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Larix decidua (Weeping Larch)

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Bio 140: Humans and Their Environment

April, 24, 2020

Weeping larch

(Larix decidua)

When choosing a tree for the Arboretum project, there were many large and exotic examples from which to choose. However, I was drawn to a twisted and rather small evergreen growing near where I usually park. Located at the very end of the walkway to McKillop Library, my tree appeared to be a relatively new planting.

It took a small amount of research to determine the species. Additionally there was no tag or number associated with it, so I was only able to rely on visual clues for identification. It was roughly 1.5m tall, with a DBH of about 7.6cm. The twisted nature of the tree made measurements slightly confusing since had it been completely perpendicular, the overall height would have been much taller. The DBH estimate requiring a measurement at the roughly 1.4m height was near the top, however the twisting nature and relative consistent trunk diameter allowed an estimate of 5cm. Crown radius was even more difficult to determine due to the young age of the tree. Weeping branches sprawled out in many directions, and the twisting central trunk provided no true center. To overcome this, I took the entire width of the extremities and divided by two to get a radius of 0.4m.

Based on appearance, I started searching using terms like 'weeping tree', as the drooping branches reminded me of a weeping willow. The leaves appeared to be evergreen, so that helped narrow it down. Eventually it matched images of Weeping Larches, also known as the European Larch (*Larix decidua*). These trees can grow upward of 30-40m, so the 1.5m individual at Salve is apparently a very young and fresh planting. While there are some lichens growing on the trunk, it appears to be in good health. If left along, lifespan estimates may reach upwards of 1000 years (Räsänen, K. 2010; Sullivan, 1994).

I began taking photos of the Larch in late January through early March. Since it is an evergreen, it did not display much difference in appearance. A final visit in late April also revealed little change.



Figure 1: January 27, 2020



Figure 2: March 9, 2020

The history of the Weeping Larch dates back to roughly 11,000 years ago according to fossil records (Wagner, et al., 2015). Modern distribution, however, was a more recent activity occurring within the past 300 years. Most populations occur naturally in central Europe, particularly near the Alps, spreading out towards the United Kingdom and Italy. Canada and the New England states have been particularly suitable habitats for the tree, since our colder climate and lack of extensive wetlands allow these large trees to take root more effectively (Sullivan, 1994).

The Weeping Larch can be easily bought from tree farms for \$30-40, and is a common gardening accent. Aside from their aesthetic properties, mature trees provide timber which is rot

resistant and strong. From an ecological standpoint, they also provide a valuable resource for developing new forests or rehabilitating ceased mining activity. They have low growth requirements, fast growth potential, and can protect other tree species which need more time to become established. Their growing season is several months longer than native conifers in New England, giving them an advantage. This usually ranges from pre-thaw conditions in Spring until early Fall. The Weeping Larch is considered invasive in some areas, but its benefits have been proved in others (Sullivan, 1994).

While this species does not have the exotic allure of many of the older trees on campus, it caught my eye and will continue to do so as its drooping branches expand into a canopy that all but obscures its inner trunk.



Figure 3: April 22, 2020



Reference List:

Räsänen, K. (2010) New Record European larch. Retrieved from: <http://www.ents-bbs.org/viewtopic.php?f=198&t=4538&p=19287#p19281>

Sullivan, J. (1994) *Larix decidua*. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station*, Retrieved from: <https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/lardec/all.html>

Wagner, S., Litt, T., Sánchez-Goñi, M., Petit, R.J. (September 2015) History of *Larix decidua* Mill. (European larch) since 130 ka. *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 12415, 224-247.