

Thursday Walk with Casey – 7 July 2016  
Contributed by Marilyn G.

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

Casey has worked at VanDusen for ten years. Prior to his position in the Sino-Himalayan Garden (SHG) beginning in April 2015, he was the creative genius behind the Black and Perennial Gardens. Casey introduced Carmen G., a summer intern from Niagara Parks in Ontario, and said that he enjoys working with interns, as they ask good questions, have a good knowledge base, and inspire him to greater things. As a side note, he mentioned that he had a calf injury that kept him out of his area for two months this winter, so he is still struggling to catch up.

We walked over to the main north-south road on the eastern border of the SHG where it intersects with the path through the Cherry Grove. Casey calls this road the "Sino Highway," and one of his many projects here is to vary the plants in the side beds and move the larger ones back (e.g. *Stewartia sinensis*) in order to minimize damage from passing trucks. Last year he planted several *Trachycarpus fortunei* (Chinese windmill palm) on the east side of the road, and this year he added *Hedychium gardnerianum* (hardy ginger), which he describes as "pretty hardy," but, just to be safe, he plans to treat it like *Gunnera*, cutting it down in the fall and mulching heavily. He thinks that if the gingers stay in the ground year-round, rather than going to the greenhouse in the winter, they will flower better. The flowers are yellow and a foot long, and some plants could bloom this summer. These are ornamental gingers, so the roots are not as flavourful as those found in the edible ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). The large perennials just ready to flower are *Kirengeshoma palmata* (yellow wax bells). Casey is also adding other perennials to fill out the display.

Casey pointed out the small *Cathaya argyrophylla* (see notes from his August 2015 walk) and said it is closely related to the larch and Douglas fir. He has planted *Phlomis russeliana*, *P. tuberosa* (with pink flowers), *Aconitum fischeri* (monkshood, which is extremely poisonous), and *Epimedium epsteinii* along the little path he calls the "Arisaema Trail." There are also some small lepidote rhododendrons still in bloom here. These have tiny leaves with dots on the back side that help to conserve moisture; the leaves, when rubbed, have a piney smell. In the back of this area are large *Rhododendron fortunei*, whose fragrant blooms recently finished, and *R. decorum*, which bloomed earlier.

The tall gangly tree is *Eucommia ulmoides*, whose common name is Chinese rubber tree because of the latex fibers that appear when the leaf is torn. He noted that dogwood leaves have a similar structure. *Eucommia* is not related to the true rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, native to South America, but the Chinese use *Eucommia* as a rubber substitute. It is also called the gutta-percha tree, but it is not the true gutta percha of Southeastern Asia, *Palaquium gutta* (formerly used to make golf balls). *Eucommia* bark is considered one of the fifty fundamental herbs used in Chinese herbology, but the tree is on the endangered list in its native habitat.

The west bank of the Sino Highway is bordered by two different *Rodgersia*, *R. podophylla*, with maple-like leaves, and the more oval-leafed *R. aesculifolia*. This side of the path is quite wet, perfect for these large perennials. New this year here are *Datsica cannabina* (false hemp) and *Astilbe*.

As we walked north on the "highway," Casey mentioned that he is clearing out the Western wood fern in the wooded area to the east. He is also giving some of the cyclamen to the Eastern North America Garden, where they are a better fit, and he noted that some of the tubers are as large as dinner plates. The cyclamen was surreptitiously planted several years ago by an elderly gentleman who was downsizing his garden.

Someone asked why the *Cardiocrinum giganteum* (giant Himalayan lily) in Bed 85A has not done well recently, and Casey said perhaps it was because of the 2015 drought. He is going to divide the lilies and fertilize heavily, so hopefully they will be back in form next summer.

Our next stopping point was near the weeping ginkgo by the waterfall. Casey said that some trees are starting to feel the effects of last summer's drought. The red leaves on the *Acer henryi* indicate that it is about to die, as it is showing fall colour early. The *Acer sieboldianum* in Bed 123 is dead, but this could be due to verticillium wilt that has also infected the *Koelreuteria paniculata* (golden rain tree) in this area and also those at the north end of the Laburnum Walk. This very contagious, soil-borne fungal disease first causes branches to die, and when they are removed, you can see dark staining in the interior tissue.

Across from the ginkgo, under the beautiful *Taiwania cryptomerioides* (coffin tree), Casey planted several plants of the same grass, *Spodiopogon sibiricus*, because, he joked, he likes saying the name. He pointed out that some of the plants are growing differently, and he was not sure why. It is related to bamboo but is not supposed to spread.

South down the path, pink-tinged *Actinidia kolomikta* has swallowed up a large tree. This kiwi is only ornamental and does not bear fruit.

Moving up towards the waterfall, Casey told us that he took out the *Lonicera henryi* that had been covering up the bank, only to find a big stump hidden underneath! He also moved a *Weigela middendorffiana* that had been grown from seed collected in China. In order to hide the gray electrical boxes that contain the waterfall pump controls, he has planted some tall shrubs, including the arching *Nandina calycanthus chinensis* which is currently in bloom with magnolia-like flowers. This work opened up the path into the Meconopsis Dell, where we headed next.

Casey has said before that vines and trees do not co-exist well, but he is leaving the *Campsis radicans* (trumpet creeper) growing in the ginkgo; it should be in bloom soon. *Wisteria floribunda* in the deodar cedar flowered well this year. But the *Aristolochia manshuriensis* (Dutchman's pipe) killed a large *Robinia* and was spreading into other trees, so he took out the *Robinia* and the vine. He passed around some samples of the woody vine, and the cutting had a spicy fragrance. He noted that cut magnolia wood exudes a lemony scent.

All this work has resulted in bringing more light into the area, and Casey is planning to plant lots more *Meconopsis betonicifolia* (Himalayan blue poppy) here. Early this year he planted quite a few, but the mice destroyed most of them when he couldn't patrol the area after his injury. He is particularly motivated because he met a woman from Thailand who told him she comes to VanDusen every spring to see these plants, so he wants her next visit to be worthwhile.

As we walked back past the waterfall, Casey pointed out *Tricyrtis hirta* (Japanese toad lily) that will flower soon. The nearby tree, *Maackia fauriei*, is just starting to bloom. Further down the path on the east side, he is starting to clear along the path. This area has been very wet, and he finally figured out that there was a leak in the nearby irrigation pipe. The leak was fixed, and he laid on a lot of leaf mulch to improve the soil. He finds the mulch helps with slug control because it attracts insects, and the slugs eat them instead of the plants. When asked which leaves are best for mulch, he said he uses whatever he finds in the area, but he added that beech leaves are good because they decompose quickly, as does maple. Oak leaves are also good, but *Aesculus* leaves may be somewhat toxic.

Our next stop was the Stone Garden at the top of the waterfall. This is Casey's weediest area, and he and a team have been attacking it lately. They also repositioned the big piece of jade with a loader. He is still thinking about what to plant in the bare area along the eastern path. In the back is *Gleditsia vestita* (honey locust) whose thorns are so sharp they can puncture tires, so he is thinking of relocating it because of safety concerns. He also lifted up the lower branches of the large *Pinus wallichiana* (Himalayan pine) near the waterfall to highlight the rhododendrons

growing underneath it. There is also a *Cunninghamia lanceolata* (Chinese fir) in the area that may have to go, as we have examples of it elsewhere in the garden and it is not very attractive here. This tree is not a real fir but is grown widely in China for its timber. A guide pointed out that it has been reclassified into the Cupressaceae family.

Across the path, Casey had to remove the *Acer tegmentosum* (Manchurian snakebark maple) late last summer because of drought damage. He pointed out the wonderful cones on neighbouring trees and said that one way to remember what kind of tree they are on is that fir cones point up and spruce down ("fir" and "up" are shorter words than "spruce" and "down"), and a guide who is also a labeler said the trees should have real labels soon.

Our final stop in the rain was the Fern Dell, which provides shelter for less hardy plants. Casey pointed out some new *Rhododendron sinogrande*, which have the biggest leaves of all the rhodos. He has planted more *Dicksonia antarctica* (Tasmanian tree fern) and said that the carpenter ants that infested them in the past have been eradicated. In the middle of the Dell, he is clearing out beds and adding many new plants, including interesting ferns and *Typhonium venosum* (voodoo lily). At the northwest corner of the Dell, an enormous elm split in two last year, and the remaining trunk will probably have to come out, as it is leaning dangerously. However, this has opened up the corner and increased planting possibilities.

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