MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

SEPTEMBER 2024 self-guided walk from the LOWER CAR PARK

To help keep visitors COVID-19 safe 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).

Despite the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens (MLBG) having lower than average rainfall in the past two months (70% of the long-term average) it has the benefit of being a high rainfall area as this rainfall total is twice that recorded on average in Adelaide for the same period. Further, drier conditions have optimised flowering and as a result, the Magnolia (see last month's self-guided walk) and Rhododendron collections are providing *must-see* displays. This walk features Rhododendron Gully as well as other notable specimens (note that the Upper Car Park Walk features the upper end of Rhododendron Gully).

From the carpark take the road around the lake, past the steps on your right and on past the Chris Steele Scott Pavilion. Just before the first intersection you will see the *Wate*r sculpture on your right. This is one of eight sculptures making up the Lakeside trail which has been installed to enable visitors of all ages to enjoy the tranquil features of the garden.
https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/botanicgardens/visit/mount-lofty-botanic-garden/trails-tours/lakeside-trail

Make your way to the right on the main road and continue until reaching the Duckpond.

Take the path to the left of the Duckpond, perhaps sitting awhile on the seat to admire the view over the pond to the hillside opposite. On the left are several ***Vireya*** rhododendrons with bright single flowers. Although these plants look like azaleas, they are generally treated as a special class, different from most other rhododendrons and azaleas. These were first found growing in Malaya and Indonesia by British botanists. In the wild the majority of vireyas are found growing either as epiphytes, clinging to branches and trunks high in the tree canopy (with their roots covered by small amounts of moss and/or humus) or terrestrially, often in crevices on steep cuttings. Both aspects provide excellent drainage after the frequent downpours prevalent in these habitats.

Opposite, new soft green needles are developing on the deciduous **dawn redwood**, ***Metasequoia glyptostroboides***. These were first described from fossil material from Japan in 1941, with living specimens discovered in Hubei Province, China, the same year and being named in 1948. The Chinese name is translated as winter spruce. Prior to finding this relict population, the genus had only been known from fossil remains.

Many highly coloured primula species have been planted along the borders and hillsides in this area. Take the centre path at the bottom of Rhododendron Gully, where low growing ***Deutzia sp.*** covered in small white flowers border the path. Immediately uphill a mass of bright azaleas covers the bank on the left-hand side. Azaleas belong to the genus ***Rhododendron***. Rhododendron plants are usually evergreen, and many labelled Azalea are generally deciduous, however of course there are exceptions. Further the Mollis azaleas should also be considered as they are tall, deciduous and generally have flowers of bright yellow and orange.

Rhododendrons are a feature of the MLBG, with many grown from wild collected seed. They were one of the first plants introduced in the 1960s and the collection has been extended over the years. The name rhododendron comes from the Greek for *rose tree* and many plants in this garden are over 50 years old, very tall, and hang over the paths. The focus of this Gully has been to create a diverse rhododendron eco-system like their natural habitat. This includes planting of deciduous trees to create a canopy to protect them in summer, and allow light penetration in winter, as well as leaf drop adding natural humus to the soil.

Note that some plants have fine brown hairs on the underside of the leaves, appearing as a brown rust-like coating known as indumentum which helps to protect the plants in cold and allowing respiration. Some of the plants have very large leaves which droop to allow snow to fall off. These generally grow at lower altitude in gullies where the larger leaves can absorb more sunlight. The smaller leaved varieties grow at the highest altitudes. Rhododendron flowers are born in groups called trusses, at the end of branches, and there are generally 5 petals, although some have 10. The leaves are usually large and paddle shaped. There are usually 10 stamens, though some have up to 27. Azalea flowers are borne singly, usually with 5 petals and 5 stamens and their leaves are usually small.

Each year, Rhododendron Gully starts its annual flowering in August and goes through September into October with the very latest flowerings in late October to early November. In September walking up the gully on the Northern side you will encounter the following flowering rhododendrons: ***Rhododendron vietchianum*** has white scented flowers whilst ***Rhododendron mariesii*** close to the path will have a mass of pink to purple flowers. The big leaf rhododendrons will be showing the last of their blooms and ***Rhododendron protistum*** **var giganteum** has large trusses of pink flowers and is reputed to be the tallest of all the rhododendron species. It reaches up to 15 metres in height in the wild (note that there is a specimen growing down in the bottom of the gully next to the stream).

Near the middle of the gully, the Azalea Triangle is at its best in September. These are all forms of Kurume Azaleas originating in the Kurume area in Japan. There are many forms of ***Rhododendron arboreum*** in flower still in September. This is the National flower of Nepal but is also one of the most widely distributed species of rhododendron found from China through the Himalayas to Southern India and Sri Lanka.

As you walk back down the gulley on the opposite side (the Southern side) there are some cultivar Rhododendrons that have been hybridised from species. These include, ***Rhododendron*** **Florence Mann,** an Australian hybrid that is usually covered in purple flowers.

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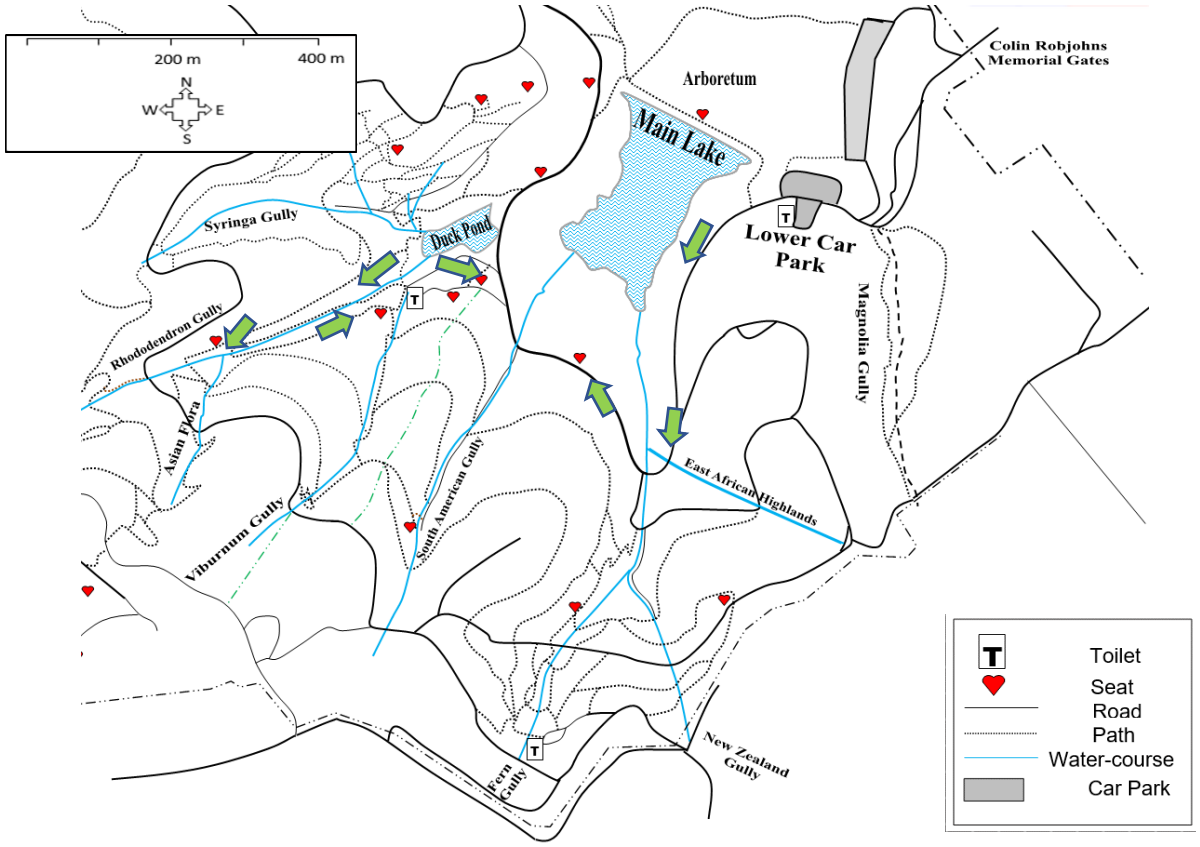

This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide Inc.
For information about the Friends and/or guided walks, please telephone 8222 9367
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