

Frank Callahan

When Frank Callahan was an impressionable lad of ten his grandfather Walter LaMinter told him: “You are from a long line of pioneers, you need to go out and make discoveries.” Fortunately Frank took his grandfather’s advice and applied it to the plant world with a keen eye for seeing what others have overlooked. He is a leading nominator of National Champion Trees, having reported the largest individual tree for more than 80 species. He has discovered locations in Oregon for 35 species of native plants not formerly known in the state, mostly northern extensions of the California floristic province (see list on the NPSO website). With no formal botanical education, he has described two new species of *Calochortus*: *C. syntrophus* alone and *C. coxii* with Ray Godfrey. He is currently working on six as yet undescribed new taxa, three each in Oregon and California: *Calochortus umpquaensis* ssp. *confertus* (ined.), *Calochortus elegans* var. *crinisordinate* (ined.), *Chlorogalum pomeridianum* ssp. *austro-oreganus* (ined.), (in Oregon), *Calochortus tetrastratus* (ined.), *Calochortus argillosus* ssp. *maritimus* (ined.), *Calochortus argillosus* ssp. *mutabilis* (ined.) (California). Frank credits his mother, Muriel LaMinter Callahan, who has a professional degree in horticulture, with his early introduction to the plant world. With this background, he is self-taught, driven by an insatiable curiosity about all things botanical. In this way, Frank resembles a modern Thomas Howell, discovering and describing new species without funding and without an academic framework.

Franklin Theodore Callahan II was born in Bend, Oregon, on March 19, 1947 to Muriel and Frank T. Callahan. He attended St Francis of Assisi school in Bend, but as a born naturalist, had trouble fitting in with Catholic theology. His saving grace through those years was his artistic talent, which he shared by teaching other students. As a teenager, he developed a penchant for exploring, going on long hikes with his German shepherd, Jack. While hiking at Wake Butte (near Camp Abbot, now Sunriver), he discovered unusual plants that grew only on welded tuffs. Dr. Gettman, a teacher at Bend High School, became his mentor and encouraged botanical collecting trips to Mt. Bachelor, Broken Top and Tam McCarthur Rim in the Cascades west of Bend. Many years later Frank finally identified a specimen of Washoe pine growing with whitebark pines on Tam McCarthur Rim.

Just before his senior year, his family moved to Charleston on the Oregon coast. Frank graduated from Marshfield High School in Coos Bay in 1965 and joined his family who, disappointed with the dank coastal climate, had moved to Central Point. He purchased a copy of Peck’s *Manual of the Higher Plants of Oregon*, and began learning the local flora. Shortly after this, his botanizing took a (military) tropical detour, with 13 months in South Vietnam and a year and a half in Hawai’i. When he returned to Central Point, he began taking classes at Southern Oregon College (SOC, now Southern Oregon University, Ashland) in 1967 on the G.I. bill, majoring in Graphic Design, with the idea of becoming a teacher. He purchased a piece of property between Central Point and Gold Hill, and worked full

time at Cascade Wood Products doing millwork. During his time at SOC, he “pestered Frank Lang with numerous botanical questions,” but did not take a course in botany. He left college after two and a half years, when he reached his limit of living on four hours of sleep a day while meeting the demands of classes and working full time.



He has botanized extensively in California, made ten expeditions into Mexico, and amassed a personal herbarium of over 3,000 sheets associated with his native seed business. He is presently transferring his herbarium to the Oregon State University Herbarium. He wrote the *Calochortus* chapter for the *Bulbs of North America* published by Timber Press and furnished some of the photographs. He appeared in botanical documentaries with Martha Stewart (Martha Stewart Living), Ed Bagley, Jr. (Bigfoot Country) and “American Forest National Champion Trees” for PBS. He teaches a course in native conifer identification at the Siskiyou Field Institute each summer.

Frank is a member of the Siskiyou Chapter of NPSO and the California Native Plant Society. He and his wife Karen live in the botanically rich foothills between Central Point and Gold Hill and have two grown children, Katie and Forrest. At age six, Forrest’s son Leo started hiking to the tops of mountains with his father and grandfather, and now helps his grandfather with plant collections.

After 27 years of mill work, and a detour into minerals and geology with the Crater Rock Museum, Frank now devotes his time to managing his native tree and shrub seed business. Callahan Seeds was started in 1977, offering seeds of western North American trees and shrubs. For many years he offered seeds from Asiatic, European, South American, Australian and New Zealand seed sources. However, recent importation and inspection fees have limited his seed stock to domestic sources. Because most of the world uses the metric system, seeds are sold in 25 gram packets up to kilogram amounts. His seed list includes about 478 species of seeds, including everything from *Abies* (true firs) to *Xylococcus bicolor* (Mission manzanita). He does not offer grass or wildflower seeds. Most seeds are wild collected with provenance information provided. He says that seed collecting usually leads to discoveries of range extensions for other species.

Offspring from Frank’s seed collections grow in major arboreta in the western US and around the world. Some of the plantings are now mature and producing seed. Bringing our plants to the world stage for all to enjoy is one of Frank’s major contributions to plant lovers everywhere. He is a modern David Douglas in that regard.

He consults as a field botanist for the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. His particular botanical interests range from trees (both conifers and angiosperms) to geophytes (bulb or corm-forming taxa including *Calochortus*, *Chlorogalum*, *Dichelostemma*, *Brodiaea*, *Fritillaria*, *Erythronium*, and *Triteleia*). Frank’s eye for discovering new locations and new species stems from his understanding of geology, habitats, attention to detail, innate curiosity, and an attitude that “botanical exploration is far from finished in Oregon!” – Cindy Roché, Siskiyou Chapter