

Pacific Iris

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris



The Sydney B. Mitchell Medal 2018



This year the American Iris Society has awarded its highest honour available to Pacific Coast Native Iris, the Sydney B. Mitchell Medal, to Terry Aitken of Salmon Creek Garden, for his 2010 registration 'Pacific Tapestry'.

More details on Terry's career in the iris world, as well as details on the origins of his award winning iris on pages 6-8.

Cover photo—A seedling in the editor's garden

SPCNI MEMBERSHIP

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises (SPCNI) is a section of the American Iris Society (AIS).

Membership in AIS is recommended but not required for membership in SPCNI.

	US	Overseas
Annual, paper	\$15.00	\$18.00
Triennial, paper	\$40.00	\$48.00
Annual, digital	\$7.00	\$7.00
Triennial, digital	\$19.00	\$19.00

Lengthier memberships are no longer available.

Please send membership fees to the SPCNI Treasurer.

Use Paypal to join SPCNI online at <http://pacificcoastiris.org/JoinOnline.htm> (SEE NOTE BELOW)

International currencies accepted

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARY/TREASURER
ABOUT DUES NOTICES**

Members who get paper copies, please keep track of the expiration date of your membership, which is printed on your Almanac address label. We include a letter with your last issue, and may follow this with an email notice, if you have email.

Members who get digital copies will get an email message after receiving the last issue. If you have a question about your membership expiration date, contact the Secretary. Also contact the Secretary if your contact information changes in any way, including phone, e-mail and mailing addresses.

AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

Membership in AIS is not required for SPCNI membership, but it is encouraged and may be of considerable benefit to gardeners new to growing iris.

Send membership renewals or inquiries to the AIS Membership Secretary, or enroll on line at :
<http://www.irises.org/member.htm>.

Tom Gormley - AIS Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 177, DeLeon Springs, FL 32130.

Phone and fax: 386-277-2057 E-mail: aismemsec@irises.org

MEMBERSHIP RATES, AIS

	US	Overseas
Annual, single	\$25.00	\$30.00
Annual, dual	\$30.00	\$35.00
Triennial, single	\$60.00	\$65.00
Triennial, dual	\$75.00	\$80.00
Life, single	\$1000.00	NA
Life, dual	\$1500.00	NA
E-membership	\$15.00	everywhere

PLEASE ADVISE SPCNI & AIS OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS

PACIFIC IRIS DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

The opinions expressed in articles and letters appearing in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or beliefs of the SPCNI. Remarks about specific irises, companies, products and services shall not be considered endorsements by the SPCNI.

NOTICE RE PAYPAL

When you order seeds or extend memberships via PayPal, please send a message separately to the appropriate email address (seedex@pacificcoastiris.org or orders@pacificcoastiris.org). More often than we like, PayPal does not send a confirmation message to these addresses.

When you send a separate email, include the date that you placed an order, or the date when you updated your membership. Then the Secretary or Seed Chair can quickly find the missing transaction.

SOCIETY FOR PACIFIC COAST NATIVE IRISES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President, Bob Sussman
12142 Alison Drive, Santa Rosa Valley, CA 93012
(805) 523-8604 e-mail: matilijanurseryweb@gmail.com

First Vice President, Michael Monninger
4861 Brookhill Terrace, Riverside, CA 92509
(909) 361-3177 e-mail: regomdm@yahoo.com

Second Vice President, Position open

Immediate Past President, Debby Cole
7417 92nd Place SE, Mercer Island, WA 98040
(206) 232-7745 e-mail: dcthree@juno.com

Secretary-Treasurer, Kathleen Sayce
PO Box 91, Nahcotta, WA 98637
(360) 665-5292 e-mail: ksayce@willapabay.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Editor, Gareth Winter
64 Michael Street, Masterton, New Zealand 5810
(00646) 377-5373 e-mail: wintergareth53@gmail.com

Historian/Archivist, Richard Richards
5500 Aztec DR #510, La Mesa CA 91942
(619) 464-2180 e-mail: mongo2u@cox.net

Recorder, Kenneth Walker
1391 Santa Clara Ave., Concord, CA 94518
(925) 825-2350 e-mail: kenww001@astound.net

Seed Distribution, Louise Guerin
2200 E Orange Grove Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91104
(626) 808-1986 e-mail: siber@siber-sonic.com

Trek Chairman, Position open

Web Manager, Bob Seaman
7051 South 126th St., Seattle, WA 98178
(206) 235-7358 e-mail: kcisbob@leonineiris.com

In this issue:

Editor's notes

Gareth Winter 3

Simple Division

Bob Sussman 4-5

Weaving a Pacific Tapestry

Terry Aitken 6-8

Now Showing— The Clincher Hybridizing Pacific Coast Irises

Bob Sussman 9-10

Talking turquoise

Garry Knipe 11

Some administrative stuff...

12

David Douglas and his iris

Gareth Winter 13-15

Mike Starrhill photographs of PCI

Mike Starrhill 16-18



Douglas Iris at Point Reyes
Photo—Garry Knipe

**PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE
FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER**

Prices listed are for SPCNI members in the US.
For out of US, please add \$3.00.

PRINT ARTICLES

Check List of named PCI species and cultivars, 2005
Lists species and named cultivars and hybrids to 2005. \$9.00
If ordering both print and CD checklist versions together,
\$14.00

A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises

Victor A. Cohen, 1967

Reprint of British Iris Society 1967 booklet, describing
species, sub-species and distributions. 40 pages, \$8.00

A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises Lee W. Lenz,
1958 Reprint of Aliso journal article 5.5x8.5, 72 pages. \$8.00

Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz, 1959. Reprint of Aliso article 72 pages, \$8.00

If ordering both of Dr Lenz's reprints, \$14.00

All three volumes, \$20.00

Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris

Lewis & Adele Lawyer, 1986. Fall 1986 Almanac, 22 pages,
\$4.50

Almanac Index, 2005,

includes the following indices: author, subject, species,
hybrids, \$4.00, or download free PDF from the SPCNI
website.

COMPACT DISCS

SPCNI Photo CD, 2009.

Compiled by Ken Walker, this CD includes 423 photos of
species and hybrids, neatly labeled. \$9.00.

Welcome to the Beauty of Pacific Coast Iris CD, 2009.

A 15-minute presentation with a concise overview of PCN
species, early hybridizers, Mitchell Medal winners,
gardens landscaped with PCIs, and culture tips.

Ready to play for individuals or groups, \$9.00

USERS GROUP ON YAHOO:

SPCNI has a users group site at

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/PacificIris/>.

Members are encouraged to join this group, which provides
a simple online way to ask questions about finding and
growing PCIs. To join this site, you must register with
Yahoo, but do not need a Yahoo e-mail account. You may
post photos here, check on scheduled activities, and contact
other SPCNI members.

Editor's notes

What an interesting spring we have had in
New Zealand. An early one, with more hot flushes
than a menopausal woman, was followed by cool
and wet weather. The breeding season was terrible,
with lots of crosses simply not taking. The usual
late spring chore of removing a multitude of
unwanted seedpods was nowhere near as onerous
as usual—even the bees do not seem to have been
out and about in the iris patch.

This issue of *Pacific Iris* is a slender one, as less copy
was forwarded than we usually receive. We are
always on the lookout for your viewpoint on
growing Pacific Coast Iris, whether you are growing
in PCI heaven on the temperate parts of the west
coast of North America, or struggling away in
unfamiliar climes. Please let us know how you are
going so we can share your fortune, good or bad,
with other members.

Our President Bob Sussman has let us know about
the processes he follows when creating new
varieties, an important aspect of the work of his
commercial nursery. He has also given us some
good advice on the vexing problem of division—
a perennial problem with most PCI varieties.

Terry Aitken of Salmon Creek Garden won this
year's Sydney B. Mitchell Medal with his seedling
'Pacific Tapestry'. He tells us about his life in irises,
and how 'Pacific Tapestry' came about.

Perhaps the most popular of all PCI species is the
Douglas Iris. In this issue we have a look at this
little charmer and at the intrepid Scottish plant
hunter whose name is recalled, both in the scientific
name *Iris douglasiana*, and in the common name.

We also catch up with Garry Knipe and have a look
at some of his wonderful turquoise blue seedlings.

Well-known irisarian Mike (Unser) Starrhill has
contributed some marvelous PCI photographs, all
of named varieties.

Arohanui

Gareth

Simple division

To every thing there is a season, as SPCNI President Bob Sussman explains.

If you've done any gardening you know there is a right time of year for everything, and I might add a wrong time for most things as well.

In Southern California fall is the right time of year to divide Pacific Coast Iris. This prime period goes on from mid-October through to the end of November. The timing is crucial - before or after the peak period it is nowhere near as successful.

This varies a little bit from year to year as well as geographic location. Up the coast it might be a little earlier and in the Southern Hemisphere the best time is exactly six months later, as one might guess.

It is important to divide Pacific Coast Iris clumps every four to six years, as the plant will start to lose its vigor and the flowers will tend to be fewer and smaller.

Okay, now how does all this work for us, with many clumps growing in 5-gallon pots?



First we figure out which ones we need to divide. We keep an eye out for multiple fans – groups of leaves. Once we have decided which clumps need to be split up we make sure that there are plenty of labels for each of the clumps, because it is really easy to get them mixed up at this stage – not something you want to have happen in a commercial nursery!

In the garden, you can carefully dig up your Pacific Coast Iris clump (or take it out of the 5-gallon pot). You will need to dig deep enough to make sure you get all the new “white” roots. About a foot should be fine. Gently shake off all the soil and begin separating them and they should look as shown below.



You can see in the clumps above, the natural divisions/rhizomes with the new white roots coming down indicating they are beginning to grow.

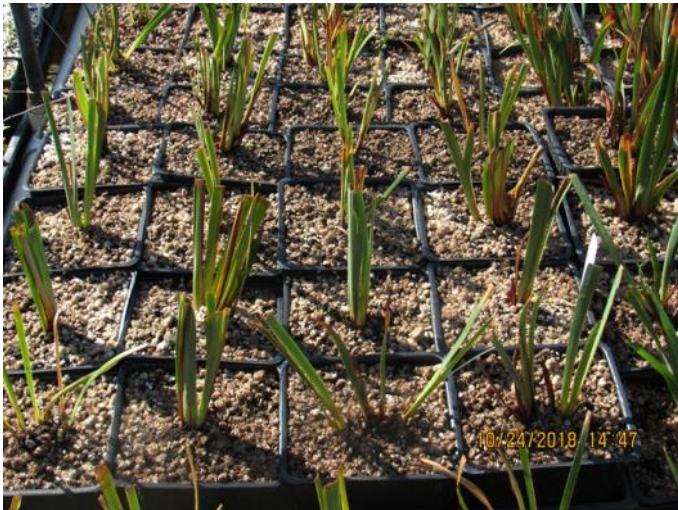
Third, after your rhizomes have been separated soak them in a mild bleach/water solution about 1 or 2 oz/gallon of water.

Let them sit for a couple of minutes to sterilize the tear in the rhizome, then pull them out of the water and rinse them off with clean water and begin potting or planting them out.

Overleaf is what they should look like before you plant them out or put them up.



You are now ready to plant or put them in a pot/ container. We put them in small containers with a very well draining mix and give them the secret drench of the anti-fungal and growing solution. You can try diluted hydrogen peroxide (1 oz/gallon) and some balanced fertilizer and that will work just fine too. Water twice a week - since we use a very well-draining mix - or weekly for heavier soils



Keep a close eye on the plants as they grow over the next few months, making sure they do not dry out. Also take care to ensure the named divisions do not get mixed up - you may not want clumps of unidentified irises waiting for you.

If you have done everything right, and if the weather has been kind to you, you should be rewarded with healthy and happy clumps of your favorite irises.

And even better—they should be in flower by the following spring, and will be good-sized clumps by the next fall.



All photographs by Bob Sussman.



'Fallen Plums'
Photo—Mike Starrhill

Weaving a Pacific Tapestry

Words : Terry Aitken

This year's Sydney B. Mitchell Medal the highest honour for Pacific Coast Iris goes to 'Pacific Tapestry', a child of 'Bar Code', introduced by Salmon Creek's Terry Aitken. He explains how it all came about.

Immediately after World War Two, when I was about eight years old, my father bought a home on the banks of the Red River and I got to help clean up the landscape. That was my introduction to working in the dirt – and did I think it was fun!



'Pacific Tapestry'

Photo Terry Aitken

I think I was born with a green thumb, as a part of my heritage. My grandfather was a landscape engineer who helped build a barge canal with locks across Scotland. He moved to Canada in the late 1800s where he designed all of the city parks and public cemeteries in Winnipeg.

There was a vegetable farm next door and I began working there – for fun – when I was only ten. They finally they started paying me when I was about 12 years old – the princely sum of a bag of jelly beans.

What I came to realize was that none of my other relatives had the green thumb obsession like I did.

However, on my mother's side of the family there was a huge farm, so I guess I got the green thumb genes from both sides.

Barbara and I met in High School and we were married a few years later when I was an architectural draftsman, and we later moved to the USA where I worked as a draftsman.

Bennett introduced me to George Shoop and we visited Schreiner's Gardens - an incredible 250 acres of irises.

With these new iris friends, the hybridizing bug struck hard. We found the four acres that we now occupy and the iris display garden evolved. We soon noticed a common complaint among the visitors - "Isn't it too bad the irises only bloom for two weeks". Taking that on board, I expanded our collection until we grew all types that would grow in the northwest.



Salmon Creek Irises— photo: Intelligent Design Garden Consulting ex Facebook

After working for a while as a draftsman I realized that I needed to go to college and I eventually graduated in architecture. We built a home in Minnesota, and in the landscaping stage, I purchased a collection of irises from Schreiner's Gardens. I joined the Minnesota Iris Society and AIS but I was too busy working overtime to participate.

A few years later, with no family ties in the USA, I decided that a warmer climate would be more conducive to my green thumb obsession. We moved to Vancouver, Washington and contacted Bennett Jones.

We now have iris bloom from earliest spring until fall freeze up and we try to breed all of them for extended bloom.

Pacific Coast Irises were a special challenge because they flowered at the busiest bloom time in spring and we found it difficult to focus on hybridizing them. I collected seed pods but only from my most favored cultivars - and Joe Ghio's spectacular hybrids were always among those I loved the most!

The first cultivar we introduced was 'Pacific Rim'. It was actually a seedling that Bennett Jones had grown and we used a name that I had on my reserve list. Later, I was fortunate to see 'Pacific Rim' blooming in a garden in the South Island of New Zealand. It has proven to be a real survivor! This won the Mitchell Medal in 1998.



'Pacific Rim'—Photo: unknown ex Iris Wiki

The first step in the selection process was to transplant them, but this was always difficult – in fact it was frequently a fatal experience. However, the survivors were then analyzed for uniqueness, then transplanted again just to make sure they would survive.

'Pacific Tapestry' was selected using the same routine. Since almost all of the PCIs that I grow are from Joe Ghio, the bumble bees or other pollination assistants don't have much to choose from except Joe's wonderful plants. How could I go wrong?

This pattern of selection is not exclusive to PCIs - spurias and Louisianas suffer a similar fate. With all of these I do try to make a "legitimate" pod and pollen cross on occasion! The odds of success do improve. Thrip-pollinated flowers would give you a "self" cross and a better guess at the pedigree.

A new seedling in my yard has me mystified. It was a lone survivor in a lineout of 100 seedlings. That plant is incredibly vigorous with large flowers, solid black in color and with no signal pattern!

Could the bees have brought Siberian pollen to the scene of the crime?

Stay tuned!

At the moment we have set aside the name 'Midnight Marvel' for this beauty.

Editor's note: Terry has been very modest. He and Barbara are both life members and Emeritus Judges of the American Iris Society (AIS), and have served the AIS in many capacities.

Terry is past president and past bulletin editor of the AIS. In addition, he has been honored with many top awards for his work in iris hybridizing, (medals in seven different categories), as well as the Hybridizer's Medal, Distinguished Service Medal, Gold Medal for service to AIS, and the Foster Memorial Medal awarded by the British Iris Society.

In recent years Terry has had more time to devote to the iris nursery, and has also become more active in the American Orchid Society and the breeding of orchids.



Seedling to be called 'Midnight Marvel' - Photo - Terry Aitken

Now Showing—The Clincher!

Hybridizing Pacific Coast Irises-----what to expect

Words and photos: Bob Sussman

Years ago we started growing Pacific Coast Iris as part of the menu of California native plants at our nursery. I really didn't know much about them. We bought what we refer to as "liner" stock and potted them into larger 1-gallon nursery pots and sold what we could. We grew no hybrids except maybe 'Canyon Snow' – the rest were *I. douglasiana* and random hybrids from another nursery, which were mostly derived from *I. douglasiana*.

The dawn of the internet provided all kinds of information. Among the things we learned was that that you (or I) could make your own PCI hybrids!

My first seedlings looked just like their parents - I ended up with more *I. douglasiana* and while *I. douglasiana* can have a fair amount of variation in the flowers mine didn't.

I found out more information on the Web about 11 different species that could cross (Kathleen Sayce did some working showing that there were more species than the original 11 – but that is another subject). This information combined with a lot more details from the web showing pictures of spectacular hybrids that others created and a visit from Dr Rich Richards (one of the iris legends) resulted in more research and work on my part.

Dr Richards pointed out that if you hybridize with one species you won't get anything much different even though there can be different flowering characteristics.

This may be obvious to people of average smarts but not to me. As the saying goes I learn slow but I learn good. That was enough for me. I ordered different hybrids from several mail order nurseries, and bought Pacific Coast Iris seeds from the SPCNI Seed Exchange.

Then off I went.



It takes a couple of years from cross to flower so after a few years we had some improved results! However crossing/creating and growing /maintaining are all different things and we had to work out how to hold our new babies over the hot Southern Californian summer—our nursery's location is about 20 degrees (Fahrenheit) hotter than the nearest place PCIs grow wild.

Finally, a few years and a lot of dollars later we got a sufficient number of bugs out of the process and again off we went. I began to notice that the offspring of given cross parents generally produced similar siblings. On the previous page are a few pictures from a cross, taken a few years ago between 'Clincher' and 'Now Showing'.

Clearly the siblings have a lot of family resemblance. My experience has taught me that this is more often the case than not, but of course, this is not always what happens.

Next, we collected seeds from the first iris shown. The seeds were "selfed" (the meaning of this is just that they were self-pollinated). The resultant flowers showed greater variation from their siblings than the siblings of the first set of original "crosses". Actually, I expected flowers that were reddish and no blues but there were some surprises

In total there were about 20 seedlings from this group and 14 didn't flower this last year. That is not uncommon, and of course gives us something to look forward to and most survived our warm summer in a nursery pot. Survival in our summer heat may well be the most important characteristic. If it won't survive in the nursery I won't have anything to sell and it probably won't survive in our local gardens either.

I guess the moral of the story is that if you have a hybrid with lots of genetic material in its past you'll have lots of interesting offspring. It's all fun!

Second generation of seedlings showing diversity photos—Bob Sussman



Talking turquoise

Garry Knipe's chase for the elusive pure turquoise Pacific Coast Iris



Some results from Californian breeder Garry Knipe's program to intensify the turquoise flash sometimes found in PCIs and to spread the color further through the flower.

Photos: Garry Knipe

Some administrative stuff ...

Where do our members live?

Words by Kathleen Sayce

Looking through the membership list this fall, we had 212 members before the mailing went out, including eleven long overdue renewals from last spring. Many members renewed promptly with the last issue of *Pacific Iris*; thank you to all who did so. I will be dropping overdue names from the list before the next mailing, and sending renewal notes to all members whose subscriptions expire by the end of this year.

As in past years, your renewal date is on the mailing label if you get a print copy of *Pacific Iris*, and a renewal insert will be in the envelope. Digital members will get renewal email reminders.

North America has 169 members, 160 in the US, and 9 in Canada.

Australia and New Zealand have 15 members, 8 in AU, and 7 in NZ.

The British Isles have 11 members.

Europe has eight members, three in France, one each in Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Switzerland.

Russia has one member.

In Asia, there are five members, four in Japan and one in Taiwan.

In the US, California has 72 members, Oregon 26 and Washington 36. Arizona has four. Fourteen states have 1-2 members, well scattered across the continent. Most Canadian members are in British Columbia.

New members

Margie Brandon, Grants Pass, OR
Loretta Figueroa, Mill Valley, CA
Susan Hough, Four Marks, Hampshire, UK
Jancy Lovey, Fresno, CA
Laurie Myers, San Mateo, CA
Linnea Wolfrom Polo, Petaluma, CA
Jennifer Robertson, Los Altos, CA
Stefanie Rosemond, San Francisco, CA
Louis (Greg) Tiffany, Seattle, WA

Call for assistance

In the last issue we called for someone to fill the position of SPCNI 2nd VP.

Unfortunately no one responded to the call so we are asking for your help again.

You will be the president-in-waiting, one step down from the VP.

Your task is to make yourself familiar with the society and how it operates, just in case you need to step in.

David Douglas and his iris

Words—Gareth Winter

One of the most popular of all Pacific Coast Iris is the Douglas Iris, a “common and attractive wildflower” from areas near the Central and Northern coasts of California, extending up into central Oregon.

Along a narrow coastal band, usually in sight of the ocean and often on bluffs and cliffs, this most extensive of all Pacific Coast Iris species is a popular garden plant, and heavily involved in the ancestry of most garden hybrid Pacific Coast Iris.



Douglas Iris near Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco

Photo—Gareth Winter

The Douglas Iris was well-known to the indigenous peoples, its leaves providing a valuable cordage.

A rope was made from the fibres which occur only on the outer rims of the leaves – huge bundles of leaves were collected in the fall, being stored until it could be processed, by taking just the external fibre, the rest of the leaf being discarded.

Using a process familiar to many indigenous people across the world with different plants, the fibres were detached from the rest of the leaf by women using a small piece of mussel shell, or perhaps abalone. Once detached, the leaves were cleaned of all tissues until a fine silk-like fibre was obtained.

Once the fibre was isolated, the men twisted the thread on their bare thighs with a rapid rolling action. It was a time-consuming process – reportedly a twelve-foot long rope took nearly six weeks to make. Despite the effort needed to produce the thread, it was highly valued and commonly used for making fishing nets, bags and game snares.

The plant had other uses too. Some of the indigenous peoples made flour from iris seeds, while others used the leaves to cover acorn meal before pouring water over it to leach out the tannic acid.

It also had a number of medicinal uses. A poultice made from the rhizome was used on various sores, while the dry root was sometimes used as an internal medicine, although great care needed to be taken. It was usually used in combination with other herbs. Interestingly, modern tests have shown that the leaves do have slight bactericidal properties.



Douglas Iris, Arcata Airport, Del Norte Co, CA

Photo—Gareth Winter

The flower color is variable, but it is usually from light blue-violet shading towards dark purple. There are stands of white flowers to be found, and very rarely some cream to yellow flowered forms. These flowers were used to adorn dance wreaths by the Kashaya Pomo and steeped in hot water to make body paint by the Potter Valley Pomo.



A white Douglas Iris from Soulajule Reservoir, Marin County, CA

Photo—Gareth Winter

As might be expected from a plant adapted to growing in harsh conditions, when encountered on exposed coastal sites it forms large clumps of creeping rhizomes, sometimes comprised of a single clone that is hundreds of years old.

Most PCIs cross with each other, and *I. douglasiana* does so with abandon whenever it grows with other species that are better evolved to grow in shadier areas. Over the years many of these hybrids have been given names of their own – botanists argue over whether some should attain species status, but at the moment they are known by their common names.

Perhaps the best known of these are ‘Thompson’s Iris’, hybrids between *I. douglasiana* and *I. innominata* from the California/Oregon border area, and the ‘Marin Iris’ and ‘Santa Cruz Iris’, complex hybrids involving *I. douglasiana*, *I. fernaldii* and *I. macrosiphon*. These are found on the hillsides just north and south of the Golden Gate Bridge at San Francisco.

It was just south of here that the first European to recognise that *I. douglasiana* was a distinct species came across it. David Douglas was in the Monterey Bay area in the 1830s when he found it, although it seems likely that his great botanical rival, Archibald Menzies, may have been the first to collect its seed.



Douglas Iris growing on the coast at Point Reyes, CA

Photo—Garry Knipe

Born in Scone, Scotland in 1799, David Douglas started his working life serving a seven year apprenticeship as a gardener at Scone Palace, the seat of the Earl of Mansfield. At the completion of his training he attended a college in Perth to increase his scientific understanding of horticulture.

He then worked in Fife before moving to the Botanical Gardens of Glasgow University where he was able to attend botany lectures given by William Hooker, then professor of botany at the university, and later director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.



Botanical Gardens of Glasgow University

Hooker was impressed by the young Perthshire gardener and took him on a botanical expedition to the Highlands, following which he recommended him to the Royal Horticultural Society of London.

Douglas mounted three expeditions to North America, the first to the east coast in June 1823. The following year he went to the Pacific Northwest, remaining away for three years on what was his most successful foray into the New World.

He is perhaps best known today, apart from the charming Douglas Iris, for his collection of many conifers, including Ponderosa pine, *Pinus ponderosa*, Monterey pine, *Pinus radiata*, (now the mainstay of New Zealand plantation forestry,) the Sitka spruce, *Picea sitchensis*, and the Noble fir, *Abies procera*. He also found *I. tenax* during his trips to Oregon.

Ironically, the tree that his name is most closely associated with, the versatile Douglas fir, which is strictly speaking not a fir at all, bears the name of his great rival, Archibald Menzies, who first documented the tree on Vancouver Island in 1791.

The Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, is a favourite tree with foresters over much of the temperate zones of the world, popular because of its ease of culture and usefulness for joinery and construction. It has naturalised in parts of the world, including New Zealand where it is a pest plant in some areas.



David Douglas, plant explorer.

Douglas returned to the Pacific Northwest in 1830, discovering the iris that bears his name. On his way he stopped off in Hawaii, and in 1833 returned to spend the winter there. It was to be a fatal decision.

Climbing Mauna Kea, a sacred volcano, he fell into a pit trap and was gored to death by a bull that was also trapped there. He was 35 when he died. There were strong suspicions that he may have met his end at the hands of an escaped convict, but most researchers have concluded that his death, although terrible and very untimely, was the result of an accident.

Mike Starrhill photographs of PCI





Larger Than Life



Masked Man



Vineyard Gold



Upper Echelon

Mike Starrhill is an irisian based in Olympia, Washington who writes for the American Iris Society's blog 'World of Irises.' Perhaps best known for his love of Heritage Irises, he is also a keen PCI fan.

