

MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

March 2025 self-guided walk from the LOWER CAR PARK



We provide a copy of this walk on the Noticeboard at the Gardens which may be photographed or there is a downloadable version on our website

<https://www.friendsbgadelaide.com/garden-guides> (Mt Lofty Botanic Garden Lower Car Park).

The Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens (MLBG) were established under the vision and guidance of Noel Lothian who was the Director of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens from 1948 until 1980. The site was chosen for its cool climate and abundant rainfall (Long term Average [LTA] of 1140mm per year). The last year has been unseasonably dry with total rainfall since February of just under 700mm, being just over 60% of the LTA. Half of this rainfall fell in June and July 2024 meaning that those areas in the garden without irrigation are becoming unusually stressed. This, combined with the onset of cooler nights, has meant that deciduous trees are entering early dormancy. Fortunately, the irrigated areas will still provide the brilliant colours of autumn for visitors to enjoy. This walk visits New Zealand Gully with an intriguing collection of specimens and ends at the top of the Araucaria collection with its wide diversity of shapes and forms.

Follow the road out of the carpark to the left, heading past the Chris Steele-Scott pavilion. Further on and just before turning left up to New Zealand Gully there is an East African collection on the left. One striking plant in this collection is *Lobelia giberroa*, commonly named the giant lobelia. It is an herbaceous perennial which bears little resemblance to the commonly grown bedding lobelia. The leaves can grow to more than 50cm in length and the flower spikes reach up to 2 metres in length with racemes of numerous small greenish white to blue flowers. Nearby, there are several recently planted *Ensete ventricosum*, known as the Ethiopian or Abyssinian banana. The wild form of this plant is found in high-rainfall forests on mountains, as well as along mountain fed waterways. A domesticated form is cultivated in Ethiopia where its roots, rather than the fruit, provide an important food source.

Make your way up the hill past the Fern Gully path which is closed due to a land slip after heavy rain in June 2023. New Zealand Gully features *Cordyline australis*, the cabbage tree (known to the Māori as ti kouka), with its characteristic grey, corky bark. These trees are widespread in New Zealand ...note that the Latin epithet *australis* refers to southern and not just Australia. A strong contrast may be seen with the weeping branches of *Dacrydium cupressinum*, red pine or rimu, which is a large evergreen coniferous tree. The name rimu relates to the Polynesian limu which implies moss like leaf form. Another contrasting leaf form (large lime-like leaves) may be seen in the *Entelea arborescens*, known as whau, a member of the Malvaceae family which includes cotton and okra. Its Māori name refers to hibiscus to which it bears some resemblance. Another specimen in this area is *Myrsina australis*, known as mapou, a small upright shrub. Newly formed shoots have a red bark contrasting with the wavy-edged leaves which are pale green with a yellowish tinge on their upper surface and are even paler underneath.

Nearby is a Kahikatea or *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*, also known as white pine, a coniferous tree endemic to NZ. It is NZ's tallest tree, growing to 60m over a period of six hundred years. Pollen remains, dating back over one hundred million years, also make it the country's most geologically ancient. The juvenile foliage is a feathery light green in appearance. Further on is a Nikau palm *Rhopalostylis sapida* which is NZ's only palm and is the southernmost member of the palm family. It is easy to recognize by its circular trunk and upright fronds which have the appearance of a feather duster. Growing 10 to 15m in height, the trunk is ringed with evenly shaped scars from its fallen fronds.

Take the path to the left where there is a *Phyllocladus trichomanoides*, the New Zealand celery pine, a medium sized forest conifer. The genus name refers to the oddly shaped leaves which are flattened branchlets called phylloclades. These function as leaves producing most of the tree's photosynthates. The species name refers to the fern-like phylloclades and it is a member of the Podocarpus family having an

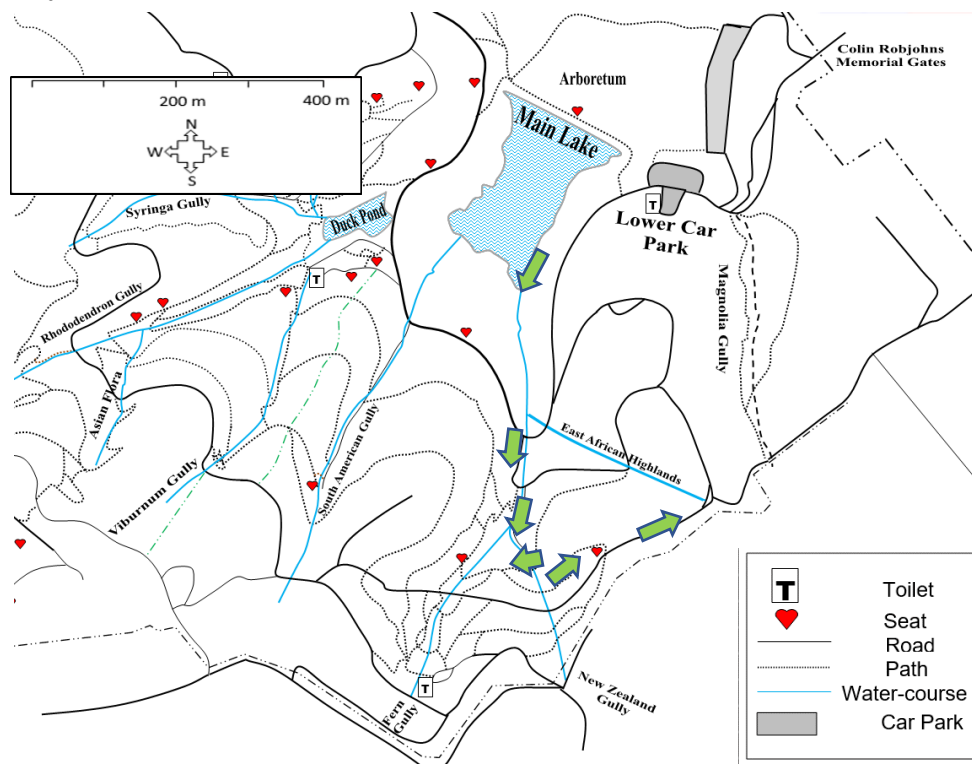
ancient heritage from old Gondwana or Antarctic flora. Further on is a small grove of **Agathis australis** or NZ kauri, a cone bearing tree in the family Araucariaceae. It grows 30 to 60m tall in the layer above the forest canopy on the North Island. Young trees have branch free columnar growth.

Further on, and on both the left and right of the path are plants of **Pseudopanax ferox**, commonly known as the fierce or toothed lancewood. Their appearance is like dead sticks. The plants have both juvenile and mature leaf forms. The juvenile form in the lower part of the plant may be maintained for 15-20 years and consists of long, narrow, dark and tough leaves with toothed margins and are downward facing. The mature form includes branching at the top as the tree develops into a round-headed form (note the tree on the right). One theory is that such trees have evolved in response to browsing by the now-extinct moa, although another more accepted theory is related to climatic factors. Further up the path another species, **Pseudopanax lessonii** or Houpara, has the more commonly found features of the genus. It has between 3 and 5 thick leathery leaflets, green flowers and purplish fruits.

Continue to the top of the hill where there is an excellent view over most of the lower section of the garden under a band of **Eucalyptus obliqua**, messmate stringybark which are native to this area. This slope has a unique collection of Araucaria species grown from seed collected in New Caledonia. While most of these trees are relatively young, they are known to grow from 30 to 80 metres tall. Out of 41 species in the family Araucariaceae, eighteen are endemic to New Caledonia (Australia has five endemic species). Many of the specimens in this section were chosen as they are endangered species. Two specimens just below the path intrigued the Guides preparing this walk. The first is **Araucaria biramulata**, named the piggyback tree due to its unique growth habit where mature trees develop secondary branches near the trunk, giving the appearance of "piggybacking" on the original tree. Another specimen, **Araucaria rulei**, known as graceful pine or the Rule pine (named for Australian nurseryman John Rule) is widespread but generally with small populations of widely scattered individuals. This tree prefers serpentine soils which are high in nickel and, as it provides an indicator for nickel miners seeking ore bodies, their numbers are under severe pressure.

We hope you have enjoyed this walk and suggest that in returning to the Car Park you either follow the road to the left down the hill and back past the East African plantings or continue ahead and follow the path down Magnolia Gully.

EB, AK, SL, DS, RH 3/25



This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide Inc. For information about the Friends and/or guided walks, please telephone 8222 9367

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