

Thursday Walk with Dean M. - May 5, 2016

Submitted by Linda M

These notes have not been reviewed by staff

Under gorgeous, sunny skies our large group of Guides gathered around Dean M. who led us to the 'Dwarf Coast Redwood' (*Sequoia sempervirens* 'Adpressa') to point out a (now vacated) Anna's hummingbird nest from which two had fledged. The nest in the Japanese bed that had been a repeat nest for three years was not used this year.

Our next stop was at the flowerbed between the Minotaur and the bright backdrop of the Laburnum Walk in full bloom (so early!). For this bed he studied catalogs for bloom time and height. He selected a mix of tulip bulbs planted in the fall and annuals planted in the spring, aiming for heights of 8 inches and bloom time to coincide with the Loderi Rhododendrons. The colour mix of white and pink was created by a perimeter of pink forget-me-nots that surrounded the jumbo English daisies (*Bellis perennis*) in both white and pink, grown as an annual. Interspersed among the daisies were the white tulips 'Calgary' which had finished blooming. Despite having been snacked on by rodents the tulips had put on a satisfactory show. Dean noted that in past years when pansies were featured here the roots would heave out following freezes and thaws.



Just before we moved on, James W. stopped on the path below us to take a photo of Dean and told us that our garden crew has been nominated for a City Service award which is focused on "teamwork" and he expressed that he thought there could be none better on that score!

We continued on through the Loderi Rhododendrons and Dean pointed out an unnamed rhodo to the left of the path that has no stamens.

Dean mentioned at the willow sculpture "*Salix Iterum*" by Alastair Heseltine that, when installed, it was expected to last about 18 months. That was in 2013!



At the Lath House the Japanese wisterias were putting on a good show. Dean did some hard pruning last summer and also removed long shoots in winter. Their growing plots are quite small. On past Plant Sale days a tarp has been put over the top of the Lath House which resulted in many fallen flower buds afterward. This year the tarp was fastened from underneath, which helped the 2016 bloom. The wisteria plant most to the south has a spongy, rotten trunk and its live shoots may even be from below the graft. He's considering removing it and replanting. All these wisterias date to 1993.

At the lawn beneath the beeches the grass has been reseeded with a red fescue mix that includes some perennial rye for faster growth. Recently some thinning of several beeches was done on a training day for certifying arborists which has helped to lighten up the deep shade they cast.

Along the west end of the Loderi Rhododendron path five evergreen oaks and one red oak that died had to be removed and have been replaced with four new magnolias.

Dean led us through Gate 1 so that he could show us how far his area has expanded since last year. It now goes from the Japanese Collection out Gate 1 through the parking lot to Oak Street. The areas outside are shared between him, Tomas and James P. VanDusen presently has 6 full-time gardeners (including 1 "acting gardener" Justin) plus 1 operator, 1 apprentice (Jason) and in the summer will add 7 summer staff.

Revised safety rules for Park workers have practical effects on the gardeners. Two key items are safety vests and safety glasses. The glasses are always required at the work trucks yard. The safety glasses tend to scratch themselves when folded so they do sometimes reduce the clarity of vision. The safety vests must now be "tear-away" to prevent getting caught on car mirrors, protruding branches and such. The irony is that they will sometimes "tear-away" while being put on over bulky winter clothing. City service trucks have changed from being identified as Engineering by an orange stripe or Parks by a green stripe and now there is just one colour.

Returning to the garden path Dean pointed out on the left the cobra lilies (*Arisaema ringens*) whose leaves are quite large now and hide the flowers. For the cart drivers he has cut all the leaves on one of them so its cluster of hooded flowers can be easily viewed from above.



Between Gates 1 and 2 there is no irrigation. Dean will be requesting removal of a Douglas fir on the north side of the path to improve light and water for the other plants. The Rhododendron Walk was planted in an alphabetic order starting with A at the lower end by either species or hybrid female parent, e.g. *Rhododendron augustinii* X *impeditum*. Dean pointed out the very furry indumentum on the leaves of the 'Teddy Bear' rhododendron. He also noted the big pink blooms of 'R. Cynthia' of which there are others in the parking lot and along 37th and mentioned a big specimen in Ladysmith that is reputed to be 125 years old.

While looking at the dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*) Dean noted that the flower bracts were bigger this year than last. He also pointed out that water sprouts caused by past snow storm damage has diminished the winter form of the branches when bare.

Up the path is the unusual *Rhododendron* 'Fastuosum Flore Pleno' notable as a double or semi-double form. Some blooms look as if the few stamens have petals. [Note-This is an old cross of *R. catawbiense* and *R. ponticum*. Ours were accessioned in 1972.]



Along to the right are the profusely blooming deciduous Knaphill azaleas. Dean reminded us of the distinction by general number of stamens, i.e. 5 for azalea and 10 for rhododendron, with the longer name having the higher number. Dean also drew our attention to the marks on the upper lobe of the azalea flowers which guide pollinators. Further along the 'Homebush' azalea was recognizable by its tight ball-shaped pink trusses.

The garden administration wants VanDusen to host more frequent large events, perhaps one a month, so the Rhododendron Walk needs to be kept wide for access by service vehicles. Luckily rhododendrons are shallow rooted. After cutting around the base, wrapping with tarps and using a front-end loader, one large white-flowered azalea on the right that had been overhanging the path was successfully moved farther back. Water will be essential to its survival. A dead tree behind the bed died after last summer's drought and needs to be removed. The blue and purple columbines (*Aquilegia*) along the path are self-seeded and not native.

We followed Dean along the Azalea Trail where he let the bright, fragrant blooms do the talking! He did remark on the red lotus tree (*Magnolia insignis*) that it is evergreen but (alarmingly) lost its leaves all at once, apparently from its new leaves pushing the old ones off.

Out on the lawn opposite the beeches he described the condition of the Exbury azaleas when he started in this area. They were engulfed in ivy and the roots from cherry trees that had been removed were still there, undulating up and down through the surface "like dolphins". The roots had never been dug out so he removed them with a mattock

and then with a chain and loader. [Note: the azalea bloom was at a peak on Thursday May 5 this year. By Sunday May 8 two intervening days of hot sun had greatly reduced the show.]

At the beech trees opposite, Dean told us that beeches, especially the weeping ones, are very susceptible to wooly aphid. An excellent predator of the aphids is the syrphid fly that lays its eggs on the beech leaves and their larva eat the aphids.

At the Magnolias & Hydrangeas Dean said he has ordered more colourful hydrangeas. The wooden sign that said Hydrangeas has been replaced. The bench there is broken. He commented on the ostrich ferns that if they dry out once, they turn brown and look terrible. He pointed out the pink Walloper rhododendrons that are part of a grouping of American cultivars.

At the Japanese bed he noted that scabiosa didn't do well there. He has divided two cultivars of *Iris ensata* and spread them around. They are 'Freckled Geisha' and 'Lion King', both accessioned in 2013. The *Shortia uniflora* keeps getting stepped on by people taking shortcuts. An unusual plant that he stakes is devil's tongue (*Amorphophallus konjac*). At the western area of the bed variegated golden Japanese aster (*Kalimeris yomena* 'Shogun') has proved to be invasive so he's removing it in places. Japanese blood grass planted from single rhizomes filled in within a year.

Recent news on animals in the garden: last week a sick barred owl was found in the garden, is being rehabilitated at an owl rescue facility, and will soon return. Apparently it had ingested rat poison from eating a rat. A dead coyote was found on the Rhododendron Walk and it was determined that the puncture wounds on its neck were probably caused by another coyote. Ravens and both Coopers and sharp-shinned hawks continue their presence in the garden.

Fire ants are by the parking lot and at various locations in the garden. We can easily avoid them by staying on the paths.

Photos by Linda M.