



## MARCH 2022 WALK FROM THE LOWER CAR PARK

The walk this month largely covers the South American Gully where there is a diversity of interesting and colourful plants. However, the Garden is also displaying many other late summer and early autumn plants of interest, including some plants indigenous to this area.

In the car park near the large ***Quercus robur*** or English oak tree is a flowering pineapple lily ***Eucomis comosa***. Endemic to South Africa this deciduous bulbous perennial is used as an ornamental plant. The white to purple flowers appear in summer arranged in a spike (raceme) topped by a 'head' of green leaf-like bracts. The overall effect is of a miniature pineapple plant (*Ananas comosus*), though in fact the two species are not closely related. The name comes from Greek and refers to the tuft of bracts that are present on top of the inflorescence. The name literally meaning 'pleasing hairy head'.

Take the road which goes clockwise around the lake and stop to observe the changing colour of the leaves of a group of three ***Aesculus glabra*** or Ohio buckeye on the right. In the New World, the horse chestnuts of the Old World are called "buckeyes", alluding to the similar appearance of the glossy, dark – brown fruits (chestnuts) to the eyes of a buck deer. Despite its name, the Ohio buckeye is native to an area extending from s. Canada to Texas. This buckeye carries panicles of attractive, yellow-green flowers with a pink throat and can be distinguished from others by the unpleasant odour released when any part of the plant is bruised.

If you look towards the native bush, you may notice ***Bursaria spinosa***, Christmas bush and ***Ixodia achillaeoides*** the Hills daisy which lend a white froth to the Adelaide Hills in January and February. They are particularly welcome as most native plants tend to flower in winter and spring. *Bursaria*, from Latin for purse, is named for the red/gold rattling seed pods following the sweet-scented blossom. Each pod is shaped like a little purse. They attract many creatures including butterflies, beetles and spiders and so are important for biodiversity. In the 1940s a glycoside from the plant was used in sunscreens and today is used in medical research. *Ixodia* is common through the hills but multiplies rapidly in recently burnt areas. In fact, it needs a burn every 10 years or so. The flowers are papery, and the sticky stems have flat wings growing down them.

On the left bank after you pass the Fern Gully sign you may notice a tangled, twining plant that uses a host plant for support. This is ***Cassytha pubescens*** or downy dodder-laurel, a native plant of the Adelaide Hills. If you look closely, you will see tiny flowers forming. Whilst some might think it unattractive or weedy, it is an important part of the local flora and a food source for the caterpillar of the blotched dusky-blue butterfly. The twining stems are photosynthetic, but nutrients are largely derived from the host plant. Other common names include snotty gobbler or devil's twine.

A profusion of purple flowers of ***Verbena rigida*** or slender vervain announces your arrival at the South American Gully. Originally from Brazil and Argentina, this plant will self-seed. Behind this carpet of flowers is a taller shrub with yellow flowers which are now developing ornamental red seed pods somewhat reminiscent of maple seeds. This plant is ***Heteropterys angustifolia***, commonly called Mariposa or red wing. The 'pterys' in the genus name refers to the winged seeds. This plant originates from the grasslands of Southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Northwest Argentina.

Go left here and enter South American Gully.

On your left is ***Amomyrtus luma*** which flowers at this time of the year. This attractive, evergreen tree, a native of s. Chile and w. Argentina, grows in moist localities, including rainforest, and reaches a height of about 25m. After fertilisation, the fragrant, white flowers develop into spherical berries (*cauchaos*) that ripen to a glossy black colour and which can be used to make marmalade. *Amomyrtus* translates loosely as "fragrant myrtle" and *luma* is the tree's name in the Mapuche language. A member of the Gondwanan flora.

Are you a curry lover? If the weather is damp this perfume should be particularly strong around the lower part of the Gully. The leaves and shoots of the ***Escallonia resinosa*** from central America are sticky and resinous and exude the curry perfume. Many *Escallonia* species and varieties are perfumed but maybe less pleasant; one has been described as like a pigsty.

On your right you will find ***Lochroma cyaneum*** with its hanging, violet, trumpet-shaped flowers. Native to Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador and Peru it grows in the mountainous forests between 1800 and 2700 metres altitude. The name of the genus is a combination of the Greek (ion) = violet and (chroma) = colour. The name of the species refers to the deep blue colour of the flowers. This evergreen shrub from the nightshade family (Solanaceae) is pollinated by hummingbirds in its native range, but here you may see one of our local honeyeaters at work. The flowers emit an intense fragrance in the late afternoon and evening. All parts of the plant are toxic if ingested. Laboratory studies have evidenced the presence in various parts of the plant of bioactive compounds of potential pharmacological interest.

Further up the path on the left is ***Lochroma grandiflora*** which has larger, more flared blossoms.

The large purple flowers of ***Tibouchina urvilleana*** are a feature of the Gully at this time of the year. Also called glory bush or princess flower, this evergreen shrub grows 3 to 6 metres tall and 2 to 3 metres wide. It has furry prominently veined leaves and large, open, rich purple flowers, with unusual stamens of differing lengths and anthers with appendages of different colours and lengths.

The South American Gully also features a multitude of fuchsias, including the small flowered ***Fuchsia microphylla***, the vigorous, free flowering red and purple ***Fuchsia coccinea*** and ***Fuchsia boliviana*** with its long clusters of 10cm white and fluorescent pink flowers. The genus has between 150 to 200 species, mostly found in Central and South America.

The path becomes steeper and will take you to two bridges. From the top bridge look over to your left through the trees for the distinctive outline of ***Araucaria araucana***, the monkey puzzle tree. Although the monkey puzzle is Chile's national tree and a widely grown ornamental, it is currently classified as *Endangered* (in the wild) by the IUCN. The monkey puzzle is a large, dioecious conifer, having pollen cones and seed cones growing on separate trees, that is endemic to the lower slopes of the Andes in c. and s. Chile and w. Argentina. The black gemstone "Whitby Jet", found locally on beaches in NE England and much favoured in jewellery by Queen Victoria while she was in mourning, is fossilised wood from the monkey puzzle or a closely related member of the genus. The close relationship of the monkey puzzle to the Australian endemic trees the bunya, hoop and Wollemi pines is explained by these plants all being members of the Gondwanan flora.

You may choose to cross these bridges and explore further, though the paths become less well graded. It is suggested you return the way you have come, back down the Gully to the road, turn left and complete the circuit around the lake and back to the car park.

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