

Thursday Walk with Casey W. – May 4, 2017
Contributed by Marilyn G.

These notes have not been reviewed by Garden staff

Casey has worked at VanDusen for 11 years. Prior to his position in the Sino-Himalayan Garden which began in April 2015, he was the creative genius behind the Black and Perennial Gardens.

We started our walk in Bed 84B at the northern edge of Casey's area. Last summer after the hardy ginger (*Cautleya spicata*) flowered, he transplanted it in the windmill palm bed further south along the main road. This year he will also move the ginger lily (*Hedychium spicatum*). Because the flowers of these two plants are very similar, he wanted to stagger the transplanting to make sure the plants were properly identified. These Asian plants were out of place here and the Northwest bird garden will expand to this bed, so the plants needed to move.

As we walked south along the main road, we admired the specular sight of the blooming rhododendrons behind the Himalayan white birches (*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*). The birches are holding their own against an attack by the bronze birch borer several years ago; other birches in the Garden are not faring as well. However, there is some dead wood here, and he will prune when the trees have fully leafed out, which makes it easier to see the damaged areas. At the edge of this bed are masses of *Anemone nemorosa* 'Flore Pleno' with its double-flowered center. They tend to get into the rhodo rootballs and are difficult to remove, but here they make a nice show.

Throughout this area the great drifts of *Rhododendron augustinii* are in full purply-blue bloom, and there are many varieties, each with a slightly different shading. On the west side of the path is a magnificent coral *R. Biskgra* Group, which is leaning. Its root ball and those of several other rhodos heaved out of the soil this winter because of the alternating periods of snow and cold. Casey is planning to move this rhodo back a bit into a space where a large cedar was removed. The large birchbark cherry (*Prunus serrula*) was grown from seed, and there are several more across the road, along with hundreds of new primulas that love the wet soil here.

Just northeast of where the path from the Cherry Walk intersects with the main road is Casey's new 'Sieboldii bed' (Bed 85A) where he is starting a collection of plants named after Philipp Franz von Siebold, an 18th-century German plant explorer in Japan (the 'ii' at the end of a plant name epithet refers to a person's name). Behind the primulas lining the path is Japanese wood fern (*Dryopteris sieboldii*) and *Hosta sieboldii*. Across the road is a shrubby *Magnolia sieboldii*. He's now searching for a *Viburnum sieboldii* to continue the theme.

We circled back to the Meconopsis Dell and started up the path behind the weeping ginkgos. Casey pointed out two different rhodos with similar leaves. *Rhododendron calophytum* blooms in the spring, but *R. auriculatum* blooms in early summer. He has done a lot of cleanup and is 'self-composting' by using fronds of Western sword fern as mulch in the open area; in the shrubby areas, he is breaking up dead branches and putting leaves on top. This is similar to the way compost builds up in the forest, and he is interested to see the results. He is also adding straw used to protect the gunnera over the winter. Three years ago in this area, he dumped 10 loads of nymphoides that had been removed from the lakes, and it broke down within three months.

There is only one patch of meconopsis left. Last fall Casey started to grow some in the greenhouse, but mice destroyed nearly all the seedlings, so he doesn't have many to plant out. There are difficult to find in a nursery. This area is quite wet, so they do well here because the conditions mimic a Sino-Himalayan monsoon season. In a drier area nearby, he has planted early-flowering borage (*Trachystemon orientalis*) that has a starry blue flower similar to brunnera.

We stopped at the Waterfall. It is still leaking, and a big chunk of rock broke off about halfway up, probably because of the freezing and thawing over our long winter. The feature is shut off in October and is turned on when there is no danger of freezing in the spring. At the bottom of the Waterfall is a big grate which allows most of the water to be recirculated. The rest drains off into a small stream that ends at Shaughnessy Lake. Next to the steps is a blank spot where a honey locust (*Gleditsia melanacantha*) fell across the path into another bed. He wants to plant more dead man's fingers (*Decaisnea insignis*) here.

We walked down to the main path again where Casey pointed out the cobra lilies (*Arisaema ringens*), which have orange berries in the fall. Another species, *A. griffithii*, is across the path; the underside of its leaves is purple, and it makes little bulbuls.

At the main entrance to the Sino-Himalayan Garden (Bed 123) is the striking rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*). It is not edible, but the Chinese use it as a purgative. Behind it is a weeping *Camellia* 'Elina Cascade' whose flowers are similar to those of a styrax.

Casey noted that this time of the year he loves to watch emerging foliage. A case in point is the purple-stemmed royal fern *Osmunda regalis* 'Purpurascens' that comes up purple then changes to green. This plant's root ball is massive, and he had to use a loader to transplant it. Next to it is *O. regalis*, which comes up green.

Further north in this bed there are a lot of changes. This is a very wet area because of the groundwater sitting on clay. The rhodos that used to be here among the rogersia were unhappy, so he removed them last summer then

added compost this spring. Casey moved the rogersia up the bank a bit, and then planted some golden willow, which can be easily maintained, and a Manchurian snakebark maple (*Acer tegmentosum* 'Joe Witt') with striped white bark. Other plants in this bed include false hemp (*Datisca cannabina*) and a dawn redwood cultivar (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Goldrush'). The *Magnolia sieboldii* behind it was growing into the redwood, but he pruned it back. He is waiting for the soil to dry out before planting more perennials along the edge of the road. Also in this area is *Rhododendron fortunei*, which has pink flowers and is fragrant (*R. decorum* and *R. auriculatum* are also fragrant) and *R. davidsonianum* with white flowers.

We then walked down the path alongside the giant Himalayan lilies (*Cardiocrinum giganteum*) that have some slug damage, but two will flower this year. Last year's bloom was disappointing because of the previous summer's drought. Once they bloom, the middle part of the plant dies, but the enfant plants will bloom another summer. Next to this bed are two large leatherleaf viburnums (*Viburnum rhytidophyllum*). The backs of their leaves are covered with what looks like dust but are actually tiny hairs which are irritating to the lungs. The flowers are insignificant. Roy planted these as a shelterbelt for the large rhodos behind them.

Our next stop was on the Great Lawn at the north end of the Korean Garden. Casey pointed out a large snakebark maple (*Acer capillipes*) in Bed 93, which looked very healthy...until we saw the back side, which looked burnt. It could be canker, but he is worried that it is verticillium wilt, which starts in the roots and quickly overwhelms the tree. Three other maples in this area have already died, so the soil may be infected, and they will have to figure out a more resistant species to put in the soil. Use of chemicals in the early years of the Garden may have contributed to this problem by killing off the microrrhizae. An *A. callipes* in Bed 85, however, looks healthy. It was a seedling so might be in better shape.

Behind the *Acer* in Bed 93 is the flagpole-like *Toona sinensis* whose leaves come out of the top. This one had its top half broken off, so it doesn't look like much now. It was accessioned into the Garden in 1999 so is a slow grower. There is another toona in bed 85A next to the path up from the Cherry Walk. It is easy to miss. Casey said that they are supposed to be multi-stemmed. He is not sure why our toona only have a single stem, so he is thinking about planting more near this specimen to give a multi-stemmed effect.

Behind us the camellias were in full bloom, but Casey noted that they are so full of flowers, many branches are in danger of crashing. He needs to do some major pruning here. [He also put in a plug for an adult education course on pruning he is teaching on June 10 - see the Education catalog for more details.]

Our final stop was the Fern Dell. Near the entrance along the road going up to the Waterfall, he has divided the hostas along the road. *Viburnum plicatum*

'Summer Snowflake' makes a nice backdrop here. The purple *Primula denticulata* have diminished, but he wants to plant more. He is planning to move the bergenia at the Dell entrance and replace them with interesting ferns. The Tasmanian tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) closest to the entrance was not doing well because of competition from rocks and roots, so he moved it across the path behind the tiny pond. A few years ago another tree fern was infested with fire ants, but they have not returned. He treats these infestations like he would a wasp nest and feels more in control. He uses a pyrethrum spray (but avoids using it around water as it is very toxic to fish).

In answer to some questions, Casey said that the laminated signs throughout the Garden are for an owl scavenger hunt. The Japanese landscape display along the Cherry Walk is temporary.

Casey's enthusiasm was contagious, and we look forward to seeing what changes he will make next.