

# Playfair Park

## Habitat & Trail Map



Just some of the spectacular rhododendron flowers you'll see in the garden.



Garry oak - *Quercus garryana*



The Garry oak meadow forms a major part of the diversity of plants found in Playfair Park.



Common Camas - *Camassia quamash*  
The perennial border offers a wide variety of rare and exotic plants.



Saanich Archives circa 1959

Playfair Park, a 3.7 ha (9.1 acres) jewel in the heart of Saanich, is renowned for its beautiful garden and large collection of rhododendrons. The park is especially delightful each spring when the rhododendrons and azaleas put on a dazzling display of colour under a canopy of Garry oak and tall fir trees. The Garry oak meadow comes alive with camas, shooting stars and other native plants.

### Planting the Gardens

In 1952, a community park committee, headed by Norm Zapf, began neighbourhood work parties to clear the stumps and brush from the park. In those days, the municipality did not work in the parks, instead, they gave \$200 a year to the park committees to take care of their local parks. It took two years and an enormous amount of volunteer work before the park was cleared and the grass area planted.

In 1956, Dr. Adam Szczawinski, curator of botany at the Provincial Museum, brought together a group of garden enthusiasts to organize and register 'The Arboretum Society of the Pacific Northwest' as the first stage in the larger dream of a National Arboretum. It was decided to plant a specialized rhododendron garden to attract the interest and support of the public. The Municipality of Saanich was in full support and through the Superintendent of Parks, Bert Richman, the previously undeveloped Playfair Park was offered as a site for a rhododendron garden.

Nurserymen in the area were extremely co-operative and donated scores of hybrid and species rhododendrons, azaleas, mature camellias, as well as heathers, daphne, berberis, dwarf junipers, and companion plants. The University of Washington Arboretum, Seattle, contributed several hundred azaleas. Dr. Stuart Holland and Kai Christiansen propagated plants from seeds and cuttings from such sources as Edinburgh Botanic Garden, Savell Great Park, various Arboretums, and other sources. A.E. Greig of Royston, Ed Lohbrunner, William Goddard, and Rudolph Williams also provided many fine species.

Frank Ross, the Lt. Governor of British Columbia, provided generous support to the Society and in April 1959 the garden was declared open by Mrs. Ross, Patroness of the Society.

Gifts and purchases of plants continued to be made, and by July 1963 the Arboretum Society Plant Accession list indicated that about 650 species and hybrid rhododendrons, 600 azaleas of all sorts, 45 camellias, and 300 heathers, daphnes, cypress and companion plants had been planted at Playfair Park.

Saanich maintained the garden after it was planted and established by the Arboretum Society. Unfortunately, in 1980, The Arboretum Society was officially dissolved and the dream of a full-scale arboretum on the Saanich Peninsula was reluctantly abandoned.

### Playfair Park Today

Saanich Parks continues to improve and manage Playfair Park for everyone to enjoy. The park is host to numerous community gatherings and events, and is the perfect setting for quiet contemplation, photography, and painting.

The Garry oak meadow at Playfair Park, with its spectacular spring display, is one of many restoration sites of the Garry Oak Restoration Project (GORP). This public ecological restoration program is designed to educate local residents about the value and sensitivity of Garry oak ecosystems. GORP restoration sites are on municipal lands and provide opportunities for community stewardship, preservation and education.



Playfair Park is home to many community events and festivals.

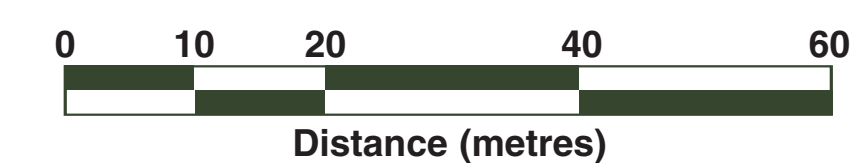
Restoration efforts at Playfair Park include management of invasive plant species, protection of the meadow (especially during spring and summer), management of species at risk and ongoing monitoring efforts by volunteers and consultants.

GORP is a partnership program sponsored by the Municipality of Saanich, Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, UVic Restoration of Natural Systems Program and the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative.

Credits: Stuart S. Holland, Catherine Skinner, Bill McMillan and Municipality of Saanich Archives.

### MAP LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Trail
- Footpath
- Picnic Table
- Bench
- Interpretive Sign



Saanich Parks & Recreation

