

A Self-Guided Walk

April – May 2025

WITTUNGA

Parts of Wittunga have struggled in the warm, more or less rainless summer and early autumn. We have taken a bit of a risk with a couple of choices in the list, but as conditions become milder there should be enough species flowering in the Terrace Beds (A) to compensate.



See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 ***Chondropetalum tectorum*** (now *Elegia tectorum*) Cape thatching reed Cape Province South Africa
These 1.5 - 3 m high clumps of tufted reed-like plants consist mainly of flowering stems (culms) growing from short underground rhizomes and topped with clusters of dark-brown flowers. The taller forms were used for thatching and were grown commercially for that purpose. It belongs to the southern hemisphere family Restionaceae, which along with the protea and erica families characterise the South African fynbos, a fire-prone, nutrient-poor vegetation of extraordinary species richness.
- 2 ***Diospyros whyteana*** Bladder-nut, wild coffee Cape Town to E. Cape and north to Ethiopia
An attractive small evergreen tree from the family Ebenaceae, bladder nut has 'fruits' which look and feel much like an inflated seed-bearing capsule. In this case, however, the true fruit is a berry, enclosed in a bladdery casing formed from the fused segments of the calyx. These little green 'pumpkins' will turn scarlet with time and open to expose the fleshy, edible, but bitter, mature red berries which were once harvested, roasted and used as a coffee substitute. The adjacent glossy-leaved hedge is another species of *Diospyros* (*D. scabrida*) which also features in the cloud pruning (niwaki) near the grey box at the next site.
- *3 ***Eucalyptus microcarpa*** Grey box, green-leaved box Qld, NSW, Vic and SA
Grey box is native to the area, and was part of the landscape (grey box grassy woodlands) when the Ashby family bought the land and built their home here in the early 1900s. This rough-barked eucalypt is a useful honey tree, and was once an excellent source of fuelwood. There has been a proposal to recognise the remnant populations of the Adelaide Plains and western slopes of the Mt Lofty Ranges as an endemic 'Adelaide Variant' of the species, but the matter has not yet been settled.
- 4 ***Diospyros kaki*** Persimmon East Asia
This magnificent persimmon is all that remains of the orchards planted by Edwin Ashby and his family, beginning with the home orchard in the early 1900s. It only just escaped damage from the massive SA blue gum which came down in a storm in late 2022. The astringent green fruits develop slowly over summer, ripening to bright-orange amongst the reds, and yellows of the turning leaves in autumn. The fruit, edible as soon as it turns orange, has an apple-like texture which rapidly softens as it ripens further.
- 5 ***Protea 'Pink Ice'*** The 'label' is missing its plastic nameplate Cultivar
Growing here between two cone-bushes (*Leucadendron brunioides* and *L. stellare*) this handsome, autumn-flowering protea, is very popular in the cut flower industry. On the left, about 25 m NW of the picnic bench under the willow myrtle, is another protea in flower. Blue sugarbush (*P. neriifolia*) is said to be one of the parents of a cross (*Protea neriifolia* x *susannae*) from which 'Pink Ice' was selected. Another 'Pink Ice' can be seen at 5a. Near 5a are both the white and red forms of *Protea repens* (common sugarbush).
- 6 ***Brunsvigia josephinae*** Candelabra lily Southern Africa
The attractive flowers of this autumn-flowering geophyte, borne in open, widely-spreading umbels on a naked stem, are dark red, and orange-yellow toward the base. The leaves appear in winter and die back in late summer. As a deciduous geophyte, it is able to withstand seasonal drought, very low temperatures in winter, and is also resistant to fire. There are about 20 species of *Brunsvigia* in southern Africa. From here, if the weather permits, you may be able to see some pink-flowered nerines further along the path.
- 7 ***Dovyalis caffra*** Kei apple, wild apricot South Africa
Kei apple is a large shrub or small tree with drooping branchlets, bright-green foliage and thorns up to 70 mm long. Some of the many tiny, creamy-green flowers on this female tree late last year are developing into young green berries which will ripen to an apricot-yellow like those on the ground beneath. The fruit is more similar to tomato (also a berry) than either an apple or an apricot. It can be eaten fresh or used to make jams and jellies. There is a male tree on the other side of the Terrace beds, at 7a.
- 8 ***Haemanthus coccineus*** Blood lily, ox tongue, paintbrush lily South Africa
This patch of blood lilies in the shade of a hybrid eucalypt appears to have survived the summer conditions much better than those in the fynbos beds where this walk began. It survives as a bulb in the dry season. The first signs of life are the emerging heads of coral to scarlet flowers (sometimes likened to a shaving brush) surrounded by the fleshy, red valves of a spathe. The two or three leaves, which appear well after the flowers, are broadly or narrowly tongue-shaped, and often red or dark green on the underside.
- *9 ***Livistona australis*** Australian fan palm, cabbage palm Qld, NSW, Vic
Along the path indicated by the red arrows** is a pair of tall, slender palms, each with an open rounded crown consisting of 35-60 dark green leaves. Dead leaves usually form a prominent skirt of drooping grey fronds beneath the new leaves. Early European settlers used the fibrous leaves to make wide-brimmed cabbage-tree hats, the basis of a cottage industry at the time. It occurs further south than any other native Australian palm - the most southerly stand is at Cabbage Tree Creek, 30 km east of Orbost, Victoria.

** The path is now much more well defined than indicated on the old base map over page.