

## TALKING TO PARK USERS

One of our Board members took some time to talk to park users and we thought the answers to her questions would be of interest. This is in no way to be considered an official survey and is not a source of information about any decisions concerning the Park. It is nothing more than a snapshot of peoples' views on a given day.

1. **How often do you visit the park?** Surprisingly, the majority of people visit the park on a daily basis. I did meet a couple who were in the park for the first time.
2. **What do you usually do when you are here?** Not surprisingly, almost every person I spoke to came to give their dog some exercise. Only one couple did not have a dog. (I saw a second person without a dog but he was on the phone so I couldn't talk to him.)
3. **How did you first discover the park?** Most people were familiar with the park because they live nearby. One regular used to drive by on his way home from working at the airport and when he retired, had time to stop. Google was the source for two persons who moved here recently. Several people heard about the park from family members. The first timer said she has driven by from Prospect Lake to volleyball at night and finally had a chance to visit. A few had come with their kids from Kelset elementary school.
4. **How long have you been coming to the park?** This ranged from three months to more than 50 years.
5. **What do you enjoy most about the park?** Most answers focused on the beauty of the open green spaces and the trees. It was described as visually

special, beautifully curated, peaceful, stunningly beautiful. The presence of other dog owners aka 'fine people' was another draw.

6. **Is there anything you would like to change?** Suggested changes were improvement of 'refuse' collection and better communication between park users and decision makers. This could be done by posting in the kiosk. Several people asked for clarification of 'dog rules'. Someone liked the idea of connecting DBP with Cy Hampson, probably by building an underpass. Others wondered if there could be a path on the south side of the park connecting to the terraces. Ironically, an adamant 'off leash' dog owner wants the park to be protected. One person is unhappy with the uneven concrete stairs.
7. **Do you know any of the history/background of the park?** Almost no one I spoke to knew anything about the history of the park, so of course I made them listen to some of it. The man who has been coming for 50 years did know quite a bit of the background. One person said it used to be a railroad stop but had no awareness of the plants.
8. **Are you Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society members?** Two were members and three said they were going home to sign up immediately. I provided brochures to all.

The park users would like to know what future use of the park will be, specific to dogs. Most agree that dogs should be under control but adamantly not on leash.

## THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS



The work season is over for those who work regularly in the Park. Much has been accomplished including weeding, mulching, adding more irrigation zones and providing professional plant care. Thank you for all your time and effort to help maintain the health of this unique horticultural collection for our community to enjoy.





## ARMCHAIR TOUR - PART 7

by Ian Cameron

Part 6 of this series, which appeared in the Summer Newsletter, looked at the Hatfield yew (*Taxus x media Hatfieldii*) located behind the London Plane Tree in the Northwest corner of the park.

Just to the east of that shrubby (but interesting) tree is a tree that is just the opposite: not terribly interesting in itself, but quite attractive. It's a Morinda spruce, or West Himalayan spruce, *Picea smithiana*. Morinda is the Nepalese name in its home range, the foothills of the west Himalayan mountains from Afghanistan to Nepal and Tibet. The epithet (the second name) comes from a guy named Smith, who was the first person to grow one in the British Isles, in 1826.

It's a tall, pyramidal, needled conifer with horizontal branching and drooping

branchlets that typically grows to 25 to 30 metres, with scaly grey bark that exudes pitch. (*Picea* comes from the Latin *pix*, or pitch, and all spruce trees weep pitch to greater or lesser degree.)

Having said that the tree isn't very interesting, the plaque in front of it is. The tree was donated by friends of Christina Sethi, who died at a young age. It was the first donated specimen in the park, hence the plaque. The Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society is no longer accepting memorial trees and has greatly limited any new plantings. We are unable to provide the level of care needed to get new plants established, especially with the more variable weather conditions that we are now experiencing.



## FEATURE PLANT – ILEX AQUIFOLIUM (HOLLY)



The first English hollies were planted in Saanichton in 1914 but it was not until 1953 that the Government of Canada started research into holly varieties at the experimental farm. Holly had become an important commercial crop locally. At one time up to thirty holly farms operated locally. Victoria was known as the holly capital of Canada.

By 1956, the experimental farm was growing 46 varieties of holly, including a number of Saanichton select varieties. Variety development sought to meet needs of producers, including leaf colour, leaf size, berry production and quality and ease of handling. From the results, a list of recommended varieties was suggested for commercial production. The government suggested up to 10% variegated varieties and noted that three males in 100 trees are required for pollination.

Research was also conducted on cutting, preserving, packing, storage and shipping to be able to ship a quality product that met the demands of the markets in central and eastern Canada. Holly would be shipped from Victoria to Winnipeg and back to simulate transcontinental shipments and to provide information on departure and arrival conditions and lasting quality.

Today only a handful of holly farms remain on the peninsula. The holly collection has been removed from the grounds of the Centre for Plant Health. A few specimens still grow in Dominion Brook Park.

The Invasive Species Council of BC notes that English holly has become a serious invasive plant because of its adaptability to grow in shade or sun, and how easy its seeds are spread by birds. It will crowd out native species as well as monopolize groundwater.

*Staff this issue: Jody Aylard, Nancy Johnson, Ian Cameron, Dawn Gould*