

Armchair Tour - Part 5

by Ian Cameron

Our last newsletter featured the Ubame oak, one of the oaks on either side of the path that leads north from the kiosk. After looking at the oaks, we turn to look to the northern boundary of the park, and see a very large tree, and one that few would call beautiful. Gnarled, maybe. (As opposed to 'gnarly', which is the Californian surfer term for a large, dangerous wave.) Lumpy, for sure. Thick. Ugly. All of those.

But that ugly, malformed tree has an ancient and honourable history. It's a *Platanus x acerifolia*, or London Plane-tree. *Platanus* indicates that it is a member of the sycamore family, and the *x* means it's a hybrid, in this case a hybrid of the Oriental sycamore and the American sycamore. It's a natural hybrid, meaning that it wasn't created on purpose: it just appeared in England, in the late 1600's, probably after a gardener

to Charles I planted a seed brought from Virginia, and when the tree matured it crossed with an Oriental sycamore. The *acerifolia* refers to the leaves, which are shaped like maple leaves, *acer* being the Latin name for maple.

The tree was one of more than a hundred that were going to be planted along the northern boundary of the park, all the way down to the water, when the park was created in 1913, but WW I came along and there wasn't enough labour to do the planting, so the three plane-trees that had been planted were the last ones. The rest were heeled in and became part of the Shelbourne street memorial to the B.C. men who died in the war, and later to the men and women of B.C. who served in the two world wars.

The sycamore is thought to be one of the earliest trees to be planted for ornamental purposes. The Romans

thought they had mystical powers, and the Hippocratic oath was taken in the shade of a sycamore by young doctors. The emperor Caligula had a tree house built in a plane tree, which he used for parties. London Plane-trees are widely used as boulevard trees allowed to grow naturally in North America, pollarded in Europe.



Membership Renewal

We know you've heard this before and sorry to keep repeating ourselves but it's only because your membership renewal is very important to the upkeep of this beautiful Park. Your membership supports the Park in many ways. Membership fees are used for maintenance and restoration. Membership numbers strengthen our grant applications. High membership numbers reflect the importance of the park to the community. A park that is important to the community is more likely to get funding by granting agencies. - it's that whole cyclical thing. If you can spare \$20.00 per family per year, please consider renewing either at the upcoming AGM or online at: dominionbrookpark.ca/support-the-park/membership/. And why not ask a friend to join?



Important Notice - AGM

Our board members are busy prepping for our AGM April 23 at 7:00 p.m. at the Center for plant Health Pavilion and we would love it if you could attend!

Join us for coffee/tea/goodies and meet our invited speaker – Jarrett Teague.

Jarrett grew up in North Saanich and has worked in John Dean Parks since high school – now he is a young (50ish) retiree from the military after doing several tours in Afghanistan. He has spent thousands of hours working

on trails and signs in John Dean Park, tÁU,WELNEW as well as researching the history of John Dean. He has written two books about the Park. He will share his knowledge of its history and he will help us learn the correct pronunciation of Mount Newton's indigenous name.

In 2012 Teague won a recognition – do you know what it was for – join us and find out!

We hope to see you there.

Construction Update - Centre for Plant Health

Updates on construction at the Centre for Plant Health

Construction activity is in full swing for a brand new science facility at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) Centre for Plant Health. Visitors to the park have likely caught a glimpse of the new structures from along the park's southern boundary. The exterior and interior are starting to resemble a finished building, with noticeable progress each day.

Construction remains on track to be completed by the end of 2024, with the project expected to be fully complete and staff moved into their new laboratory and office spaces in 2025.

The project includes an Indigenous art strategy, with artists representing local

First Nations creating pieces that will be displayed at the Centre. This includes artwork for the reception area, exterior building panels and sculptures at the front gate and beside a retention pond to the east of the new building. These pieces will weave the perspectives of Coast Salish peoples with the site's location and current uses, and many of them will be able to be viewed and enjoyed from the park.

The CFIA has also been very pleased to see a lot of foot traffic, including large groups of students, making use of the new crosswalk across East Saanich Road to access the park. Installed as part of the renewal project with the District of North Saanich, the new crosswalk helps both Centre for Plant Health staff and visitors

to the park safely cross the busy road!

For more information, visit [Renewing the Sidney Centre for Plant Health](https://inspection.canada.ca/sidney-laboratory) (inspection.canada.ca/sidney-laboratory) or contact cfia.CPH-Sidney-CPV.acia@inspection.gc.ca.



Volunteers Badly Needed

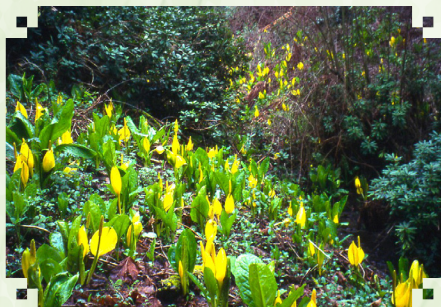
This year four super volunteers retired and we desperately need to replace them plus a couple more. You don't have to have experience - we will help you. What the Park needs is your commitment to help when and where needed. We meet every Wednesday from April to October 9:00 to 12:00 a.m. Any amount of time or any number of Wednesdays that you can give to the Park is greatly appreciated.

We are a fun group that love the Park, love working outdoors and enjoy getting some exercise. You will be helping care for an historically interesting, horticulturally significant, beautiful park in our community. Volunteers meet 9:00 a.m. at the Marshall Road entrance to get their work assignment. If you have any questions or want more information our email address is contactus@dominionbrookpark.ca.

Feature plant - Skunk Cabbage

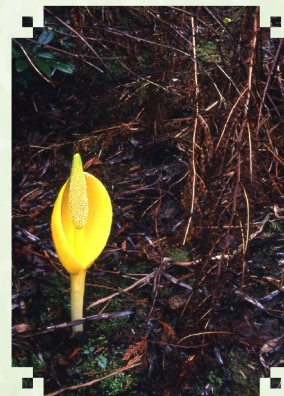
While many ornamental plants were chosen for Dominion Brook Park; others have chosen to grow there. Skunk Cabbage is one of our native plants that has found a suitable habitat in the Park. It thrives in the ravine and in the wet area south of the pond. This time of year, it is on full display.

Western Skunk Cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*) is one of the first flowers to appear in the spring. The flowers appear before the leaves, borne on a knob-like structure known as a spadix. This fleshy spike consists of many petal-less flowers.



The characteristic yellow hood around the spadix is called a spathe. The leaves emerge after the flowers and can grow up to five feet tall and two feet wide.

Its common name comes from the distinctive skunky odour it emits, particularly if the flowers or leaves are crushed. The traditional uses of skunk cabbage by the WSÁNEĆ people include using the leaves as a surface to lay out food or to line berry baskets. Skunk cabbage is not edible due to the sharp crystals of calcium oxalate in the leaf and stems which cause prolonged burning and irritation to the tongue and throat.



Staff this issue: Jody Aylard, Ian Cameron, Dawn Gould