MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

AUGUST 2025 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
(see Mt Lofty Botanic Garden Lower Car Park).

This walk visits Magnolia Gully, first planted in the late 1970's to simultaneously develop a dramatic landscape feature at the lower entrance to the Garden and provide a representation of the Magnolia family. Over the years it has been continually developed to include other members of the Magnolia family such as *Liriodendron* and *Manglietia,* as well as some modern hybrid magnolias.

Magnolia is a widespread genus that is found from the tropics in the Philippines, through the cool temperate parts of the Asian sub-continent and China, Japan and North America back to the tropical Caribbean. With this present-day geographical distribution, fossil evidence indicates that the magnolia family was once more widely spread, occurring in even Greenland and Europe. The occurrence of *Magnolia* in both Asia and America indicates a type of discontinuous distribution associated with plant groups which have been separated by continental drift. They are one of the earliest forms of flowering plants. Their simple stamens with pollen sacs on either side are a particularly primitive feature. The trees have male and female parts within the same flowers. As they evolved before bees appeared, the flowers developed to encourage pollination by beetles and are extremely robust to avoid damage by these heavy insects. However, they are now also pollinated by bees and flies. They may be evergreen, or more commonly, deciduous. Note that magnolias which flower before leaves emerge all have Chinese origins, although there are many Chinese and American species which flower after leaves have expanded.

On the way to Magnolia Gully, don't miss the varied display of ***Hellebore* spp.** as you leave the car park. These herbaceous perennials are classic plants for winter, with elegant nodding flowers in shades of green, ruby, pink and white. They are native to northern temperate zones, from Europe to western China, and are particularly suited to shady conditions. Further on, and on the left, are evergreen members of the genus, ***Hellebore foetidus,*** with thick succulent stems and glossy leaves in contrast to those already seen. These are all cultivars from the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden and have been relocated from the Woodland Garden over the years. The green "flowers" are held in bunches and are excellent for flower arrangements. Note that all parts of this species are poisonous, symptoms including vomiting and delirium.

On the edge of the roadway to the lower section of the car park also note ***Magnolia denudata***, commonly known as the Yulan magnolia and native to Southern and Eastern China. Its pure white, luminescent, goblet shaped flowers signify purity in Chinese Buddhist temple gardens where it has been cultivated for over 1000 years. It is deciduous and flowers appear on bare stems in late winter to early spring, hence its other common name of Lily tree. It was introduced into Western horticulture by Sir Joseph Banks in 1789 by way of Japan. Close by, on the lower side of the exit road ***Magnolia stellata*** is amongst the first of the magnolias to begin flowering and will continue for some time. Known as the star magnolia and native to Japan it was introduced to the United Kingdom around 1877.

Take the left path ahead up the hill to Magnolia Gully, admiring the magnificent ***Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca Pendula'** which is a grafted weeping standard of the blue Atlas Cedar. This contrasts strongly with the original form and tall specimens may be seen to the left above the car park access road. Continuing the uphill path, walk between several specimens of ***Michelia***, which have been included within the *Magnolia* genus since 2006. As an example, ***Michelia doltsopa* 'Silver Cloud'** is one of 45 species of mainly evergreen, tropical trees with scented flowers, and some with scented wood. The leaves are magnolia-like, shiny above and sometimes hairy on the underside. The distinguishing feature of flower position: magnolias bear their flowers at the end of the stem whilst the flowers of ***Michelia*** arise in the leaf axil. This aspect is no longer thought to be sufficiently important to warrant separate genera.

Magnolia campbellii is a tree species of Magnolia that can be found growing in the wild in the Himalayas. It has magnificent blooms that range from pink through to almost white. Eventually the trees can get to 20 metres tall. There are some older specimens growing in the lower part of Rhododendron gully. It was discovered, in the western sense, by Joseph Hooker one of Britain's most famous plant hunters, and named to honour Archibald Campbell, the British Political Agent in Sikkim. Their adventures there make for fascinating reading.

Further on there is an evergreen magnolia from China, ***Magnolia delavayi***. The species name honours Père Delavay, a French Jesuit missionary to China. It has a bluish tinge to the leaves that is referred to as glaucous in botanic descriptions (as with *Cedrus atlantica*). It flowers in mid-summer, which is the same timing as the American Bull Bay magnolia, ***Magnolia grandiflora*** which is also evergreen and large-leaved. The flowers of both species are large and almost dinner plate sized and cream in colour. This is part of the evidence that botanists use as an indication of the early Continental break up referred to earlier. Nearby is a beaver tree ***Magnolia virginiana*****,** also known as sweet bay magnolia. It was the first magnolia to be scientifically described under modern rules of botanical nomenclature and is the type species of the genus *Magnolia.* Note that it may be evergreen or deciduous depending on the climate, but here it is evergreen. Early American colonists called it beaver tree as the fleshy roots were used as bait to catch beavers in traps. It is native to the coastal areas of southeastern United States and north along the Atlantic coast to New York. Nearby is a Chinese fir ***Cunninghamia lanceolata*** which now has attractive burnished roundish cones. This tree is native to central China where it is grown extensively for timber. The wood of these trees usually is light and strong with a pleasant aroma. Near the top of Magnolia Gully, on the right are two ***Taiwania cryptomerioides,*** which bear some resemblance to Chinese fir and are known as coffin trees.

As you make your way up, and then back down Magnolia Gully, look up into the canopy of the trees to marvel at the different forms of lichen. These fascinating life-forms are a partnership between an alga and a fungus. The alga may be a green or a blue-green variety, both of which can photosynthesise. The fungal component provides the filamentous structures to adhere to the surface substrates (e.g,. trees or rocks). Fungal filaments are termed hyphae and bundles of hyphae are called rhizines. Lichens are widely used as environmental or bio-indicators as where air is badly polluted there may be no lichen present. The most sensitive lichens are shrubby and leaf and are known as fruticose lichens. Their abundance here in Magnolia Gully indicates how clean the air is.

To both the east and west of Magnolia Gully, *Pinus* species have been planted, partly as a backdrop to show off the magnolias. These are mainly ***Pinus densiflora***, the Japanese red pine (named for its bark) and some Mexican pines including ***Pinus patula*** which has attractive drooping needles. On the west side, the *Pinus* species includes ***Pinus thunbergii*** the Japanese black pine with its shorter, thick needles. On a breezy day the pines make music as the wind moves through them.

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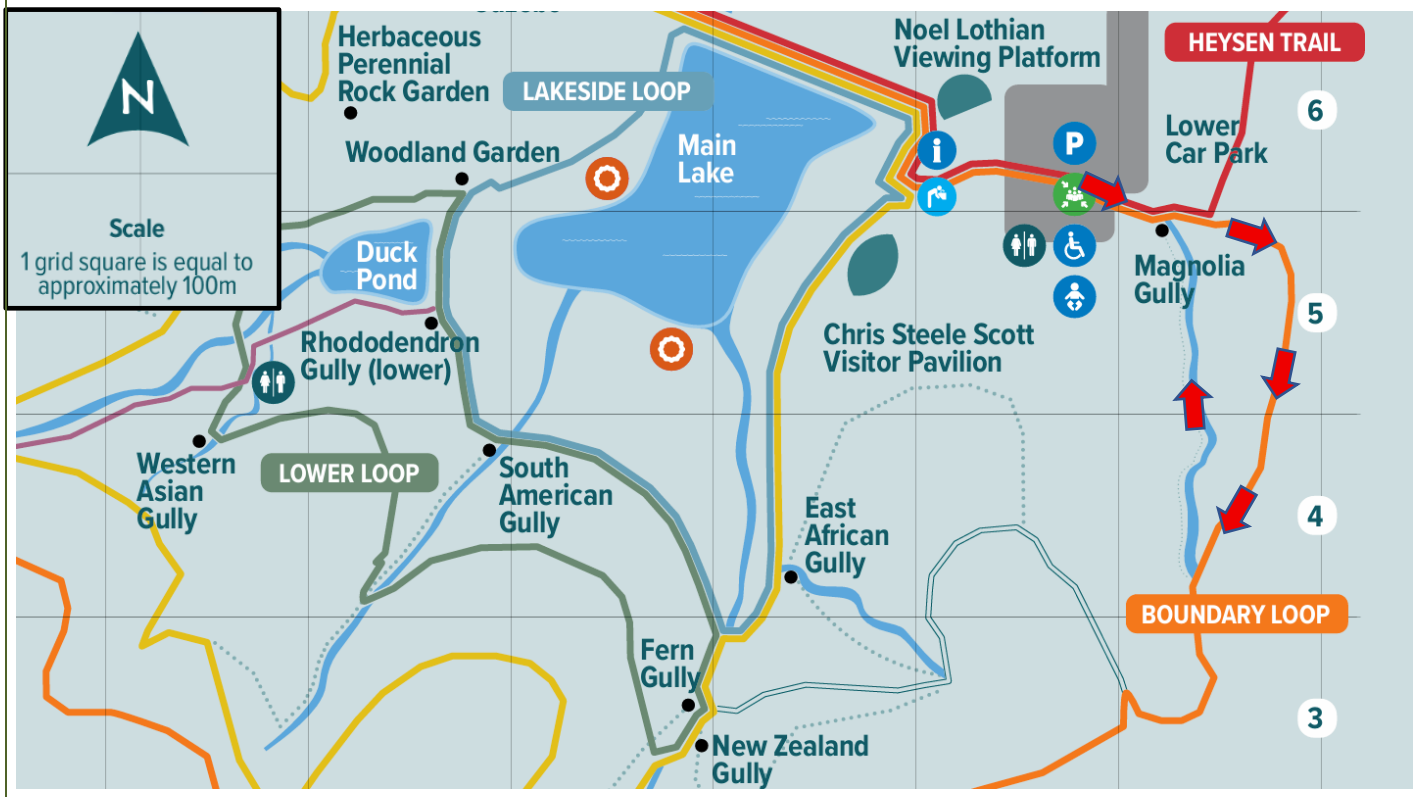

We are a group of volunteer Guides who prepare these monthly walks, all members of the Friends of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. The Friends would greatly appreciate if you would e-mail letting us know if you find them useful, or if you have any suggestions for future self-guided walks at friendsabg@internode.on.net.

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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