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Hill Garden And Pergola

It is time for a walk around a garden, as a break from learning vocab lists and phrasing principles, doing drills and taking dictations. Sometimes you just want a passage that makes you forget that shorthand practice is work (although pleasant work, if you are a true enthusiast) and which contains no specialist terminology. Several days ago we went to Hill Garden and Pergola which is situated on the high ground next to Hampstead Heath in north west London. I could see from the online photos that this place would not be quite the same as the usual ordinary park visit. It is a very large, long and tall raised pergola, and was built at the end of the garden of Hill House, now Inverforth House, which was owned by William Lever. He commissioned the pergola, with extensions being added to it over the years as he acquired more of the surrounding land. The house is now private apartments with its own grounds, but this part of the garden and the pergola are owned and managed by the City of London Corporation.

we approached from the woodland below, and went up a gentle ramp to the beginning of the pergola, which extends a long way in several directions, in various L shapes. The walkways are flanked by rows of majestic stone columns, topped by wooden beams, and with open wooden cupolas at the intersections. There are roses, vines, flowering perennials and greenery everywhere. This did puzzle me somewhat as to what exactly they were rooted and growing into, seeing as the structure is built up to such a height. I concluded that the pergola was continuous with the soil and land at the rear, where the main house is, and the built-up structure is only at the front, which would give everything a good root run. These are still quite challenging conditions for the plants, and the absence of large areas of open soil did mean that there were no patches of weeds, which would probably not survive long, and I saw none trying to establish

themselves. Roses have a long root run and so once established they can do very well on what looks like parched ground, simply because their roots are gaining moisture from elsewhere.

The word pergola brings up an image of some small shady walkway tucked in a corner of a garden, but this one is spacious, luxurious and unique, and is really like an enormous winding plant-filled balcony or seafront promenade, with plenty of room to sit and enjoy the views over the woodland of West Heath below. At the far end of the western part of the walkway is a viewpoint looking towards Dollis Hill and off into the countryside beyond. It is a reminder of how green London is throughout, and that one does not have to go into the suburbs and outer fringes to find it. We sat on a wooden bench and had our sandwiches under the shade of the climbing roses, with nothing but treetops and blue sky in front of us.

Below the pergola is a narrow Mediterranean style garden wrapping closely around its base, with plants that can survive the dry conditions and that do not need cossetting. Being the perennial garden tinkerer, I was imagining that it would be wonderful to have a stream, pool or lake, or some other water feature, below the walkways and garden, to take the edge off the dryness, or maybe just a tinkling fountain or rill to provide the cooling and soothing sound of moving water. To one side is a separate garden with a rectangular still pond with reeds and water lilies, and opposite is a large recessed seating area with a long bench, where we rested in the shade and looked out over the water and into the wooded distance. To finish our visit we left the garden and walked through the woodland where it was much cooler and alive with bird calls and bird song. Our bus and train journeys home were a return to hot and dry, but once home all the glorious photos will be a very pleasant reminder to make another visit, regardless of the weather. (701 words)