

Garden Walk with Bill - Thursday, March 3, 2016

To kick off the guiding season, new Garden Director Bill M. talked about his vision for the coming year and beyond. Bill assumed the directorship in October 2015, but he had already been director once before for 18 months in the mid-1990s. In addition to our Garden, he is also responsible for the direction of horticultural operations at Bloedel Conservatory, Queen Elizabeth Park, and Sunset Nursery. Bill introduced a new staff member, Ema T., who is the Business Team Leader. She will manage Park Board staff and direct special events at the garden. Their mandate is to increase the number of visitors and improve the visitor experience. Ema's background is in tourism. Last summer she worked on a project with our special events team, so she is familiar with the Garden.

Bill then took us to visit several areas that will be renewed soon. He referred to a draft document on garden renewal that is being prepared by Cynthia and Bruce; the finished document will act as a guide for future projects. Our first stop was by the evergreen magnolias at the entrance to the Eastern North America Garden. The trees in this area need attention, especially in the upper canopy, to reduce risk to visitors and to better manage light underneath. This area of the Garden provides a wonderful opportunity for visitors to see a broad range of non-native plant material, although it is a challenge to find good specimens here. In 2016 we will focus on the evergreen magnolia area to create a more visual late-winter display. A question was asked about the fate of the nearby butternut tree (*Juglans cinerea*), the sole specimen in the garden. Bill said they will ensure that the most important species are being looked after in the long term.

Our next stop was at the intersection of the Mediterranean and Southern Hemisphere Gardens, both of which have been hit hard by recent bad winters and last summer's drought. Both collections need to be renovated, and some plants should be treated either as annuals or overwintered in a greenhouse. The Garden has a responsibility to introduce new varieties that work better in our climate and to educate gardeners about the best ways to deal with extreme weather conditions.

We moved on to the Heather Garden. Winter takes a toll here too, but the damage from the installation of lights is significant, and we should replace some plants on an annual basis. Balancing out the need for special events in the Garden with their destructive impacts is a challenge.

Next stop was the 'blue border' in front of the Formal Rose Garden. This border has declined and now contains a variety of colours rather than just the shades of blue found in the original design. Should it be returned to its original colour? Should it become more of a mixed border? Bill will make a decision soon. The renovation proposal for the Stanley Smith Garden across the path is underway, and another set of decisions will need to be made there.

As we continued up the Rhododendron Walk, Bill noted that they are selectively removing/replacing/thinning the understory and opening up the canopy to bring more light into this area. Renovation of this area is an ongoing project; Bill remembers talking about this same issue when he was director in the 1990s.

Our final stop was the new Japanese Garden. We will continue to add unusual Japanese perennials to the mix. Bill pointed out the hummingbird nest in the Japanese white pine (*Pinus parviflora*). The nearby Korean Pavilion will remain fenced off until funds can be found to fix it.

Bill said he is very happy to be back at the Garden and welcomes feedback from us, as we have a unique perspective on the Garden.