

I have tried to write the review of the P&G trip to Leonardslee several times – but I keep running out of superlatives! They say a picture is worth a thousand words – I took over 120 pics!

The day was warm and the sky was cloudless. We arrived at about 10.15 and I thought, “Oh no! Coach parties”. But the site is so huge, 26 acres, that there was no sense of crowds – except in the cafes which quickly ran out of spaces at the outside tables. More of that later!

The booking in system was quick and very efficient and after greeting the last arrivals Glyn and I set off. Ever rebellious, we went the opposite way to everyone else - but this was fortuitous as we found the rock garden first. Oh my goodness – this where words start to fail! No small rocks here – great chunks of stone made giant steps and little winding paths. The colours of the azaleas and rhododendrons layered against and above one another rendered us both speechless.

The camera on my phone was ceaseless in its effort to capture the beauty and colour all around us. We came out of the rock garden and needed coffee! Fortunately, some of our members (you know who you are) had got there before us and were ensconced in the sunshine eating large slices of cake. So, we joined them.

After coffee we set off again past the bluebell bank to find the five hammer ponds, which are more like lakes. We crossed to the far side and walked all along the lakeside through yellow tunnels of scented Rhododendron Luteum. Heavenly. We stopped often just to sit and absorb – and try and capture - the beauty.

After the ponds we took the woodland walk through the enormous mature rhododendrons, where again the mixture of the colour palette of the azaleas and rhododendrons was breathtaking.

I particularly liked the Loder’s white rhododendron which is named after the garden’s founder. Did you know that rhododendron means Rose Tree - from Greek for rose and dendros – tree.

The one thing Glyn wasn’t keen to see was the exhibition “Beyond the Doll’s House”, but we were both glad that we did. It was amazing – a whole village including the village church, big house with the butler bringing champagne to guests on the lawn and even the village schoolroom with the master writing on the blackboard and the naughty boy (There’s always one!) dipping the plait of the girl in the desk in front in his inkwell!

This was a very magical trip for me as it was my first return to Leonardslee for 34 years. I think I enjoyed it even more this time. Some of our members took a picnic so that they could make a day of it but Glyn and I and our two friends went to a local country pub for lunch.

It was a wonderful day out. I urge you to go.