

October 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/guided-walks>)

One of the jewels of the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden (MLBG) is its collection of rhododendrons. Late September and October are the best times to visit the collection which may be found in Rhododendron Gully. This area may be entered either via the lower Duck Pond paths or from the Upper Car Park. Note that there are steep paths, but the collection and its display are well worth the effort. This walk follows the path close to the creek behind the Duck Pond and returns via the well-paved path on the southern side of the lower Rhododendron Gully.

Rhododendron is a large genus in the heath family (Ericaceae). Most species are native to eastern Asia and the Himalayas although smaller numbers occur elsewhere in Asia, North America, Europe and Australia. Rhododendrons may be either evergreen or deciduous.

The focus of the MLBG Collection is to grow rhododendron species largely from China and to establish a Taxonomic Collection. As many wild origin plants as possible have been collected to ensure provenance. For the collection to thrive, a diverse eco-system mimicking their natural habitat has been developed. This includes the planting of deciduous trees to create a canopy to protect them in summer and allow light penetration in winter and planting in groups of at least 10 to ensure survival.

One of the deciduous trees that flowers in spring is the spectacular **Cedrela sinensis Chinese Cedar or Toon-tree**, native of Nepal to China. The brilliant pink new foliage of this narrow upright deciduous tree is very unusual and distinctive. The pinnate leaves then turn cream before maturing to green. The leaves change to yellow in autumn before falling and are most colourful with cold winters.

Rhododendrons are typically erect, growing up to 25 metres high. Nestled amongst the rhododendrons are azaleas, which belong to the same Ericaceae family, which are twiggy, spreading bushes, usually reaching a height of no more than 2.5 metres. All azaleas are botanically recognised as rhododendrons. Rhododendrons are usually evergreen and those labeled azaleas are generally deciduous. Rhododendron flowers are borne in groups called trusses, at the end of branches, and there are generally 5 petals and 10 stamens. Azalea flowers are borne singly, usually with 5 petals and 5 stamens.

Rhododendrons can have large paddle-shaped leaves, or small leaves like the blue-purple flowered **Rhododendron websterianum** at the base of the Gully, and many shapes and sizes between. This rhododendron originates from NW Sichuan in China at 3,300-4,900m altitude and was collected by the famous plant collector Ernest Henry (Chinese) Wilson in 1908. This compact, evergreen grows to 1.5 metres with solitary flowers, purple to blue-purple or yellow. Its unique foliage features small ovate to oblong leaves with distinct scales.

Also found at the base of the Gully, behind the Duck Pond, is a collection of Mollis azaleas. This collective name is given to cultivar deciduous azaleas which have been bred from either the Japanese deciduous azaleas, American deciduous azaleas or the deciduous azalea species **Rhododendron luteum** from the Black Sea Region in Central and Eastern Europe. These range in colour from red through to yellow and white, and flower before they get leaves. Mollis azaleas can in general withstand more exposure to sun than other members of the genus Rhododendron. Because of their deciduous nature they are also more tolerant of frosts.

The leaves of the Kurume azaleas are smaller than other azalea types, with their evergreen foliage sometimes turning purplish in winter. Their small very compact size makes them a very showy plant when spring brings on profuse blooming in attractive colours of pink, white or red. They are named after the city in Japan where they were developed.

Near the path as you ascend are individual plants of the giant Himalayan lily ***Cardiocrinum giganteum*** which is the tallest species of any lily, growing to three and a half metres. Found in the Himalayas, China and Myanmar, these bulbous lilies emerge in spring to go through their growth, flowering and seeding process in spring and summer before dying down in winter. They have shiny green heart-shaped leaves, and some are now starting to put up a significant flower stem from which numbers of large fragrant white flowers, streaked inside with maroon, will open in late spring.

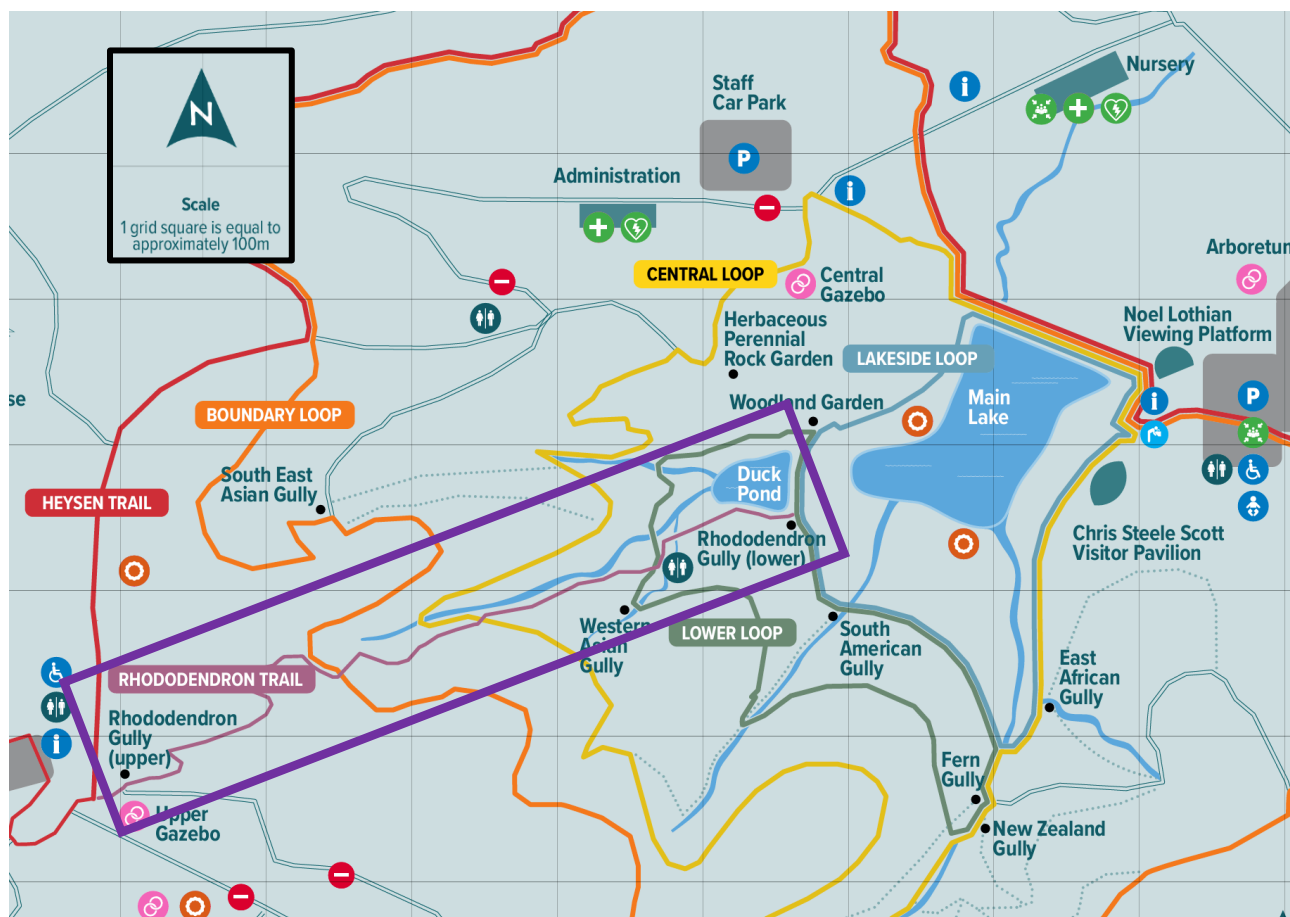
Close to the path as you turn down hill, look out for ***Rhododendron carneum*** which has fragrant flowers featuring over a long flowering period. These start as flesh-coloured pink buds becoming whiter as the flowers age. This species originates in the mountains (above 2,500m) of Northern Myanmar. It is a medium-sized upright shrub that grows to about 1.5 tall and 1.2m wide.

Throughout the collection is ***Rhododendron arboreum*** an evergreen tree form of the genus which grows from 5-20 metres with a showy display of bright red flowers. It occurs widely from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka and Thailand. It is the national flower of Nepal. The broad dark green leaves have a fawn or brown furry coating underneath, called indumentum, which acts as a form of insulation.

Near the Duck Pond is a collection of Vireya rhododendrons. These rhododendrons are outstanding for the brilliance of the colour of their flowers, with the added feature of typically blooming more than once a year. Sometimes known as tropical rhododendrons, their native range is the cloud forests of SE Asia to Australia. More than half of the 300 species are found on the island of New Guinea. Vireya rhododendrons are often epiphytic but can be terrestrial or even lithophytic. The flowers are waxy and long-lasting, and the leaves are glossy, with scales on their undersides. The relatively new collection in this area comprises examples of Vireya species, hybrids and cultivars.

EB, HK, HM, RH2, RH, DS and JH 9/25

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 and funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide. For information about the Friends and/or guided walks see www.friendsbgadelaide.com.au