MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

2026 May/June walk from the Lower Car Park

We provide a copy of this walk on the Noticeboard at the Garden which may be photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website (https://www.friendsbgadelaide.com/guided-walks)

Welcome to the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens as the deciduous tree collection completes its transition though autumn colours to final leaf drop, revealing the fascinating differences in branch structure in the different species. Being a cool climate garden, look out for lichens on the bare branches and their myriad forms and colours. Lichens are not at all parasitic and simply develop on tree surfaces as their substrate, as well as being found on rocks and even bare soil surfaces. The lichen is a primitive partnership between fungi (cyanobacteria) and algae. The algae provide energy from photosynthesis, and the fungi provide the structural and reproductive function. Lichen do not have roots, rather they simply absorb water from rainfall and surface and airborne nutrients as they photosynthesise to produce their food sources.

To begin this walk, head down from the Car Park to the Main Lake. Just before crossing the wall a drift of ***Miscanthus sinensis 'Zebrinus'***, commonly called **Zebra Grass** has an interesting combination of striped stalks and seed heads. It is native to East Asia and the Latin species name *sinensis* means 'from China'. This herbaceous perennial grass has gained the UK's Royal Horticultural Society's prestigious 'Award of Garden Merit', denoting it as a plant of exceptional quality. It grows in dense clumps from underground rhizomes, reaching 1.5 - 2.5m, with feathery flower heads in late summer which last well into winter. On the far side of the wall follow the path up the hill entering a deciduous arboretum which includes maples, ash, oaks and pears with gorgeous vistas all round. This arboretum introduces some lichen types and features green and yellow shaded specimens as well as a variety of many forms including crustose (adhering, and sometimes peeling, like paint to their substrate), filamentous (stringy/matted), foliose (flat two-dimensional structures) and fruticose (branched upright or pendulous). Follow the road to the left passing a series of **Prunus** specimens (Rosaceae family—this includes fleshy fruit favourites as well as roses) which have pruned structures highlighting their lichen cover.

On reaching the Duck Pond, ***Gunnera tinctoria***,or **Chilean rhubarb**, provides a striking feature. It is a herbaceous perennial, native to river margins and watercourses in Chile and Argentina. It is also grown as an ornamental plant but has escaped cultivation and is invasive. Plants form dense clumps and mature plants can reach over 2 m tall with a similar spread. The wide, coarsely lobed leaves have prominent venation and are armed with sharp spines. They have the tendency to shade out more desirable plants, then die off and rot on the ground over winter. In summer it produces thousands of tiny, closely packed dull red flowers on distinctive 1 m tall inflorescences. The flowers are followed by small, orange-red fruits.

At the corner of the path up to Rhododendron Gully, just past the Duck Pond, is an ***Abies pinsapo***, the **Spanish fir**. It is the Andalusian National Tree and originates from the Andalusian mountains. This tree is a rare survivor of the Ice Age. Our specimen currently features a large crop of female cones which are all showing signs of gumming which is festooning the upright cones. Adjacent to the Gazebo ahead is a ***Gingko biloba "*Mariken'.** This slow growing, dwarf form (to 1m) is a result of a directed selection which has been grafted to a standard gingko. It has a dense habit and thick branches compared to the usual form which may be seen on the slope across the Duck Pond. The foliage, although smaller in size, is dense and cup shaped in appearance with the same fan shape and equally stunning autumn colour as its parent plant. It is an extremely long-lived, dioecious tree characterised by unique fruits which resemble apricots. The epithet *biloba* is from the Latin 'bis' twice' and 'loba' lobed, referring to the shape of the leaves. The Ginkgo is considered a living fossil (dating to the Middle Jurassic period) and is the only member of its botanical family **Ginkgoaceae.** Its closest living relatives are the cycads.

At the top of the Duck Pond are five magnificent specimens of the **Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptrostroboides***. It too has fossilized relatives and was discovered in China in the mid-1940s. It is one of only five deciduous conifers (Larix, Pseudolarix, Glyptostrobus, Metasequoia and Taxodium). These were green at the end of April and will turn red-brown and develop a carpet of red needles beneath them.

Continue up the path and take the first left and then up to the right passing a ***Larix kaempferi* 'Julian's weeper'**. This recently established specimen is another of the deciduous conifers, this one selected for its weeping habit. With time this will become a low spreading mound, bare in winter and green in summer.

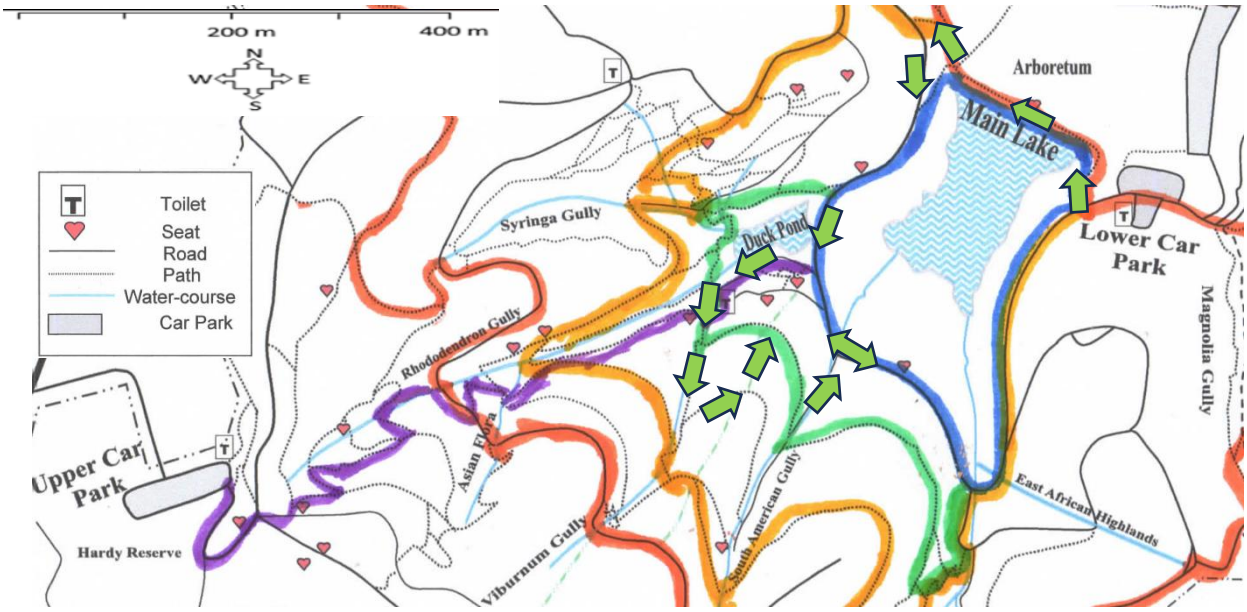
A little further up the hill is a glorious species hydrangea, ***Hydrangea aspera* subspecies *strigosa*** which has large, and striking lace cap blooms. Native to China, Taiwan and Indochina it reaches to 1-3 metres. The large conical inflorescences are showing the autumnal form which will last into winter. The lilac-blue fertile flowers are now aging purple to magenta, surrounded by sterile white florets. `It is relatively late flowering and has large leaves with strigose or short stiff hair on the undersides. Above and on the right is a ***Betula jacquemontii*** or **Himalayan birch**. The thin peeling bark of these trees is not always dazzlingly white as in this specimen but can also be reddish brown. The bark peels off in broad horizontal layers, making it usable for Sanskrit manuscripts in the past, and still for sacred mantras. Horizontal lenticels on the bark perform the function of pores i.e. facilitate the direct exchange of gases from the air to the internal tissues of the tree. The tree grows to 20 metres and has ovate leaves with serrated margins which turn butter yellow in autumn.

Further up the hill is a ***Hydrangea davidii*** or **David's hydrangea**. Named for Père Armand David, a French missionary botanist and zoologist who collected extensively in China from 1862 to 1876. Pre David travelled 7000 miles, mostly on foot, and collected more than 1500 plants. This late-flowering hydrangea, again of the lace cap variety, has a flat or slightly domed inflorescence with thick, serrated and textured leaves. The fertile central flowers are surrounded by large white sterile florets. In acidic soils the fertile flowers are blue and are pink in alkaline ones. Like many other hydrangeas, the flowers age in eye-catching tones and continue to be of interest well into winter. Nearby is a ***Stewartia monadelpha*** or **orange bark stewartia** This Asian/American genus of small trees is related to the camellia and has a disjunct distribution. This species is native to Japan where it occurs in cool montane areas. Stewartias provides year-round interest together with an elegant structure and form. It features delicate white, long lasting summer flowers (reminiscent of the camellia), followed by interesting brown seed pods, then striking red autumn deciduous foliage, followed by peeling grey, red and brown bark through winter.

Take the path to the left, admiring a young specimen of ***Quercus mongolica* 'Aurea'**, **Mongolian Oak** planted above**.** It is a slow-growing, deciduous tree with large, spreading branches and is native to forested areas in Japan, China, Korea, Mongolia and Russia (Siberia). 'Aurea' is a rare and generally smaller cultivar, prized for its striking bright gold foliage in spring, which matures to a greenish yellow, before turning bright golden again in autumn, occasionally presenting golden acorns. At this point we recommend you take the vehicle track down to the lower loop and make your way across to and down South American Gully. Once in the gully look out for the purple flowers of ***Tibouchina urvilleana***, a native from Brazil also known as a **princess tree**. Its sprawling bushy growth (3-6 metres) provides another surprisingly cold tolerant South American native which thrives in the acid soils and sheltered areas available at Mount Lofty. On reaching the main drive around the Lake, turning right will offer new vistas on your return to the Car Park.

EB, JH, SS, SH, RH and DS

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 info@friendsbgadelaide.com



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