

Spring 2024



MOUNT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN WALK FROM THE UPPER CAR PARK

To help keep visitors keep COVID-19 safe we provide a copy on the Noticeboard at the Garden that may be photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website

www.friendsbgadelaide.com/garden-guides see Mt Lofty Botanic Garden Upper Car Park Walk.

One of the highlights of the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden is the Rhododendron Collection. Rhododendrons are at their best in Spring, and they continue to flower in general from August through to November. This walk explores the genesis of the collection, starting from 1960. Other plant collections, notably the Dwarf Conifers, and the Erica collection are also featured.

Start your walk from the car park and follow the roadway. On the right side is a recently planted collection of Azalea Indica hybrids. These cultivars are popular for their large colorful flowers, the length of their flowering season, and ease of cultivation. You may know that azaleas are members of the Rhododendron genus. Instead of turning to the left at the bend in the roadway, go straight ahead towards the Dwarf Conifer collection.

Stop and admire the picture made by the Dwarf Conifer collection, with its variety of colour, shape, size and texture. Donated to the Garden in 1976 by local nurseryman Mr. David Thomson, the generous gift consisted of over 900 specimens of miniature, dwarf and slow-growing conifers. These plants are mainly cultivated from stock which had been damaged by insects or other organisms including fungi, mites and nematodes, or genetic mutation. The damaged plant sometimes develops what is known as a witch's broom, which is a dense mat of shoots that emerge from one point. This can then be grown into a new plant with different characteristics to the original one.

Turn left across the lawn where a group of stately, tall and narrow *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Fletcheri' frames the view. Amongst the dwarf conifers here are golden *Thuja occidentalis* 'Gold Haze' with book-leaf leaves, the small *Picea pungens* 'Montgomery' with short blue needles, and the glowing lime-yellow of a much smaller *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Erecta Aurea'. Follow the slope down southwards to the perimeter fence.

Growing alongside the fence is the Whibley Collection of Rhododendrons. Mr. David Whibley, gardener at St Vigean's, the home of Sir Edward Stirling, was also appointed by the Council to develop the gardens that grace the main street of Stirling to the present day. He was a talented gardener and propagator and developed over 40 named Rhododendron cultivars. A wander along the fence will reveal the range of cultivars of all colours that he developed, and the very personal names he gave them, which included family members and even pets. David Whibley donated plants to the Gardens in July 1960, and enabled access to St Vigeans for cuttings to be taken, as well as the garden Wairoa, the property of Sir Thomas and Lady Gosse.

The 1960s and 1970's were times of extensive development at the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden. Although the acquisition and development of a cool temperate garden in the Adelaide Hills had been approved in 1948, such was the time taken to identify and purchase land, fence the garden, prepare sections for planting, that the Garden was not open to the public until November 1977. An opportunity to procure plants came in the 1960's when the South-Eastern Freeway was being cut through the Hills. The Director, Mr. Noel Lothian, was given a chance to remove plants from several significant gardens that were to be subsumed by the freeway. Nearly 300 rhododendrons, camellias,

trees and shrubs were relocated from some of these gardens in mid-summer, and eventually planted out to become the core early plantings of the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden. You can see some of these 'Freeway rhododendrons' further in from the fence. They are larger plants and include the cerise red flowered R. 'Sir Robert Peel', a paler pink R. 'Corry Koster', and R. 'Cynthia'.

Walk back uphill where the *Ericas* may still be flowering. Planted in 1976 just prior to the Garden opening, this collection features both purple Scottish heather *Calluna vulgaris* cultivars and *Erica* genus cultivars. *Calluna* is distinguished from heath or *Erica* by its small-scale leaves being only 2-3mm long and its small flowers with the corolla and calyx being in four parts rather than five in *Erica*. There are over 700 species of *Erica*, whereas *Calluna* has only the one. These plants are low growing and spread to cover large areas. They prefer acidic soil, just like Rhododendrons which are also members of the Ericaceae family. Enjoy weaving through the heather beds, and discover the secluded lawn with its Greg Johns' sculpture Guardian Figure.

Make your way to the roadway, perhaps stopping at the Upper Gazebo to see what might be flowering there. In late spring to early summer the elegant *Styrax japonica* 'Emerald Pagoda' or Japanese snowbell tree is adorned with pendulous bell-shaped white flowers. As the name suggests, this small deciduous tree is native to Japan, Korea and China. The slightly fragrant white flowers are followed by fruits which resemble green olives in shape and colour.

Follow the road back to the car park, passing a large bed of flowering trees. For instance, in early Spring *Rhododendron* 'Seta' makes a spectacular show with copious blooms of pink-ice borne in loose trusses. Rounding the bend, look out on the left later in the season for lilac *Syringa vulgaris*, a white form called 'Madame Lemoine', named after the wife of the French lilac breeder.

HM, DS, RH, JH 8/24