

Three Gardens in Three Days



And It Was Awesome!
By Matthew Chesterman



Chatsworth



Plants, Wonderful Plants!

Kicking us off on our journey was Chatsworth, and it started strong! The first thing I walked into was the glasshouse, inside I found all sorts of tropical goodies, like this Loquat and Passionflower!





I found a Laburnum arch that was interesting, and although it was just a week away from full bloom you could get a hint of what was to come.

I also discovered the sensory garden, which was a very calm, peaceful area of the garden, the mints and other herbs were fun to smell.

There were a couple of Iris varieties that I found, I decided to start a collection of Iris photos seeing as they were my favourite flower. Pin in that for later.





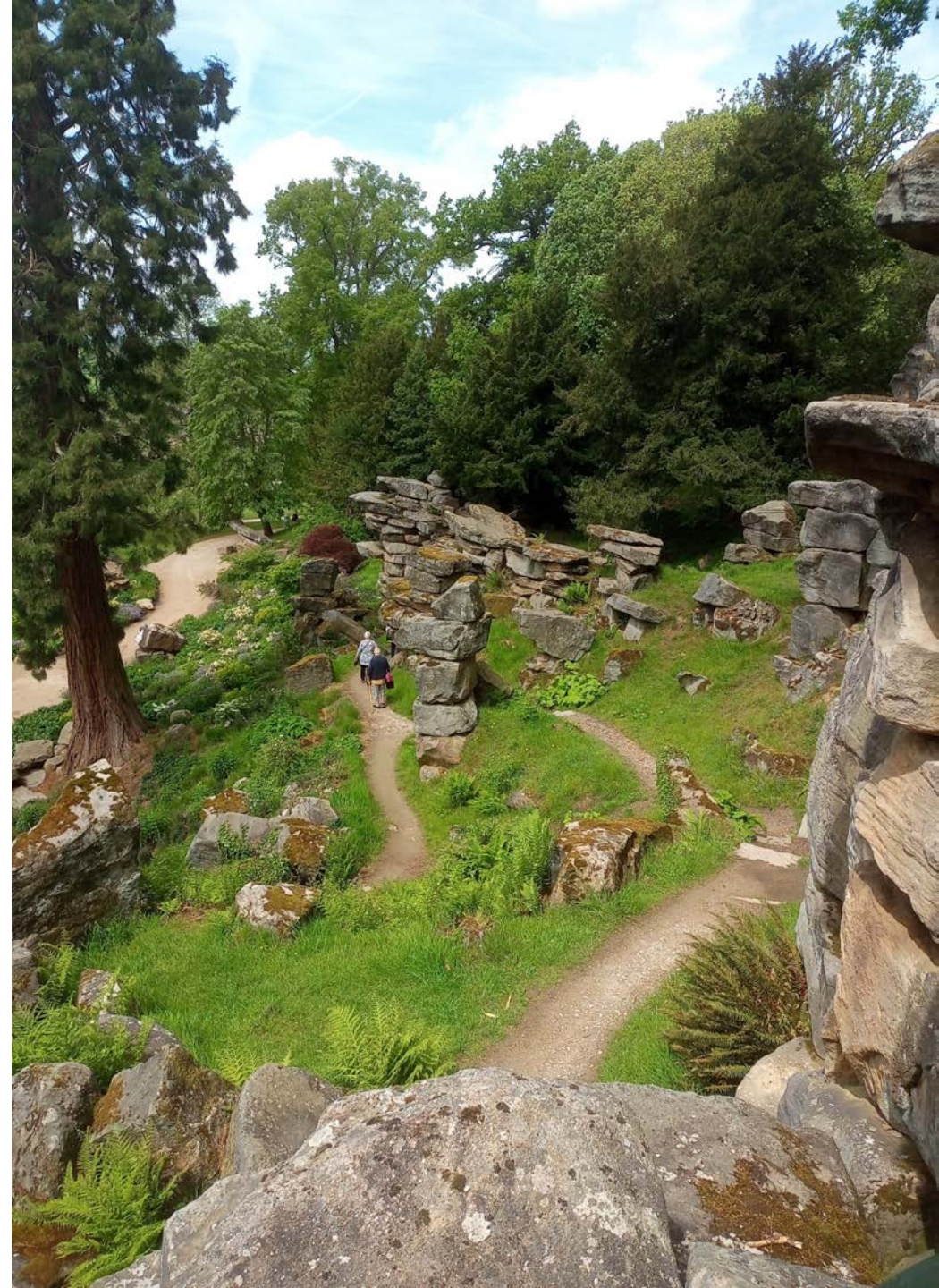
Lunch Above The Fountains

Lunchtime was serene in this building. Imagine, the water rushing outside, you're perched on the edge of a stone with the ambient light radiating off the intricate carvings of fruit and grapes as you watch the water cascade into the distance. I was almost sorry to leave that spot and continue exploring.

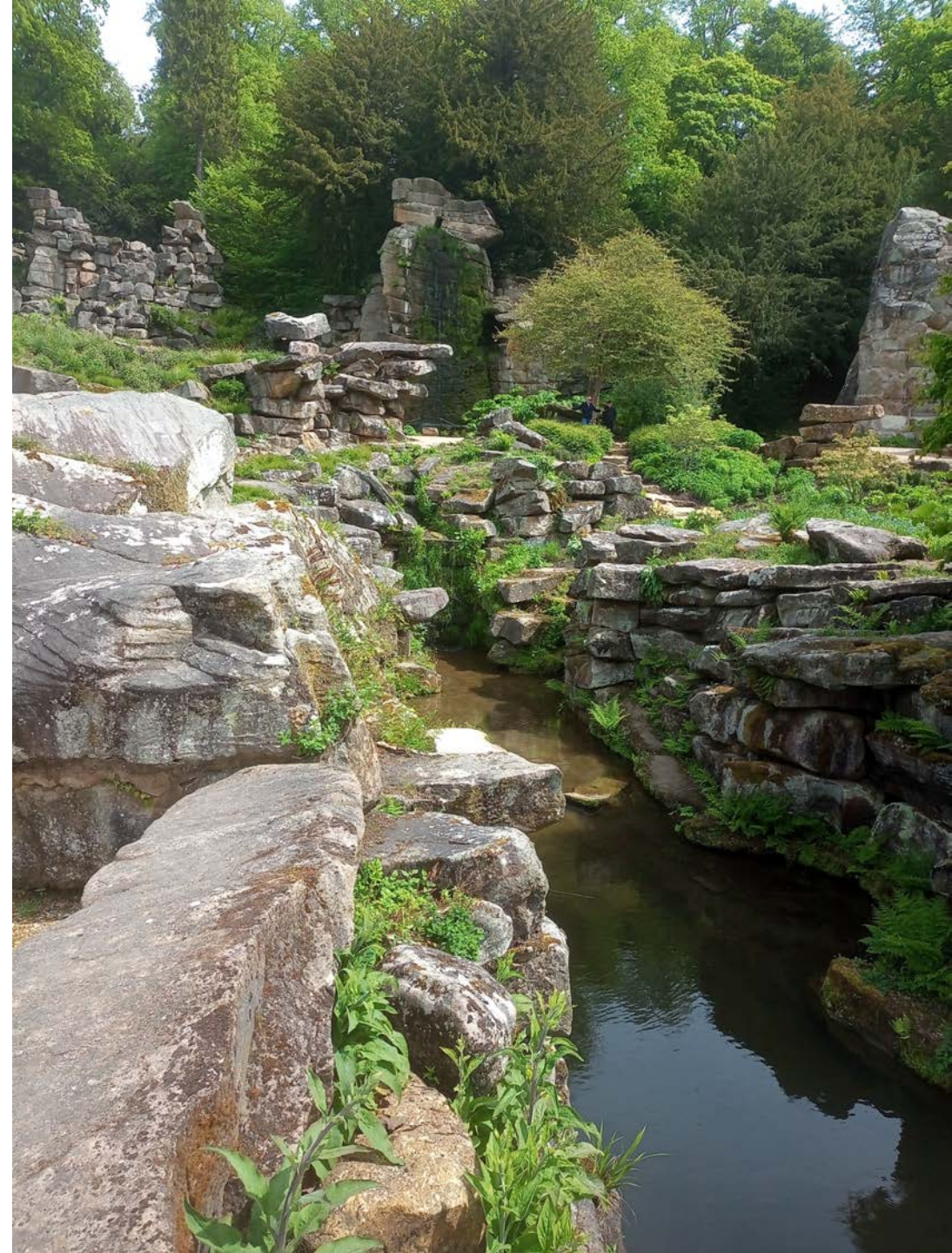


Enter the Rock Garden

I must have landed on Vulcan or some other distant planet, because the world of the rock garden was an incredible scene of boulders stacked into astounding shapes of towers and crevasses, each bend framing the path beautifully while hiding a brilliant view around the corner.



I spent ages admiring the rock garden, I didn't leave a path untrodden.



Getting Thoroughly Lost

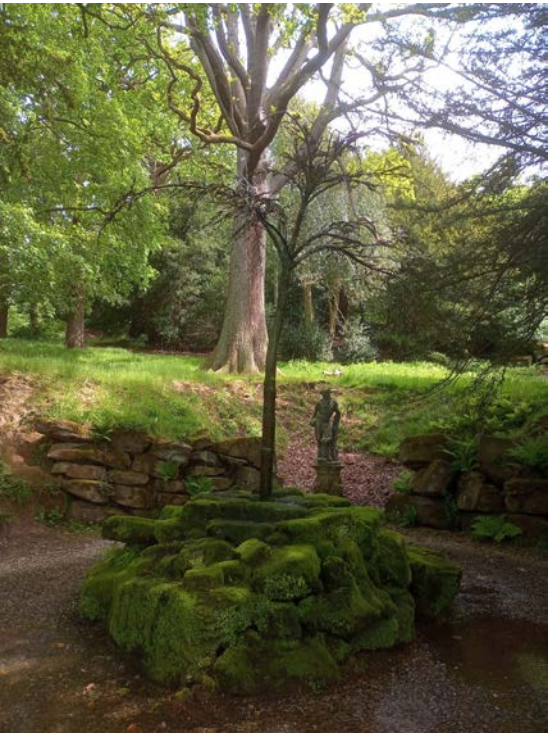
Eventually I found *The Tunnel*. A chilling black hole beckoning you to descend into cold, cold darkness with nothing but the frozen draught whispering in your ear as you plunge on into the unknown with no clue where *The Tunnel* ended... If it ever did...



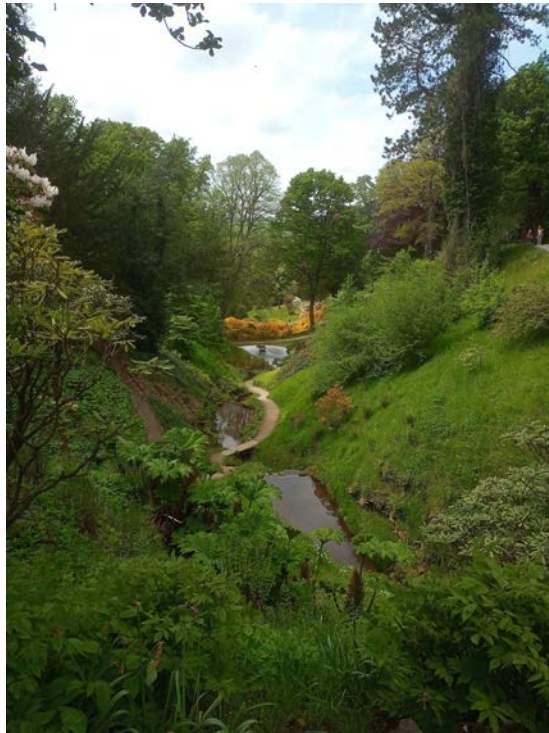
And this photograph is my trophy for finding my way both in and out of the maze! (I did come home!)

Some Special Things to See

This tree was a fountain, I loved how the water was spraying in all directions from the branches!



This valley was a great view to have a break over, the path was so far below and a stream trickled down to it from next to the bench.



This hut not only gave you a fantastic view of the garden below, but fit into the view just as well!



This meadow just flowed like an ocean, although I couldn't enter it I could just imagine how peaceful it would be to sit amongst the flowers.



Chatsworth's Rating:

- Enjoyment: **A**, Lots of amazing things to see, The rockery was like being another planet and the coal tunnel was easily the most thrilling thing in the entire trip.
- Explorability: **A**, So many hidden views that crept up on you, many paths never quite let on where they were going but there was always a reward!
- Iris Photo Score: **D**, Eh, just 2. But we can look past that.
- Overall Score: **A** – Brilliant!



Trentham

Formal Gardening at its Best

The formal gardens of Trentham had to be the best part the visit for me, It was beautifully geometrical and had a wide, open view all around. And while I was wandering around, something else caught my attention amongst the borders...





So many Irises! I couldn't help but try and find each and every one of them, I love how varied the colours and forms of the flowers are.



The Ruins of Trentham

There's this strange feeling you get when you see aging buildings fall to the plant kingdom, particularly in the case of these wisteria growing on the walls of this disused building. It's beautiful, but with a touch of melancholy when you consider that these plants have claimed what humans no longer inhabit. It provokes that age old question, does the garden really need a gardener?

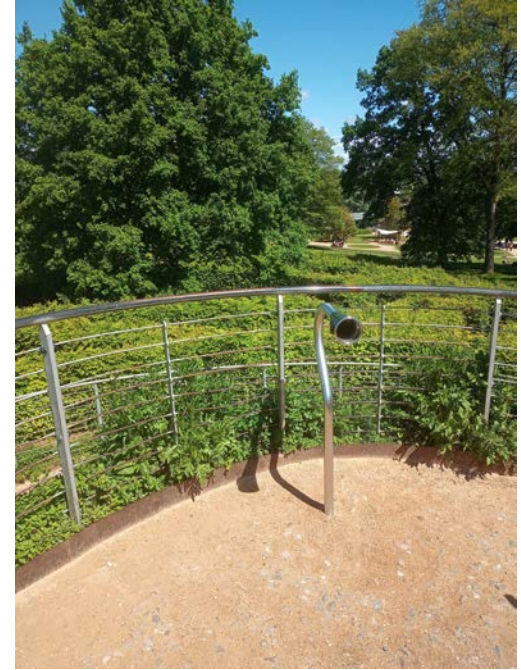


Back to Something More Optimistic



I was taken by surprise with the barefoot trail, I thought it was a very novel way to engage the senses. I wandered along the whole length and it felt like an adventure in itself!

The maze was also a fun challenge, but when I reached the end I found trees blocking my view of the full maze, so I couldn't retrospectively find the answer for next time! Clever. (Unfortunately no-one heard my cries for help through the pipelines!)



Trentham's Rating:

- Enjoyment: **A-**, Plenty to see and do, but there was A LOT of walking involved to see everything around the lake.
- Explorability: **B**, much of it was already in plain sight, not many secrets to discover or rocks to look around, but there were still many points of interest.
- Iris Photo Score: **A+**, 21 Irises!
- Overall Score: **B** – Great, but the best is yet to come...

Bodnant



Bodnant was nice at first glance, it seemed like your usual kind of estates with borders, a nice big lawn and a few trees here and there.

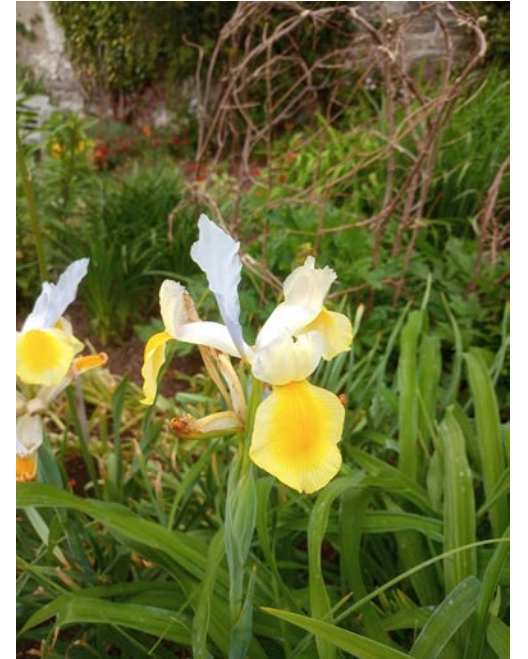


As popular as the laburnum arch is, it was too busy for me so I didn't actually see it properly, but on the lawn there was an aged sweet chestnut with a giant trunk. A fascinated arboriculture student told me it was one of the oldest veteran trees in Britain!



And What About the Irises, I Hear You Cry?

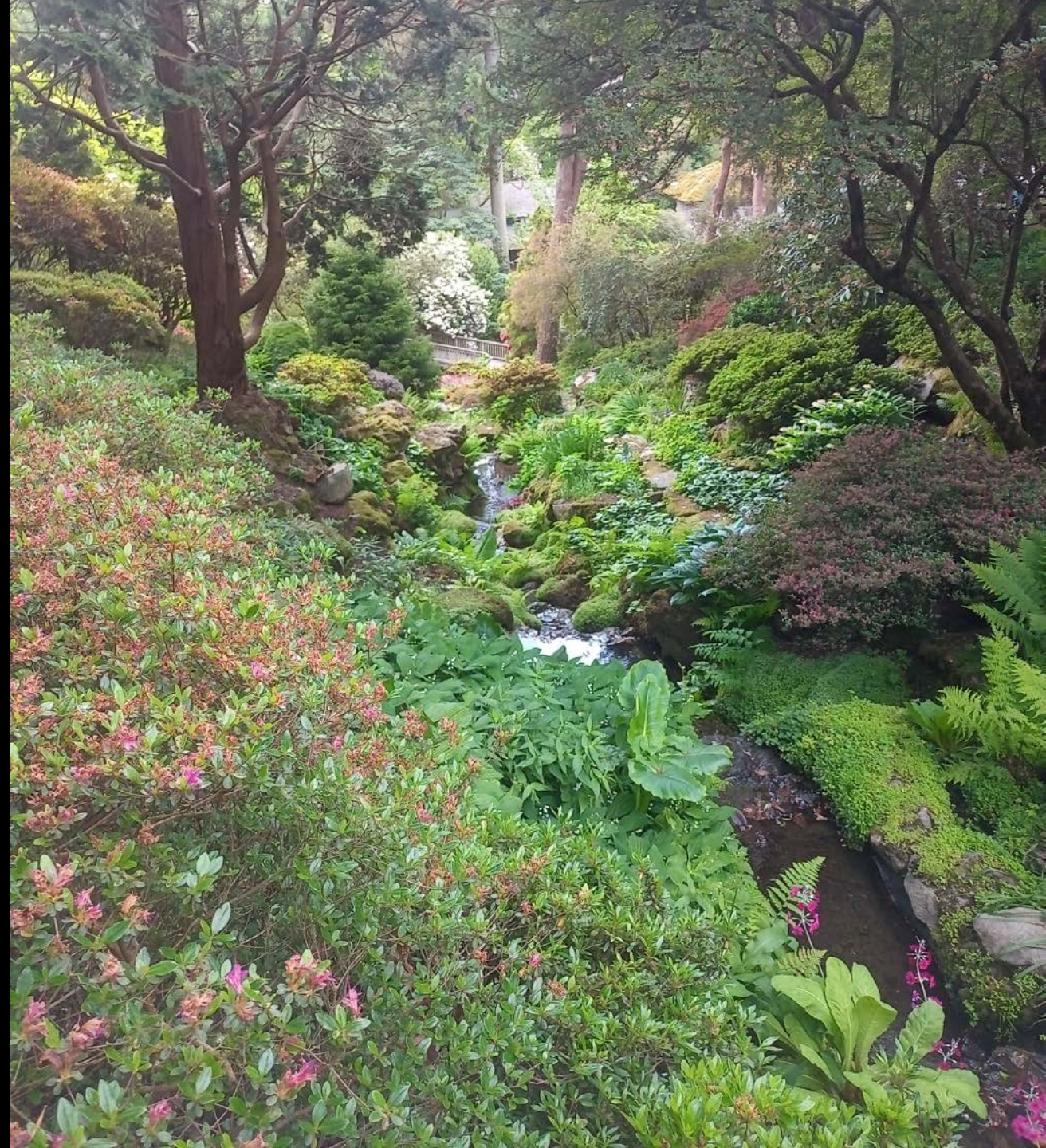
Yes, they were nice.





But then I
found this

And then this

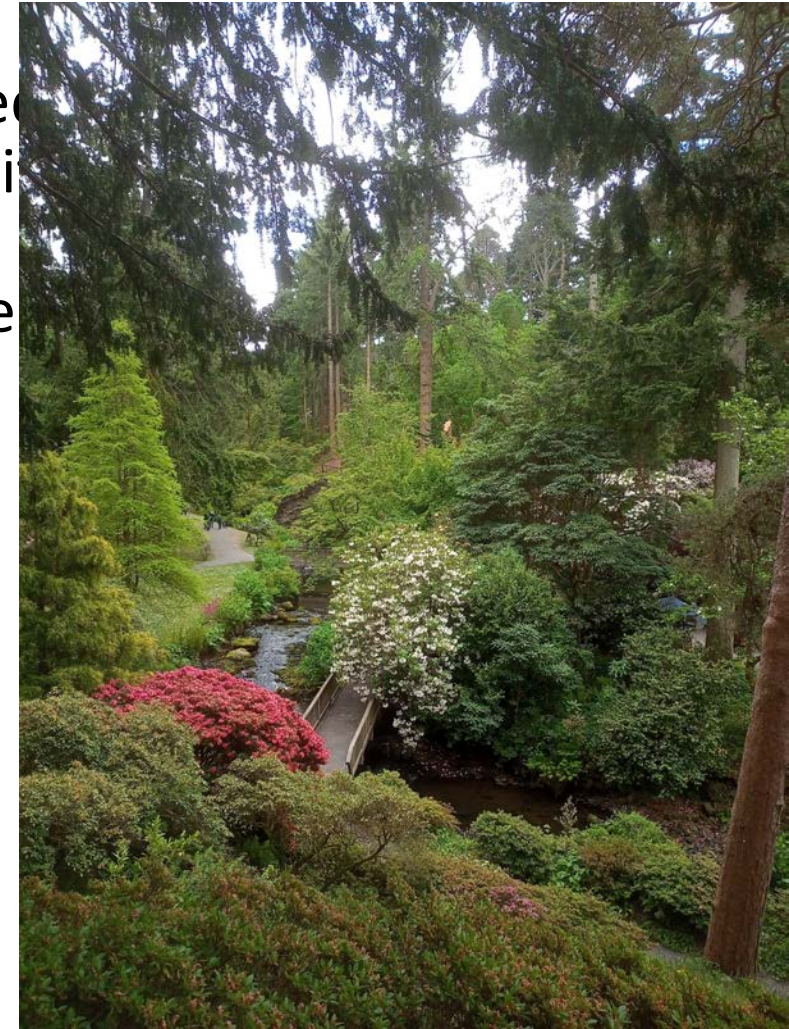


Need I say
more?



Yes, Bodnant Had A Lot More to Show Off!

I can't describe the feeling of excitement that I felt when I discovered the true depth of Bodnant's grounds, it was amazing how beautiful such a huge place could be no matter where you were standing.





Streams trickled down waterfalls everywhere and amassed into a roaring river,

The paths weaved up, down and around every slope and there was always somewhere new to explore at every turn!

The colours on show were bright and beautiful, the cherry blossoms were all out and all sorts of colours dotted the thick green backdrop.

The garden felt very natural and appeared wild but still held a sense of structure with the architecture and pathways, it was very soothing and relaxing.

This was my favourite garden by far!



Bodnant's Rating:

- Enjoyment: **A+**, It was stunning, the amount of joy this garden brought me was something I will treasure forever.
- Explorability: **A+**, I was scurrying about gleefully trying to find every hidden nook and cranny and I bet I still didn't find everything! An iceberg of a garden that makes curiosity worthwhile.
- Iris Photo Score: **B**, 6 at the entrance but I was way too caught up in the rest of Bodnant Gardens to check any further than that.
- Overall: **A+** Can we go again? Can we? Can weeeeeee!?

Thank You for Everything!

When all is said and done, this was an experience that I will never forget. I am very grateful to the Lancashire Historic Gardens Trust for giving me this opportunity, and if it were to happen next year, I'd gladly take the chance all over again!

