TREE WALK at SEWARD PARK

Tree Ambassador

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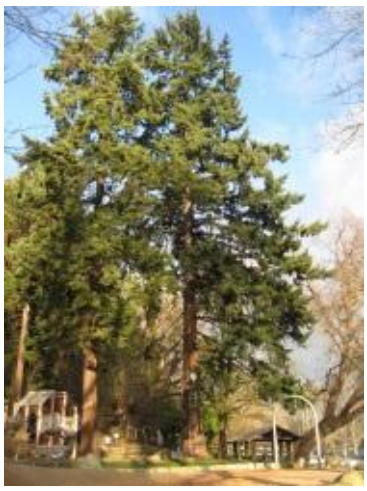
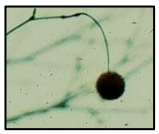
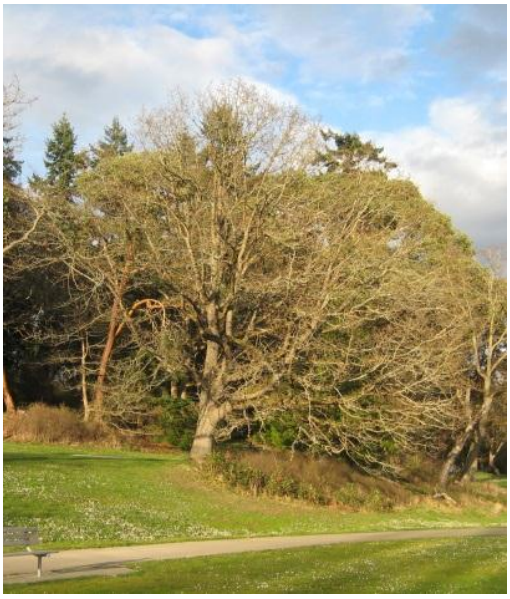
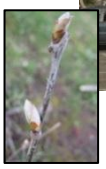
Trees, The Echoes of History

This Tree Walk covers the "isthmus" area of Seward Park, from Clark's Prairie to the Swimming Beach.

Tree #	Common Name *Botanic name*	Notes	Photos
This Tree Walk begins on the south terrace of the Audubon Society Building, facing the playground.			
1	**Douglas Fir** *Pseudotsuga menziesii*	To start, face south and look up. This is the tallest tree in view. Any discussion of trees in Seward Park, Seattle's largest and oldest forest, has to start with the Douglas Fir. Most of the trees on the Bailey peninsula are Douglas Fir. They were here thousands of years before we humans got here, and hopefully they'll still be here thousands of years from now. This particular specimen is probably somewhere between 100 and 200 years old. You can distinguish a Douglas Fir from other evergreen trees by noticing: 1. each needle is separate, they're not bunched together like a pine, larch, or cedar; 2. its cones are about 3 inches long; and 3. its cones have a distinctive protrusion resembling a dragon's tongue jutting out between the cone bracts.	
2	**Norway Spruce** *Picea abies*	Let's introduce ourselves to another evergreen tree, the Norway Spruce. There are four of them framing the platform on the upper-western edge of this playground. Climb the 2 short flights of steps to your left (watch out for kids). You can identify a Norway Spruce by noticing: 1. its gray-brown flaky bark, in contrast to the furrowed bark of pines and firs; 2. its needles attach to a reddish-brown stem; 3. its cones tend to be 4-6 inches long; and 4. The bracts on its cones tend to be "papery" thin. These may seem like big trees – and, well, they are – but they're not very old, as trees go. These trees are just 50-80 years old. They grow quickly.	

3	**Madrona** *Arbutus menziesii*	Our next tree is to the right of the picnic shelter. It's the one which seems to be leaning out over the street. Let's walk or *slide* our way over there. This tree is called a Madrona. Like the Douglas Fir and the Norway Spruce, nearly all of the Madrona trees in Seward Park weren't planted; they grew here on their own long before people came around. You can easily tell a Madrona tree from all others by: 1. its smooth, reddish, papery, peeling bark; 2. its twisting, curvy trunk and branches; and 3. its bright orange-red berries (when in season). Seward Park is home to Seattle's largest collection of Madrona trees. We'll see several of them on the hillside to our left as we walk towards our next tree.	
4	**London Plane** *Platanus x acerifolia*	Let's turn left and walk east down the trail past the picnic shed. Our next tree is coming up on the right, between us and the parking lot. It's the one with the really gnarly, bumpy trunk. This is called a London Plane. One of the ways we can tell that it was planted is that there is a row of these trees planted at more or less regular intervals. This tree was planted in the late 1930's, so it is about 75 years old. This row of trees was probably planted here to provide refreshing shade to this southern-exposed walkway in the summer. You can identify a London Plane by: 1. the papery bark (further up on older trees) which peels away to reveal a cream color underneath; 2. the gnarly bumps and folds in the lower parts of the bark which form over time; and 3. the round ball-like fruits, which grow in the summer.	
5	**Garry Oak** *Quercus garryana*	Our next tree is a bit of a walk from here. You'll need to walk east, going past the end of the parking lot, and keep going until the pathway enters into an open prairie. The tree you're looking for is a large, deciduous tree just to the right of the path in the middle of the prairie. Watch out for joggers and doggers as you walk and read this. The area you're walking towards is known as Clark's Prairie. It's named after Edward A. Clark, who built a cabin and a small farm in this area, along with his fellow-settler John Harvey, back in 1852. It is believed that Clark and Harvey were not the first people to clear this prairie, however. Local native tribes probably kept the Douglas Fir at bay, using fire, to preserve an area for hunting game and collecting edible vegetation, like acorns. Although it is likely that they hunted, fished, and gathered wild vegetables from other parts of this peninsula as well, no evidence has yet been found of a permanent settlement pre-dating Clark and Harvey. As an established pioneer, in 1854 Clark built another house for himself in Seattle at what is today the southwest corner of First and Yesler. Unfortunately, the cabin and farm they built here met a fiery end in 1856 when a treaty dispute between the Native American tribes and Governor Stevens escalated into violent conflict. The native tribes burned the farm to the	

		ground, as well as nearly all pioneer settlements in the area outside of the village of Seattle. Clark and Harvey, along with pioneers in the area, had seen the attack coming and escaped into Seattle. Clark never rebuilt the farm, choosing instead to stay in Seattle, becoming County Auditor and a Justice of the Peace. He died of unknown causes in 1860 at the age of 32. Harvey relocated to Snohomish where his descendants still reside today. The tree, at which you've probably now arrived, is the largest tree in the center of Clark's Prairie. This is a Garry Oak tree. While this particular tree may not date all the way back to the 1850's, it is likely that oak trees like it have grown here and provided food for people and animals for centuries.	
6	**Bolleana Poplar** *Populus alba 'Pyramidalis'*	The Garry Oak tree was the easternmost point of our Tree Walk. Let's turn towards the lake, find a safe spot to descend the hillside to the lower bike path, turn right, and head back towards the west to meet our next tree. As we approach the parking lot, we can immediately see our next tree. It's standing in a row with 15 of its brethren between the parking lot at the lake. These Bolleana Poplar trees are known for: 1. their columnar shape (i.e. being very tall and skinny); 2. their white bark which develops dark diamond-shaped breaks higher up; and 3. their leaves, which are green on one side and white on the other. The shimmering effect these leaves create in the mildest of breezes makes these popular as ornamental trees.	
7	**Red Maple** *Acer rubrum*	For our next tree, go back across the street to the playground and look to the west. This large deciduous tree in the center of the lawn is a Red Maple. We can tell by its light-gray, scaly bark and the tiny red blossoms which come out in early April. The leaves of a Red Maple provide ample shade in the summer. In the fall, true to their name, the leaves turn a glorious bright red (much like its neighbors, which we'll see in a moment). This variety of Maple commonly lives "only" 70-100 years. As this tree was likely planted back in the late 1930's, it's probably in the latter half of that life span.	

8	**Northern Red Oak** *Quercus rubra*	A few yards south and west is the next tree. This one we've identified as a Northern Red Oak. Like the Garry Oak we saw back in Clark's Prairie, the most distinctive attribute of an oak tree is its acorns. An acorn consists of a brown nut topped with a hat-like stem. When the acorn falls to the ground, the nut and hat separate and the nut usually gets picked up and consumed by local wildlife such as squirrels. The hats, which are about the size of a quarter, are left behind to mulch the soil. See if you can find one! These oak trees, along with the maple, poplars, and the London Plane trees we've already seen, were planted here during the huge public works projects of the Great Depression in the 1930's. They provide us with cool and dense shade in the summer and beautiful red leaves in the fall. These Red Oaks also provide a tie to the landmark Garry Oaks which drew Clark and Harvey to settle nearby in the 1850's.	
9	**Kanzan Flowering Cherry** *Prunus serrulata 'Kanzan'*	Let's walk back towards the Audubon building. Just before we get there, let's stop and notice the tree on our right. It's easy to overlook as there's a lot going on around it – sidewalks, playground, fire hydrant, lamp post, etc. This is the first Flowering Cherry tree on our tour. Cherry trees blossom in March and April every year with beautiful pink and white flowers. As some have been known to blossom as early as late-February, these trees are often thought of as a harbinger of spring. Several of the cherry trees surrounding this traffic circle date back to 1929, and this may be one of them.	
10	**Cascade Snow Flowering Cherry** *Prunus × yedoensis 'Akebono'*	Let's head north on the sidewalk past the Audubon building. This is about the mid-point of our Tree Walk. We also happen to be passing by the public restrooms, if anybody would like a quick break. Let's head west across the crosswalk towards the large field. Greeting us on the other side is another Flowering Cherry tree. What you'll notice that's different about this one is: 1. It's much smaller and younger than the previous tree. Cherry trees tend to be fragile and therefore need to be replaced more often than other tree species. 2. The 5-petal white blossoms on this tree identify it as a different species called the Cascade Snow Flowering Cherry. It's a hybrid of the Japanese Flowering Cherry developed for the Northwest.	
11	**Coastal Redwood** *Sequoia sempervirens*	Let's turn north and walk towards the Pottery Studio building. On our left as we pass the parking lot are two groves of Coastal Redwood trees. Walk under the first one to feel the spongy Redwood bark. In the second grove of three trees, the tallest is about 120' tall, easily the tallest tree yet on our tour. Coastal Redwoods are the tallest trees in the world, some exceeding 300 feet. Were these trees planted or did they grow here on their own? While they may seem far too tall to have been planted, consider that prior to 1917, the water level of Lake Washington was 9 feet higher than it is today. Trees don't typically grow underwater. Are these trees above or below the pre-1917 water line? My research shows these were planted around 1937.	

12	**Lombardy Black Poplar** *Populus nigra 'Italica'*	Let's take a closer look at this tall, skinny, lighter-color tree at the northwest corner of the parking lot. No peeking to the left column, now. What kind of tree is it? We've seen one like it before. It's deciduous, not evergreen. Okay. It's tall and skinny. Good. Light gray, almost whitish bark. Getting closer… Poplar! That's right. Good job! But this one's a little different, isn't it? The other poplar had white bark with those diamond-shaped spots. This tree's bark is more gray and furrowed. That's how you can tell this one's a Lombardy Black Poplar. The edges of the leaves are slightly different as well. These poplars were also planted in 1937.	
13	**Alaska Cedar** *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*	If you turn right and look around the corner, you'll find a very different looking tree. The Alaska Cedar is eye-catching primarily because of its drooping branches or "melted" look. An appropriately ornamental tree to plant next to an art studio, isn't it? The Alaska Cedar is also distinctive for its tiny spherical cones (averaging just 1 cm in diameter) and its scaly twigs and leaves. Another interesting aspect: the drooping branches are probably good at sloughing off snow – a useful trait in Alaska. As these trees usually grow to a height of 60-90 feet, this one is apparently pretty young – possibly the youngest tree on our tour. There's something else very unusual about this tree. Take a look on the ground just east of the trunk. A large, healthy-looking branch appears to have broken off and is lying on the ground. It's actually still attached to the tree. Furthermore, you'll find that the branch has *dropped its own roots* into the soil. These are known as *stoloniferous* roots. Given the right conditions, this species of tree can spread out like ground cover.	
14	**Port Orford Cedar** *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*	Let's turn left and walk around to look at the side of the building facing the beach. There are three identical evergreen trees growing along this wall of the building. They have soft reddish bark like a Redwood, but their leaves or needles are all scaly like a cedar. Their tiny spherical cones also suggest they're cedars. But the "Aha!" feature on these trees are the tiny white X-marks on the underside of the leaves. Only the Port Orford Cedar (also known as Oregon Cedar) has this feature. As this species of tree tends to grow 100-150 feet tall, the relative shortness of these three suggests that they were planted more recently. Indeed, they don't show in a 1935 photo I've seen of this area; so they must be less than 80 years old. It's a very dense tree, so it was probably planted here to provide some late-morning and mid-day shade for summer bathers.	

15	**Black Cottonwood** or **Balsam Poplar** *Populus trichocarpa*	For our next tree, we need to turn around and walk west across the gently curving concrete steps of the beach. Straight ahead, very near the water's edge stands a tall solitary Black Cottonwood tree. Let's contemplate this location for a moment. What was different about this place 100 years ago? It was under water! Remember, the lake was lowered by *nine feet* in 1917. So this tree must have been intentionally planted here, presumably by a landscape architect, sometime in the last 80 years. But why here? Was the architect trying to create a western boundary to the swimming area to keep us out of the muddy weeds? Was he trying to create late-afternoon shade for folks on the beach? Or perhaps he was trying to create a visual frame for the view of the lake as seen from the tori gate. Perhaps all of these.	
16	**Japanese Red Pine** *Pinus densiflora 'Umbraculifera'*	Let's continue up the hill to the westernmost tip of Seward Park. It's best to make a bee-line for the bike path first, as the grassy hillside here can get pretty slippery if we've had a bit of Seattle's liquid sunshine recently. At the top of this little hill we find something very unusual. There's a short Japanese Red Pine tree – it looks more like a bush – surrounded by gravel and a couple of stone Japanese lanterns. This site is a monument created in 1976 to commemorate the gift of 1,000 cherry trees from the people of Japan to the citizens of Seattle in celebration of the United States' bicentennial. Notice the needles on this tree. They're very long and stiff, unlike any of the evergreens we've seen so far, and most of them only reside near the end of the branch. This gives the tree a semblance to "puffy green clouds." The "Red" part of the Japanese Red Pine's name comes from the orangish-red inner bark. Notice the large, hard, woody pine cone. Quite a contrast to the 1cm spherical cones of the Cedars or the mid-sized, papery cones of the Douglas Fir or Norway Spruce.	
17	**Japanese Flowering Cherry** *Prunus serrulata*	Who can tell me what kind of tree this is, the one opposite the triangular stone monument? Right! It's another Flowering Cherry. Most of the cherry trees in Seward Park were donated by Japan at various times from 1929 to 1976 as gestures of friendship. Notice how much taller and broader this one is compared to the one we saw by the playground. Why do you think that is? It could be related to more sunlight, less competition for moisture with other plants, and less water-diverting concrete.	

18		Okay, let's turn around, double-back down the bicycle path, and pause at the tall, handsome evergreen tree on the corner. Okay, budding horticulturalists! Now it's your turn. Try your hand at identifying this tree. We've seen this exact species of tree already today. Think of its parts: • What kind of cone does it have? Is it small and spherical like the Cedar, medium-sized and papery like the Fir or Spruce, or big and woody like the Pine? • What kind of needles does it have? Are the needles long and skinny and "bunch up" like on the Pine? Are they scaly like a Cedar? Or are they more individual like a Fir, Spruce, or Redwood? • What does its bark look like? Hard and gray or soft and Reddish-brown? • Ready? Let's take a vote! Who thinks it's a Pine? Redwood? Cedar? Douglas Fir? Why? *Bonus question:* Was it planted, or is this a "wild" tree? Why?	
19	**Green Ash** *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*	Wasn't that fun? Okay, let's follow the bike path as it turns towards the south. Let's stop at the grove of trees which this bike path weaves between. The Green Ash is a tree reaching 60 feet tall known for its long, skinny leaves and its similarly-shaped seed pods. So, what's the likely history of these trees? Consider their location and height. Like the Red Oak trees we saw on the lawn near the playground, these trees were probably planted as part of the huge public works projects in the 1930's. What do I mean by huge? • **700 workers.** With 30% unemployment nationwide, there was certainly no shortage of eager, able-bodied people. • **10,000 cubic yards of fill dirt.** Remember, this area used to be under water. Initially, they probably had a muddy, uneven, marshy area. The flat grassy field that we've now enjoyed for three generations had to be painstakingly constructed by someone.	 Seeds
20	**Blue Atlas Cedar** *Cedrus atlantica 'Glauca'*	Next, pivot slightly to your left and look at the tallest evergreen at the south end of the field. See how it's a slightly bluer shade of green than the other trees? That's a Blue Atlas Cedar. Blue Atlas Cedars tend to form a "flat top" as they age. Their branches continue to grow at an upward angle (instead of drooping like most other cedars), sometimes approaching the height of the trunk. Perhaps it was that characteristic of the tree which led the landscape architect to choose it for this location, because it stands immediately adjacent to the foundations of the Seward Park Torii Gate. The torii, built for the 1934 International Potlatch celebration, stood 26 feet tall. See photo at right. It was taken down in the 1980's due to aging and decay. There is a movement afoot to raise funds, both public and private, to build a new one – definitely a worthy cause.	 www.sewardparktori.org

21	**Threadleaf Falsecypress** *Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Filifera'*	The penultimate tree on our tour today is the Threadleaf Falsecypress. To get to it, we need to walk to the end of the bike path, look both ways (although this is a one-way street), and cross to the middle of the park entrance traffic circle. The Threadleaf Falsecypress, native to two islands in Japan, is a tree which can easily be confused with a cedar. It has tiny spherical cones, somewhat droopy branches, and a stringy reddish bark, just like a cedar. But what sets the Threadleaf Falsecypress apart are the delicate pattern of its scaly leaves, which almost look like a stack of impossibly small paper cranes. The leaves also have a whitish tint underneath. Look! It would appear that two of these trees are framing this almost hidden, smooth stone pathway leading southwest into the middle of the wooded traffic island. I think they're inviting us in. Let's see where it leads…	
22	**Japanese Maple** *Acer palmatum*	The final tree on our tour today, which is almost literally hugging this beautiful stone lantern, is called a Japanese Maple. These are most often used as ornamental trees for their predictable height (around 25 feet), and their deep purple leaves which turn a bright red in the fall. The unusual wrap-around shape of the trunk for this particular tree is most likely due to its growing in the direction of the sunlight. This 8-ton Taiko-Gata lantern, a replica of a stone lantern at the Momoyama Palace in Kyoto, was a gift to Seattle from the city of Yokohama Japan in 1930. The gift was in thanks for Seattle's assistance following the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923. In thanks for the lantern, Seattle sent Yokohama 1,000 rose bushes. The descendants of some of those roses still bloom in Yokohama today.	

The **Tree Ambassador** program empowers residents to become stewards of the urban forest and serve as resources of their local community. The program is a project of the Green Seattle Partnership, a collaboration between the City of Seattle and Forterra, and is funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry program.

Seward Park boasts 300 acres of beautiful forest land, home to eagles' nests, old growth forest, a 2.4 mile bike and walking path, an amphitheater, a native plant garden, an art studio, miles of hiking trails, shoreline, beaches and more. www.seattle.gov/parks/environment/seward.htm

Visit the **Friends of Seward Park** web site: www.sewardpark.org. The site provides information about FOSP sponsored activities and work parties, Nature Center programs and other public events in the park. It also has a large (and growing) section on the natural history of the park.

Seward Park is also home to the **Seward Park Environmental & Audubon Center**, a partnership between National Audubon Society and Seattle Parks & Recreation. The Seward Park Center's mission is to inspire exploration, discovery, and stewardship of the natural world through programs that promote healthy, sustainable communities. Visit their web site: sewardpark.audubon.org.

For more information about the community effort to design and build a replacement for the torii gate, visit www.sewardparktorii.org.

For a complete list of Seattle **Tree Walks**, visit www.seattle.gov/trees.