



# Cascadia

BY DANIEL J. HINKLEY

*“On stepping on the shore Gaulthera\* shallon was the first plant I took in my hands. So pleased was I that I could scarcely see anything but it. Mr. Menzies correctly observes that it grows under thick pine-forests in great luxuriance and would make a valuable addition to our gardens. . . . In a few hours we returned to the ship amply gratified.”*

From the Journal of David Douglas, Saturday, 9 April 1825

There was once a time, a few of you might recall, that going to the theater to see the newest movie was not bound by the constraints of something so mundane as its start time. “This is where we came in,” despite its stature as classical cliché, was the catch phrase understood: stand up, grab the coat and leave.

As anachronistic as the comparison might seem, I cannot help but think of those words

when hiking through the lowland flora of Puget Sound. As staggeringly green and large as our native bounty is, the temptation may be to assume, after a relatively short period of time, that one has seen it all, and that one might just as well grab the coat and leave.

It is perhaps for this reason that the concept of a “Cascadia” exhibit in Washington Park Arboretum’s Pacific Connections Garden undertaking has been met with—if not necessarily

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The “hanging bogs” of southern Oregon—where water continually seeps, and the seepage has created a high-altitude wetland habitat—are a unique and signature landscape of the Siskiyou Mountain Range. *Darlingtonia californica*, the West Coast’s native pitcher plant, is yet another example of the endemic flora—spared from glaciation by this east/west line of mountains—that is found here and nowhere else.

skepticism, then at least appropriate—cross-examination. With such a depauperate lowland flora, which is already showcased, by default, in other preserved spaces in Seattle, why devote additional space for its interpretation in the implementation of the new Master Plan?

An adequate answer comes by way of three distinctive avenues. First, Pacific Connections' Cascadia would call attention to selected forms of native plants we are already familiar with, i.e., cultivars of those plants in our own backyard. A second road leads us higher in elevation to the subset of flora which many of us do not find the time or ability to visit, and the third avenue takes us to the austral fringes of what is considered by botanists to encompass the somewhat subjective geographical boundaries of Cascadia in southern Oregon and Northern California.

The site earmarked for the Cascadia exhibit already plays host to a mature stand of one of most recognized native tree species, the Pacific madrona, *Arbutus menziesii*. These trees, with other naturally occurring shrubs and groundcovers, will provide a ready-made context in which to reveal to the visitor and student the little-comprehended affluence of our native flora.

### **Selected Forms of our Native Plants**

Although not as common as they deserve to be in our horticultural industry, there are numerous cultivars of our local flora that are more valued in the gardens of Europe than in our own. *Ribes sanguineum* or red-flowering currant is a good example. First collected in 1793 by Archibald Menzies—who was sailing with Captain George Vancouver—this flowering currant's introduction into British commerce, in 1817 by David Douglas, was met with substantial enthusiasm. Over the years, numerous named variants, garnered from nature as well as garden cultivation, have been selected. Named cultivars, with flowers from pure white to vibrant red, as well as golden, variegated foliage, deserve a site for side-by-side comparison.

Our evergreen huckleberry, *Vaccinium ovatum*, is more varied than most gardeners realize in regard to fruit size, color and fecundity. Cascadia will be an ideal opportunity to interpret this variability. A dwarf form of salal, *Gaultheria sballon* 'Snoqualmie Pass,' has never become as popular as it deserves to be, nor have the variegated forms of *Paxistima myrsinites* that are currently found only in collectors' gardens. Selected forms of *Rhododendron macrophyllum* might also be collected and displayed.

Dwarf and prostrate forms of our lowland hemlock, *Tsuga heterophylla*, exist, as well as too-little-known, blue-foliaged forms of our native yew, *Taxus brevifolia*. Two named forms of the big-leaf, or Oregon, maple, although already found in the Arboretum, are certainly in need of renewal and might lend themselves to Cascadia's overstory. *Acer macrophyllum* 'Kimballiae' is a low, rounded form with deeply incised leaves, while 'Seattle Sentinel' is a fastigate form that more closely resembles a Lombardy poplar.

More diminutive, *Acer circinatum*, vine maple, possesses cut-leaf, golden-foliaged and dwarf cultivars that are too infrequently encountered in our gardens. Even our signature Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, encompasses an expansive number of unusual forms, including those possessing variegated leaves and dwarf, fastigate and weeping growth habits.

### **Wish to Get High?**

Although our lowland flora might seem a bit repetitive, the mix changes precipitously and dramatically as one ascends elevation in both the Cascade and Olympic Mountain ranges. Although the mountain hemlock, *Tsuga mertensiana*, and sub-alpine fir, *Abies lasiocarpa*, are often encountered in our home landscapes as well as in the Arboretum's collection, plants requiring more precise horticultural practices often remain unknown to those unable to pay in situ homage to these botan-

ical curiosities. The Cascadia exhibit provides an opportunity to capitalize upon the talented staff of horticulturists at Washington Park Arboretum and to cultivate those plants requiring a bit of coddling, including the rarely seen flannel bush, *Cladotamnus pyroliflorus*, and *Rhododendron albiflorum*, which might ultimately find suitable homes in this exhibit and help provide interpretive as well as educational opportunities.

### Lassoing the Klamath Knot

Anyone who has traveled south on Interstate 5 towards San Francisco—even if not remotely cognizant of the rapidly changing plant speciation mile-by-mile—cannot help but comprehend how quickly the landscape begins to transfigure. By mid-Oregon, the mix of woody plant species is all but unidentifiable to those who have never traveled beyond the greater Puget Sound basin. Two celebrated conifers, *Calocedrus decurrens* and *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, begin to appear, as does the California bay, *Umbellularia californica*, whose leaves are used in cooking. These species continue south towards the botanically resplendent Siskiyou Range on the border between Oregon and California, where, due to climatic and geologic parameters, they meet an exciting inventory of rare and endemic plant species.

It is here that *Rhododendron occidentale* thrives, offering early- to mid-summer flowers with a heady fragrance. The Garry oak, *Quercus garryana*, and *Q. kelloggii* meet up with several evergreen brethren, all worthy of integration into an ecogeographical vignette of Northwest flora. *Lithocarpus densiflorus*, the tan-bark oak, joins rank with the low, rounded mounds of the Sadler's oak, *Quercus sadleriana*, as well as the hugely variable, small-foliaged huckleberry oak, *Quercus vacciniifolia*. Of special note is the golden chinquapin, *Chrysolepis chrysophylla*, with deep, glossy green foliage, under-surfaced by a rich, chartreuse-yellow farina.

Certainly, a place of honor will be found for the endemic evergreen shrub, discovered in the Siskiyou by Lilla Leach in 1930: In the Ericaceae family, *Kalmiopsis leachiana* forms a low mound of glossy evergreen foliage three feet tall by five feet wide and is coated with comely pink flowers in spring. Adjacent, I would lobby hard for inclusion of the newly discovered *Neuiusia cliftonii*, an extremely rare deciduous shrub found in Northern California in the late 1990s.

These plants might flank a grouping of what is arguably the most graceful of conifers, Brewer's weeping spruce. *Picea breweriana* is found naturally occurring only in the Siskiyou Mountains, and although currently represented in the collection at the Arboretum, a small, well-cultivated grove of this plant would be a fitting tribute to a small, rarified piece of West Coast real estate that continues to generate devotees across the globe.

These suggestions are, of course, only a fraction of the possibilities that exist in recreating a macro-glimpse of the Pacific Northwest. As in all plant collections, new and exciting accessions may replace those with less appeal, less interpretive value or more difficulty in cultivation. What will not change along the way is the increased appreciation of a more abundant and compelling natural inventory of regional plants than was ever before realized. ∞

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Garden designer and writer, as well as plant hunter, **DAN HINKLEY** travels the world in search of seed and the excitement of finding new garden-worthy plants. To read more about the Arboretum's new Pacific Connections Garden, see David Mabberley's article in the Fall 2006 issue of the Bulletin.

\**"Gaultheria"* is the spelling Douglas used for the genus *Gaultheria*. David Douglas wrote this comment in his journal when visiting the area north of the mouth of the Columbia River. (Taken from "Douglas of the Forests: The North American Journals of David Douglas," by John Davies. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1980, page 37.)