

Thursday Walk with Dean M - June 4, 2015  
By Marilyn Goebel

**\*\*These notes have not been reviewed by Garden staff\*\***

Dean's area is the south-central part of the garden. He began working at VanDusen in 2009 as an apprentice and became permanent in 2013.

Our first stop was his half of the tropical display just south of the rose garden (the other half across the path in the Children's Garden is managed by Tomas, but they work together on the design). This year there are several banana trees that stay in the ground wrapped in plastic for the winter. He usually unwraps them in early April before they begin growing, but this year the new growth started under the plastic, and he had some trimming to do. The brugmansias and cannas overwinter in the greenhouse. The colours of the annuals - brown, yellow, and orange, with a purple-blue accent - were chosen as part of the 40th anniversary celebration because they were popular in the mid-1970s. Dean is very happy that the in-ground sprinkler just south of the bed has been repaired; in the last few years, he had to use eight oscillating sprinklers to water the same space.

Along the edge of the old trough garden is one panel of the Swedish fountain. Three more will be installed along that edge, and it is possible the other four sections of the fountain will be installed perpendicularly along the side of the path.

Dean said visitors are always asking him about the number of gardeners. Currently there are five working in the garden, in addition to two open positions, one in the Western North America Garden (Tomas has moved to the Bentall Garden and Roses) and the other in the Perennial Garden area (Casey is now in the Sino-Himalayan Garden). Peter N's labourer position was never refilled. However, there are ten summer staff this year, which is a record number in recent years.

We then moved up the lawn past the Minotaur, and Dean pointed out an unnamed white-flowered rhodo that has no stamens. Dean

reminded us that usually azaleas have five stamens and rhodos have a minimum of ten, so this is a rare plant.

As we passed along the Oak Knoll, Dean said that all the oaks have epicormic shoots (twiggy growths along the branches) that are a sign of sickness. Oaks don't do well in our wet climate. Many of the oaks have been limbed high up to get rid of dead wood.

We stopped by the lath house where decorative banners were hung this year. These were left over from a plant show several years ago. There will be 12 hanging baskets for the 40th anniversary. There are rumours that the lath house will be partly or totally removed to make way for food trucks during the Christmas lights show, but these are not true, for the time being at least.

Dean said the bright green boxes installed for the electrical upgrade will be repainted a darker green to blend in better. There are also some darker green boxes in the garden (one along the rhodo walk) that control irrigation.

We then walked east down the Loderi path where three magnolias have replaced dead oaks. The Loderis are very fragrant when in bloom.

At the paved path by the parking lot gate, Dean pointed out the beautiful leaves of the arisaemas. Just past them is the actual start of the Rhodo Walk where you can see the original alphabetical planting scheme by species, with *Rhododendron augustinii* beginning the line-up. The cultivar *R.* 'Blue Tit' next to it is a hybrid of *R. impeditum* x *R. augustinii* ssp. *augustinii*. Dean uses the booklet *Rhododendrons of the VanDusen Display Garden* (available in the library) as his bible.

Across from the *Davidia involucreta*, Dean has taken out two giant *Rhododendron rex*, which were blocking other plants, and moved them to the Fern Dell. Some oaks were removed as well. We walked along a new path in the bed and admired a giant *Acer rubrum*. Along the back of the bed are several *Rhododendron* 'Cynthia', but no one can see the flowers. He wants to renovate this area, but it is shaded by the *Parrotia* growing along the fence on the street, and these trees are difficult to prune. Dean noted that in general you shouldn't prune

rhodos, but in this garden it is a necessity due to shade and crowding.

Near this area Dean recently found the remains of an owl nest, with one broken egg; he thinks squirrels were the culprits. He also mentioned that there are some coyote pups this year; their den is in the service yard.

As we strolled down the Rhodo Walk, Dean pointed out the tall *Eucryphia* across from the hydrangeas. They will bloom a little later in the summer and need some sun and overhead cover. *Rhododendron pachysanthum*, with thick leaves, is doing well.

Dean massively pruned the hydrangeas and will prune them again after blooming (so no dried flower heads this year) to improve their frame. He will also space them out better. The magnolias in this area usually don't get pruned because the new growth on these trees is straight and not attractive.

Dean mentioned that earlier this spring a big truck entered the garden by gate three and drove down the Rhodo Walk, causing a lot of damage both to the edges of the beds and to the overhanging foliage. They will put a sign up at that gate forbidding trucks to come down that way in the future.

He pointed out the dead *R.* 'Lee's Dark Purple' which died suddenly this winter. He said two branches at the bottom that were totally rotten had been removed, but the root ball never developed after that.

Watering is a big problem here. A large deciduous tree needs 40,000 gallons of water annually, 98% of which is transpired. The rhodos also need a lot of water, and he tries to keep the top 18 inches of soil wet; this will pull up water from below.

On the right side of the walk, Dean pointed out the Goat Horn Tree (*Carrierea calycina*) which is about to bloom and the pink *Acer palmatum* 'Shindeshojo' which is very rare. The two Golden Full Moon Maples (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum') have beautiful foliage now but only brown leaves in the fall.

We then moved on to the new Japanese bed. Dean said the dead patches in the Great Lawn next to it happened when the truck which was core aerating the lawn turned the corner. The stone lantern from the old bonzai house has been relocated here, and a Japanese visitor told Dean not to add any moss to its roof, as it needs to happen naturally. Mayor Robertson and the mayor of Yokohama will be here in a few weeks to plant a magnolia. The *Aralia spinosa* along the path is also called the Devil's Walkingstick and has a tripinnate leaf structure, with each true leaf having several leaflets. Last year there were fire ants in this garden, but he was able to eliminate them with a tiger torch and pyrethrin.

At the larch, Dean showed us the hummingbird nest that, unusually, was used two years in a row. Their nests are made of mosses, lichens, feathers, and spider webs for flexibility. This spring he saw two eggs, then two babies, but later one baby appeared to have kicked the other one out.

As we rounded the corner, we saw that the Korean Pavilion is now fenced off. Two end caps fell off the roof earlier this spring, and the wood underneath is rotten, as is the bottom of one of the supporting posts. The roof is not slate but appears to be some sort of fibreglass. Administration is deciding how to fix these problems.

We walked over the Great Lawn to the tree peony bed. The peonies are suffering from wilt, and he has to keep cutting out the infected tissue. Dean planted 24 *Eremurus* in the middle of the bed to distract from the diseased peonies, but photographers trampled the peonies to get close-ups of the *Eremurus*. The large *Robinia* that came down last year in this bed has suckered to the end of the bed and beyond. The fir tree at the other end was hit by lightning last year and has a large scar on the north side.

The 'lily bed' to the south had no lilies in it when Dean took over this area, but he is now getting lilies from Bloedel after they have finished blooming, so he is building the stock back up.

We ended up our walk on the grassy path between the Rhodo Walk and the Beech Grove. Dean pointed out his favourite beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, the fern-leaf beech, with deeply cut, narrow foliage.

Dean apologized for the weeds and says they get out of control when he is focusing on other projects, but weeding is next up on his list. He has been using leaf mulch, but some people complain it looks too wintry.

Dean finished by complimenting us on the important job we do interpreting the garden to visitors.