

Seasonal Self-guided Tour

February/March 2012

Contributed by Vivien Clarke, VanDusen Volunteer Guide

Please follow the black and white number and arrow signs to take this tour. Also watch your step as some areas may be slippery when wet. Parts of this tour are not wheel-chair accessible.

This is the time of year when our anticipation for spring is rewarded by the sights of renewal in the garden. But in a farewell to winter, this tour will salute a few of the trees that have provided such structural and visual beauty at VanDusen during these cold and grey months.

To begin this tour, walk towards Livingstone Lake. Take a moment to admire the vistas from here and the variety of deciduous and evergreen flora outlining and accenting the Lake. Now turn left onto the pathway leading to a wooden bridge. On your left is a true curiosity. Here is a Douglas-fir, but as you will notice it does not stand straight and tall. This is a **1 – weeping Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Pendula')** a mutation of Garden origin. You will see stately, much older Douglas-firs later in the tour.

Continue walking straight ahead past the jade water fountain on your left and the bed of dormant grasses on your right, to a fine example of a **2 – Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*)**. This distinctive tree is native to the Drina River Valley, which cuts its way through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where only small, isolated pockets of *Picea omorika* remain. It is a fairly popular garden conifer, however, and is grown in gardens in Europe and North America. At VanDusen we have at least 8 specimens. At first glance it resembles a drooping Douglas-fir with branches that curl up at the tips. Unlike firs, spruce trees have pendant rather than upright cones. Have a look at the way the needles are twisted on the branches to reveal a two-toned grey-green colour. Now continue along a little farther to the animate form of the **3 – weeping giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Pendulum')**. This slender version is a descendant of a mutation found on a tree in France. Its branches grow close to its trunk, creating a sinuous silhouette. Your eyes will no doubt also be drawn to emerging bulbs and creeping forget-me-not (*Omphalodes verna*) on either side of this path, their colours contrasting so delicately with the dark evergreens in these beds.

At the next crossroads, turn left, and follow the curve of the rock wall on your right continuing up the stone steps and under the stone arch. On your right you will soon find **4 – Himalayan pine**

(*Pinus wallichiana*). The typical habitats for this tree, considered to be one of the most beautiful of pines, are mountain screes and glacier fore-lands, such as those of the Himalayas. It is a commercial source of turpentine and is more resistant to air-pollution than other conifers. Now stay on this path until you come to three interconnecting paths. Turn right here and soon you will come to the unusually shaped **5 - snake-branch spruce (*Picea abies* 'Virgata')**. This is a cultivar of the Norway spruce, and is useful as a windbreak or screen. As you continue along the path a short distance, you will arrive at a grassy area on your right. Walk across the patch of grass that cuts between the beds and keep right. The white stone carving titled *Developing Form* sculpted by Michael Prentice, stands in sharp contrast to the dark and towering cluster of **6 – Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)**. Take some time to explore this area by walking amidst these wondrous trees that have been here since the early twentieth century, when this land was leased from the Canadian

Pacific Railroad by the Shaughnessy Golf Club. These are examples of Coastal Douglas-firs. Their common name is misleading, since they are not true firs. Their ridged bark helps them to survive moderate surface forest fires. Their wood is used commercially in construction because of its weight-bearing capability. Nestled below this stand of trees is a special piece of art on loan from the Bill Reid Gallery. *Black Eagle* is a fiberglass cast of *Lootaas (Wave Eater)*, the wooden and polychrome ocean-going dug-out canoe Mr. Reid was commissioned to create for Expo '86. Look closely at the design. Can you recognize the eagle, which represents one of the social groups of the Haida people?

Now turn back and head to the grass and curving beds from which you first entered this area. Look for an arrow directing you to some large stone steps that lead into a bed heavily planted with evergreens. Cross this rock area very carefully onto a dirt path. There are many different shrubs and trees close at hand here to compare and take a good look at. Can you find another example of the weeping giant sequoia (**#3** on the tour) just a little farther along on your right? Continue along the dirt path to the grass. Walk across the grass (cautiously, since this area can become a bit soggy with the rain) until you arrive at a paved path. The deciduous trees you passed on your left are maples and those on the other side of the path are lindens. The latter will be covered in fragrant creamy white flowers in late spring, early summer, a very different and wonderful time to visit the Garden.

Now carry on to your right along the path. Note the silhouettes of the various Japanese maples on both sides of the path. In the fall, they create a magical still-life when the sun glows through their gold or red, delicately-shaped leaves. Beyond the shores of Heron Pond you can still enjoy the majesty of the Douglas-firs you visited earlier. As you come to the end of the paved walkway, take time to walk among the shapely **7 - giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)**. Sequoias once covered North America but their numbers were severely depleted due to glaciation. Inland redwoods grow primarily on the western slopes of Sierra Nevada, California. There one can find some specimens that are over 3,000 years old. In terms of size and age, VanDusen's specimens are still very young. In 100 years their lower branches will have thinned out and their trunks become more visible.

As you turn back to the path go straight ahead. Here you will find another area that feels like a secret hide-out. The most amazing tree here is the **8 - coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)** the tallest of all redwoods. Look up to appreciate its height and breadth. Be sure to give its bark a gentle press. Imagine this absorbing the California fogs it thrives in. This bark is rich in polyphenols which keeps bugs at bay. It is also low in resin which makes it more fire-resistant.

When you come to the end of the path and back into the light, you will have a lovely view of Cypress pond and its floating bridge. Come spring, the swamp or bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) that grow at this end of the pond, will be decked out in the most amazing lime-green new needle growth. These trees are related to the redwoods and are classified as deciduous conifers because their needles are thin-skinned and can't survive cold winters. The dawn redwood, of which there are examples close by, resembles the coast redwood, but is also a deciduous conifer.

Cross over the grass on your left to the **9 - Turkish filbert (*Corylus colurna*)** beside the pond. Native to Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia, this species of hazel flowers early in spring before leaves appear. Its nut is of little commercial use, but it is important as a non-suckering rootstock for common hazel cultivars which produce commercially viable fruit. Next take the path that leads from

the grass into the planted area to the right of the bench. You are now entering the Southern Hemisphere Garden. Along the path you will see a number of *Helleborus x hybridus* that are probably in bloom now. Their leathery and unusually shaped leaves and long-lasting flowers make them a special addition to the winter/spring garden. You will soon come to a tree that many have heard of but never seen at close-range. Note its unique bark and pine-like clusters of needles. The **10 – cedar of lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)**, is known to us from ancient times. To compare this true cedar to our own misnamed **11 - western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)**, continue to the paved pathway, turn right and then left. What differences can you observe? Both these trees are valued for their fragrant, decay and water-resistant wood. It was for this commercial reason that our native tree was given the common name of “cedar”. It was also considered to be significant by B.C.'s aboriginals long before settlers arrived. For them it was the Tree of Life, a source of food, medicines, clothing and building materials. Another tree that has deep roots in the past, is the **12 – monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*)**, found farther along the path on your right. This living fossil is the national tree of Chile, one of the few places it survived following the glacial periods. It is named for the now-extinct Araucano People who used its seeds. Its unusual leaves are adaptations to a time when there was more CO₂ in the air. Seeds were brought from Valpariso to England in 1795 by Archibald Menzies and thereby entered cultivation in Europe and North America.

To continue the tour, keep right and head over the zig-zag bridge. Just as you step onto the paved path, stop to look at the **13 – umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*)**. This is another living fossil dating back to the upper Triassic period. Its water-resistant wood has been used for boat-building in Japan to which it is native and where it is considered a sacred tree. Its common and Latin name refers to the whorls of leaves that resemble the spokes of an umbrella. Now head up the path which curves slightly upward, until you are underneath another pine, the **14 - ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)**. Its delicate but long needle clusters and airy silhouette contrast noticeably with the heavy, lumpy looking basalt rocks that form the grotto on your right. This is the only native BC pine with bundles of three needles. It is generally found in the southern interior of this province. It can live up to 500 years. Nowadays its wood is used in furniture building but traditionally it was used to build canoes.

This brings us to the end of the tour. To return to the Visitor Centre, keep left and walk along Livingstone Lake. Or, turn right and explore what is on the other side of the grotto!