



Creating a Rock Framework for the New Zealand Forest

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY PHIL WOOD

Imagine walking into a New Zealand forest without leaving Seattle. The latest addition to Pacific Connections, the New Zealand Forest, will give visitors that experience. Most of the major construction is finished and the plants will be installed in early summer. As the forest grows in, the carefully constructed rock framework so obvious in the construction phase will recede into a supporting role.

The landscape architectural firm the Berger Partnership designed the project. Andy Mitton of

the Berger Partnership says the design represents the high alpine elevations of the South Island of New Zealand. It features seven plant communities of New Zealand flora, including those termed Mountain Beech Forest (*Nothofagus cliffortioides*) Silver Beech Forest (*Nothofagus menziesii*), Hebe Heath, and Phormium Fen.

The 2-acre site affords magnificent views, facing west on one of the highest points in the Arboretum, but the original steep grade was inaccessible for disabled persons. The new design features a switchback trail for pedestrians and

A rock stream directs water down the hill to drain the wet soils found on the site of the New Zealand Forest.





ABOVE: A new path down the slope creates access for pedestrians, wheel chairs and maintenance vehicles. The rock placed informally on the high side of the slope adds structure to the forest and a frame for the plants.

RIGHT: The Stone Lookout sits at the bottom of the path, and is also reached by a new set of stairs from Arboretum Drive.



wheelchairs leading from Arboretum Drive to the historic Stone Lookout.

Construction revealed the wet soils of the site. Mitton designed a series of rock-filled creeks to channel the water down the hill. The combination of the switch back path, the rugged stacks of rock that help level the slope for the paths and the intersecting rock creeks give the design a strong structure that will create the underpinnings for 10,000 plants.

All of the rock came from Marenakos Rock Center in Preston. Mitton wanted rock with a dark, rough look that reflected that found in the mountains of the Canterbury region of New Zealand. Importing rock from New Zealand

would be impossibly expensive, so Mitton settled on granite called High Cascade, from our close-by mountains. Marenakos did not have enough granite of this kind on hand for the large project. Then Mitton received a phone call—a new vein of granite had just been opened. By happy coincidence the tans and browns of the rock in the vein give it a close visual match to Canterbury rock. Marenakos named the stone High Cascade Rough.

The new design offers two ways to get to the Stone Outlook from Arboretum Drive. In addition to the gently sloping gravel path, a stone stairway made of sets of five to seven treads, with landings in between, gives a more direct access.



LEFT: This set of five steps are cut from a single boulder.

The slices are fanned back in a method called butterflying, which shows off the live, uncut edge of the rock.

RIGHT: This view shows several sets of treads, each sliced from a single boulder. The stairs connect the Stone Lookout to Arboretum Drive. The High Cascade Rough rocks fit the stairs into the slope and will provide a strong contrast to the plants.

A single boulder was sliced to make each set of treads. The treads are fanned back, each resting on the one beneath. The riser or face of each tread shows the live, uncut edge of the boulder.

The completion of the forest will be celebrated in the fall. Over the coming years,

watching the forest grow will engage all of us who visit. ☁

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LEFT: Construction of the future forest opened up this magnificent view and afforded a way down to the Stone Lookout by path and stairs.

RIGHT: An excavator works on the slope next to the new rock stairs that climb up the hill from the Stone Lookout. In the foreground are the original stone walls built when the Lookout was constructed in the 1930s.

Renovating the Lookout

Thanks to a generous \$25,000 grant secured by the Arboretum Foundation from the Seattle Garden Club, the historic Stone Lookout at the base of the new forest garden will be renovated in time for the opening ceremonies in September. Originally built in 1938–39, the lookout is badly in need of rehabilitation. The repairs will include replacing the current standing seam roof with a metal shingle-style roofing to create a fire resistant and longer-lasting structure. The roof will also be raised by two feet to its original height to allow in more light.