In spring 2019, the Arboretum embarked on a plan to restore one of its most special and beloved places: Rhododendron Glen. The project was made possible by a generous gift of $750 thousand from long-time Foundation volunteer Mary Ellen Mulder and her husband, Gordon Mulder. Their catalytic gift generated further funding for the project, including a grant from the Seattle Garden Club.

Located near the south end of the Arboretum, Rhododendron Glen dates to the 1930s and has it all: dramatic topography, tall trees, a babbling brook, and beautiful understory plants, including many unusual species of rhododendron. Over time, however, important parts of the Glen lost their luster. Weeds infiltrated; the canopy became too dense in places, resulting in a loss of understory plants; trails deteriorated and were negatively affecting the stream; and key sections of the stream and its associated rock work became silted up.

The first phase of the restoration (2019–22) focused on the upper “bowl” of the Glen. Weed removal, strategic opening-up of the canopy, and extensive new plantings transformed the garden. (Ray Larson, UW Botanic Gardens Curator, summarized these new plantings in his annual round-up articles in the Winter “Bulletin” over the past few years. Visit arboretumfoundation.org/news/bulletin-archive to read all three articles.)

The final phase took place from late summer 2022 to spring 2023, with the rehabilitation of the stream corridor in the lower part of the Glen. Starting in August 2022, our contractors, Forma and Terra Dynamics, used heavy machinery to remove the old stone “dam” at the upper pond, and to excavate and regrade the pond and stream channel. They placed new cobblestones, in various particle sizes, along the pond and stream bed, as well as large woody debris, to prevent erosion and enhance the stream’s natural character and habitat value.
Along the stream bank, they installed a new irrigation system and laid down a special, fast-draining soil mix developed especially for rhododendrons. They also created a seating area by the stream, overlooking Azalea Way, and built a new, accessible pathway connecting the area to the Centennial Garden below. Directly downslope from the seating area, the contractors created a wide planting bed running along the lower course of the stream as it exits the Glen and enters the Azalea Way Pond. UW Botanic Gardens horticulturists began intensive planting of the stream bank in November 2022, continuing through spring 2023, while Seattle Parks and Recreation staff restored the adjacent lawn.

New ericaceous (heath family) plantings include numerous species and cultivars of *Rhododendron*, *Vaccinium* (huckleberry), *Gaultheria*, *Enkianthus*, *Kalmia* (mountain laurel), *Arctostaphylos* (manzanita), and *Pieris* (lily-of-the-valley shrub). Most species are new to the Arboretum and greatly expand our ericaceous collections. Small trees on the south side of the stream include *Acer* (maple) species, *Magnolia ashei*, *M. sieboldii*, *M. faveolata*, *Stewartia sinensis*, and *Cornus* (dogwood) species.

Companion plants in areas near the creek include many species of *Primula* (primrose), *Darmera peltata* (umbrella plant), *Rodgersia* species, *Podophyllum* (mayapple) species, and *Gunnera tinctoria* (Chilean rhubarb), plus a variety of ferns and other perennials. Closer to the channel itself are new native perennials, grasses, ferns and small shrubs.

Ray will dig into these new plantings in detail in his review article in the upcoming 2024 Winter “Bulletin.” In the meantime, come see the restored Glen and enjoy the diverse new plant palette and rehabilitated stream.

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