

MY FAVOURITE TREE - THE WELLINGTONIA - *SEQUIADENDRON GIGANTEUM*



Actually I am cheating by choosing a whole avenue of trees that stands out along the crest of the hill in Spencers Wood. The double line of Wellingtonias can be seen on the skyline from across the Kennet valley and from the M4 when driving back from the west into Reading. In this avenue you are sheltered from the wind and driving rain. It was here that my young children and grandchildren enjoyed their scooters and cycles, and where we collected punnets of blackberries and handfuls of the round cones.

Birds that eat the insects which live in the crevices of the bark, and the nuthatch that walks both up and down the tree trunk, came frequently to our garden. I am enthralled by the history of these trees, discovered only in 1852 in North America and named here after the Duke of Wellington, who made his home a few miles away at Stratfield Saye. The tree was first planted in Britain in 1857, but the Local History Society has not found out when 'my' avenue was planted. The Wellingtonias are within an outer avenue of oaks (*Quercus robur*) that are mentioned as grand old trees by Mary Russell Mitford a local writer in the 1820's. Many of these oaks survive and are on our Veteran Tree register. The Wellingtonias have grown much taller than the oaks and are much bigger in girth, averaging about 4.8 metres. The largest one in the avenue measured 5.9 metres three years ago (MRN 4356 - see photo right). I have not measured it since then to see how much it may have increased. The trees are well-known to be resistant to high winds despite their height, and this may be because of the very wide spread of their base and the density of the branches. It is a special feeling to walk amongst these giants and look up through their branches to the sky.



Patricia Green