



NEWS FROM

# SUMMER HILL

Winter/Spring 2004

## South Africa Plus

Ann and I didn't do much traveling this year - just a quick trip to Arizona and Utah. But, Ann and Holly had a great adventure in September and I've asked Ann to write about it.

Holly and I traveled to South Africa and Namibia in September. The entire trip was incredible, but our favorite was Namibia. Namibia was a German colony until WWI, then part of South Africa until sixteen or so years ago. It has only 1.8 million people, the majority living in the North where there is some moist land suitable for farming. Most of the country is desert, which is unique as it extends to the sea. Designs of sand become that of water. We flew in a small plane right above both, and a most incredible journey it was.

The Namib is the oldest desert in the world, and there we saw the "oldest plant in the world", *Welwitschia mirabilis*. This plant is very ugly, for it has two leaves, which look like many, as they are torn into shreds by the wind. The one we saw was 400 years old - it looked like a dead octopus. We have photos if anyone would like to see it. A few other plants here also had very long stories and tough lives.

We also visited an area called Sossusvlei, a most glorious place in mid-nowhere, a desert with the world's highest sand dunes which we climbed. Again, we have photos.

We visited Etosha, a game preserve, in a scrubby desert on a huge salt pan. We saw incredible game - wildebeest, zebra, oryx, impala, giraffe, dik-dik, eland and many elephants among others, also many birds. There were no plants in bloom but an acacia was just beginning; yellow pom-poms were the only bright color on a beige-

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## ADDITIONS ON THE WAY

### Believe It or Not

Believe it or not, Summer Hill will be having a web site, [www.summerhill-nursery.com](http://www.summerhill-nursery.com), up and running by the early spring season. This site will not only tell about our nursery and give information on the plants we grow but will also make it possible for you to see updated availability lists and send us orders on the web. Since this site will be open to the public, prices will not be included, but we plan on listing the names of our most prominent customers so that retail customers will know where they can purchase our plants. Since we are growing more and more rare and unusual plants, I feel this will be a great benefit to our customers as well as the retail public.

### Cold Winter

This certainly has been an extremely cold winter!! We at Summer Hill have experienced six below zero days in January, including one morning when it reached  $-10^{\circ}\text{F}$ . We believe that with our expanded winter protection program most of our plants should survive quite well but, of course, only time will tell. At least the cold came in January when the plants can take the cold the best. What we fear, and what we think gives us the most damage, is extreme cold early in the season, as we had a year ago with plus  $10^{\circ}\text{F}$  on Thanksgiving, or late freezes. Hopefully, the cold weather will be gone by spring so we will avoid the late freezes. Last summer, we managed to plant, in the ground, many of our new varieties to see how they respond to our climate. This year will certainly give them a good test. Let's hope this cold winter leaves us with an early and beautiful spring. We are due one.

This is a very short newsletter this year since I spent the month of January writing an Additions to the Plants We Grow. This will include all the plant varieties that we have added since the last full edition came out in 1995. I find it hard to believe, but we have added 325 "new" plants to our list since that time. Hopefully, the "Additions" will be in your hands before the spring season starts to answer your questions regarding any of these new varieties.

### Notes on Some Summer Hill People

At the CNLA Annual Meeting in January, Holly Johnson was elected President. I was about to say this is quite an honor, which it is, but it is also going to mean a lot of work this year as there are many legislative problems facing the nursery industry in Connecticut in 2004.

Although there have been many cases where fathers and sons have both been president of the Connecticut Association, I'm very proud to say that Holly and I are the first father and daughter to hold this post. I look back on my years as President and realize that she is facing far more difficulties and challenges than I had back in the early '70's.

John Nassif has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Nurserymen's Foundation. John has been very active in promoting several different fund raising programs for the Foundation, and he will be a fine addition to the Board.

Roger McNelly, Area Manager of our Rockland Lot, has left Summer Hill after twenty-seven years of service. He is going into the landscape business

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# WINTER/SPRING NEWSLETTER 2004

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gray canvas. Even the animals blend in. On our way from Etosha to the coast, Holly and I both had a chance to fly our plane!! The desert below illustrated the surreal beauty of this trip. We even flew UNDER flamingos.

In South Africa we visited the graceful, lovely wine country which had Dutch whitewashed villages, French plants (rosemary and lavender shrubs as large as our oldest rhododendrons), and African art. It was bizarre. We visited several private gardens including a protea farm. Protea is the national flower and was blooming wild, like our laurels in June, all over the country. They were huge platters of color all the way down to the Cape of Good Hope. It was amazing.

Wildflower areas in the North were not in bloom due to two years of bad drought. However, one garden, watered for viewing purposes, gave us the chance to see what we were missing. These bright expanses of primary color were breathtaking. Instead of flowers, we saw many ancient rock paintings, done by the San people.

We also visited Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden which has many planted areas, planned and labeled, climbing up to the forest on the mountainside, which they eventually hope to focus on to allow hiking in a natural setting.

Many plants in South Africa (there are more species there than anywhere else in the world) are found only there, in their specific locales. In addition to

this trip, I have been to Kenya and crossed North Africa (many years ago) with a backpack. I can say that Africa is like Alaska in its vast proportions, beyond any "normal" landscape. Be it the mountains and tundra of Alaska or the desert and upland plains of Africa, both are awesome in their scale and enormity. All are fascinating, but for plants, one must not miss South Africa. We brought books as there were too many plants to ever write about and remember. It is a horticulturists' dream come true.

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with his son Daniel, who is presently a student at Cobleskill majoring in landscape design. We thank Roger for his many years of service to the nursery and wish him and Daniel the very best in their new venture.

On a very sad note, Betty Allen, our Office Manager, lost her mother a week before Thanksgiving and then also lost her husband, Jack, after a long illness a week later. Betty has stayed on the job during a great deal of adversity and looks forward to the return of spring and all our customers.

## New Name for Nootka Cypress

I was reading through an old issue of The Plant Propagator the other day when I happened to see an article on the discovery of a new conifer species. It turns out this conifer was found in Vietnam, and its name is *Xanthocyparis vietnamensis*. This did not interest me too much, but I did read through the article and saw in the second paragraph the mention of *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* being related to this new conifer and that its name now is *Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*. Analysis has demonstrated that it is distinct from other members of the genus *Chamaecyparis*. It will be interesting to see how many years it takes before this becomes an accepted name to be used in the nursery industry.

## GOOD LUCK FOR A GREAT SPRING

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