little odds and ends left to do...some
plantings here and there. If I get real energetic, I
may try to track down that small leak in the
system.

The whole project took about 3 weeks, working
at a "leisurely" pace, what comes with
retirement.

JP

AUGUST MUSINGS

I’ll be brief, both because it’s Wednesday night
and I have to get the copy to Elisabeth tonight,
and because I’m running out of space. Layout
rules when you’re almost done, and I’m almost
done.

As you most certainly know by now, our next
meeting is the Big Plant Sale. Not only is it our
major fund raiser for the gardening year, but it is
the best opportunity for many of our members to get their hands on some really choice plants, ones they’ve been longing for all year. When I first joined, Norman and Geoffrey brought enough seedlings to satisfy even the greediest of our membership, but the past few years have seen both diminished numbers and diminished selection. I don’t know whether it’s because we don’t grow as many plants from seed, or simply because we just don’t get around to potting up those spare seedlings and volunteers. Regardless, let’s try to bring a few special ones to the sale, so that all of us get a chance to bring home something really special. Going through my garden these past few days I found several Eriogonums brought to the sale on several occasions by Anne Spiegel, a few Penstemons brought in Elisabeth, a Campanula or two from Robin’s garden, and two really beautiful *Paeonia obovata* that Dean brought in 4 or 5 years ago. Let’s share the wealth, please!

I’ve had the opportunity to get a look at the Fall Quarterly, and it’s spectacular! There is a really varied selection of articles, and I believe that the Journal alone is worth the price of a NARGS membership. So for those of you who have failed to renew, please do it, and for those of you who have never joined, it’s time. We need NARGS to flourish and expand, and without the support of all of us, it’s going to be very, very difficult. For 15 years I’ve had the honor of spending time with so many wonderful people, most of whom I’d never have met if not for the Berkshire Chapter, which wouldn’t have existed if not for NARGS. Go to nargs.org and make the relatively inexpensive commitment of $30 for NARGS membership.

PFG

Cliff Desch, our good friend and long time BNARGS Chapter member, is undergoing major surgery next week in Boston. He informed some of us at the last meeting about the situation, and given his openness about the surgery, I thought that many of you would be interested in knowing. As he recovers, he would welcome cards and letters, so send them to his home address. Cliff’s address is: 298 Mathews Road, Conway, MA 01341. He’ll be in the hospital for 7 days, and then will begin his full recovery at home in Conway.

And Just As A Reminder……

**The Northwestern Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society Invites you to the 2012 NARGS Annual Meeting March 9, 10, 11 2012 At the Everett Holiday Inn Roadside Botanizing East of the Cascade Mountains**

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Erica Schumacher
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Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
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Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Please contact the Editor before reprinting articles