

Thursday Walk with Gerry G – April 2, 2015

Contributed by MG

Not reviewed by Garden staff

Gerry recently retired as gardener of the Sino-Himalayan Garden (SHG) but wanted to give us a final tour of this area where he has worked since its inception. We started our walk along the lower path in front of Livingston Lake to admire the *Gunnera* that are just starting to leaf out and flower along the peninsula. We have had several species of *Gunnera* in the Garden, but Gerry thinks only two are left: this *Gunnera manicata*, which he calls 'Texas rhubarb', and a much smaller *Gunnera perpensa* near the willow. The orangey stalks of the larger *Gunnera* are covered by flowers, but the plants have never reseeded themselves.

We walked over to the rockery on the south side of the lawn that features the *Sorbus* collection. The rockery was originally covered with horsetail, but continued application of beech-leaf mulch has helped control the problem. Several small lepidote rhodos are in bloom; they have small leaves and scales that are called lepidotes (most large-leaved rhodos are elepidotes, with protective indumentum rather than scales). The scales help the plants deal with stress by creating a protective air layer. Many of these plants grow at high elevations and have a short growing season. If you brush their new growth, the leaves have a spicy scent. This collection originally came from the Stanley Park miniature golf course and have grown well here. At the west end of this bed is the small *Rhododendron forrestii* ssp. *forrestii* Repens Group that had been moved from the Royston Nursery/Grieg collection to Stanley Park where it stayed for twenty years. The only time it bloomed there was the first year after its move. It was rolled up like a carpet and replanted here years ago. It bloomed the first year after this move but has had only sparse blooms since. There are larger forms of this same rhodo across the paved path on the east side of the SHG, and they propagate themselves by layering. Highlighted behind the birches are tall *R. triflorum* with maroon flowers. The Himalayan white birches were attacked by the birch bark borer after a heavy snow fall several years ago, but they seem to be holding their own.

Growing throughout this bed and south along the paved path are large swaths of *Anemone nemorosa* that are in bloom right now. Gerry pointed out that this is a very weedy plant. The roots form a mat, and all roots need to be removed for the plant to disappear.

Gerry noted that he has had plants stolen out of his area over the years, but in the case of the cyclamen that blanket the area to the south of the birches, several years ago he discovered an elderly gentleman transplanting them from his own garden into the SHG for safe-keeping. Now these plants are reseeding, and some have giant corms.

Just across the paved path are a number of large rhodos that were grown at Royston Nursery for 20 years, transplanted to Stanley Park for another 20 years, then moved to VanDusen 35 years ago. They will outlive us all! South along the paved path, all the large rhodos also came from Stanley Park.

Someone pointed out the striking *Prunus serrula* on the west side of the paved path. Gerry said this was a seedling and is doing very well here. Three other *P. serrula* to the south of the birches had been grafted onto native stock, and over the years, that stock has sent up lots of shoots, so those trees are now somewhat contorted.

Further south along the paved path is the evergreen *Magnolia ernesti* with beautiful yellow flowers. This used to be a *Michelia*, but they have all been reclassified to the Magnolia family.

Across the path near the birch is the deciduous tree *Emmenopterys henryi*. Gerry has been waiting 30 years for it to flower but may have to wait 30 more.

Someone asked why the trees were not taped for winter moth this year. Gerry said that several winters of taping seem to have reduced the moth population, so they are just keeping an eye on

the situation now. He noted that there is surprisingly little disease in this Garden but lots of slugs and snails.

Further down along the west side of the paved path and are dark red shoots of *Rodgersia*. Hopefully these large-leaved perennials will smother the false lily of the valley (*Maianthemum dilatatum*) growing underneath.

On the east side of the paved path where it intersects with the path from the Cherry Walk is a large white form of *Rhododendron calophytum* var. *calophytum*. If you take a detour behind the aboriginal sculpture at the west end of the Great Lawn, you will find a hidden group of *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the largest lily. Gerry thinks eight plants will flower this summer. The plants can grow to 16 feet in height, with a one-foot-long highly scented white flower. When they go to seed, the pod will turn upwards then split in half so the wind can scatter the seeds. It takes seven years for these plants to flower from seed, and then they die.

Back on the paved path going south towards the Korean Pavilion, there is a stump of an ailanthus that needed to come out as it was providing too much shade. The vine encircling the tree, *Stauntonia hexaphylla*, was not removed. Nearby is the spreading *Rhododendron auriculatum* that has highly scented flowers in late summer. A small *Quercus acutissima* may hold on to its leaves until spring. All this is underplanted with yellow *Primula elatior*, which Gerry says spreads rapidly.

The blooming camellias are a great backdrop to the *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion' which are at their best in fall and winter when they display bright purple berries. Gerry annually prunes out the oldest stems to promote berry production. He thinks the birds don't eat these berries until they are really hungry; they seem to prefer the *Sorbus* berries that ferment on the tree.

A *Magnolia kobus* is on the west side of the path here. It was thought to be *M. zenii* but may have come mislabeled from the nursery. A recent inventory of all the magnolias revealed this problem.

The Korean Pavilion is temporarily fenced off. The wood beneath the copper caps on the roof is rotting, and a cap nearly fell on a visitor's head. Squirrels have also penetrated the roof tiles to build nests, further weakening the structure. The Garden is looking to get some financial assistance in fixing these problems. The Pavilion was repainted about ten years ago by a Korean Buddhist monk who used dyes made from traditional Korean plants. The beds around the Pavilion now include many plants native to Korea.

We then turned down the path to the Maze. Gerry pointed out the second-growth firs above the Meditation Garden that were planted in 1912 when the golf course was laid out. On the other side of the path in the Heritage Garden is a *Cedrus deodara* planted in 1981. It was smaller than 3 feet when planted but now towers over the path. The *Paulownia* also started out small; over their first few years they died back a few times, but since then they have grown well and also dominate the canopy here.

In the small triangular bed by the Fern Dell entrance, Gerry pointed out the *Arisaema sikokianum* that are about to bloom. As they die back, ferns will grow to cover their seedpods, which are often stolen. Gerry said that at one time we had over 20 species of *Arisaema* in the Garden, but there are now many fewer due to theft and to natural decline. In one case where a thief dug up a plant, Gerry was able to collect lots of tubers from the plant's hole and propagate more.

Gerry removed the covering from one of the *Dicksonia antarctica* in the Fern Dell, and it was full of fire ants! These *Dicksonia* were part of a shipment headed towards the US. The US refused to accept them because of insects, so they were dumped at a local nursery where they started to leaf out after several months. We were the lucky recipients of some of these tender plants. For a final treat, Gerry showed us some *Arisaema nepenthiodes* in early bloom at the west end of the

Dell.

Casey has taken over from Gerry, but Gerry is planning to volunteer at the Garden and is going through guide training, so hopefully we can pick his brain for many years to come.