

MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

MAY 2022 WALK FROM THE LOWER CAR PARK



To help keep visitors COVID-19 safe we provide a copy on the Noticeboard at the Garden photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website (<https://www.friendsbgadelaide.com/guided-walks>)

The last remnants of autumn colour in deciduous tree leaves will be visible for most of this month as a delightful Indian summer has delayed leaf fall. The green colour in tree leaves is due to their chlorophyll content. Chlorophyll is a biomolecule which is essential to photosynthesis as it allows plants to absorb light energy and convert it into a food source for plants. Chlorophyll molecules strongly absorb energy from the blue and red portions of the light spectrum whilst reflecting green light. As deciduous trees prepare for winter, their leaves cease function which includes loss of chlorophyll. As the chlorophyll level declines the other natural pigments in the leaf become visible. Yellow is the default colour for most plants. However, there are many species which contain pigments which provide contrasting colours, including shades of red, orange and purple. Over time, gardeners have selected these plants for their autumn display and Mount Lofty has a wonderful collection providing a stunning display.

Last month we took you for a stroll around the car park, so in May we'll venture further afield. Begin by taking the road to the left of the dam which ultimately leads to each of the seven gullies which form the structure of this garden, gullies which are planted in themes, either by species or by a geographical location. The meadow bed to the right of the road is bright with zinnias and now the tall cosmos at the end of the bed is flush with bright pink and white flowers. Pause and look along the road to the right where the strong trunks of **Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris***, stand out with its orange-reddish bark. The species name "sylvestris" means the pine of the woods, and Europeans consider it the archetypal pine tree. Scots pine is the clan badge of the Clan Gregor, one of the most famous clans of Scotland.



Below the Scots pine, and ranged on the edge of the Main Lake, is an interesting collection of ***Taxodium distichum***, the **swamp cypress** which is native to the south-eastern United States. This collection was established in the mid-2010s, and all are showing one of their features being deciduous conifers. Most conifers are evergreen, but this species has evolved to be deciduous to aid its survival in swampy conditions in winter. These are two selections in this collection, ***Taxodium distichum* var *imbricarium***, the **pond cypress** and ***Taxodium distichum* 'Cascade Falls'**.

While the Mt Lofty Garden attracts thousands of visitors during autumn to see the leaf colour, as you walk further along on the left bank nothing says autumn more strongly than the yellow fruit of **Oriental bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculatus***. A deciduous shrub from China and Japan, the fruit are orange-coloured berries which hang on well into winter after the leaves have fallen.



At the turn in the road is a small pond with heavy sub-tropical growth from New South Wales behind it, and on the other side of the road another autumn delight, mature flowers on a ***Hydrangea* sp.** The native vegetation on the left of the road will soon come into flower but further along, just before the entry to South American Gully, a swathe of purple flowers on ***Verbena rigida*** cannot be missed. The leaves are deeply toothed, and pollination is usually by butterflies or moths, followed by a fruit containing 4 narrow nutlets.

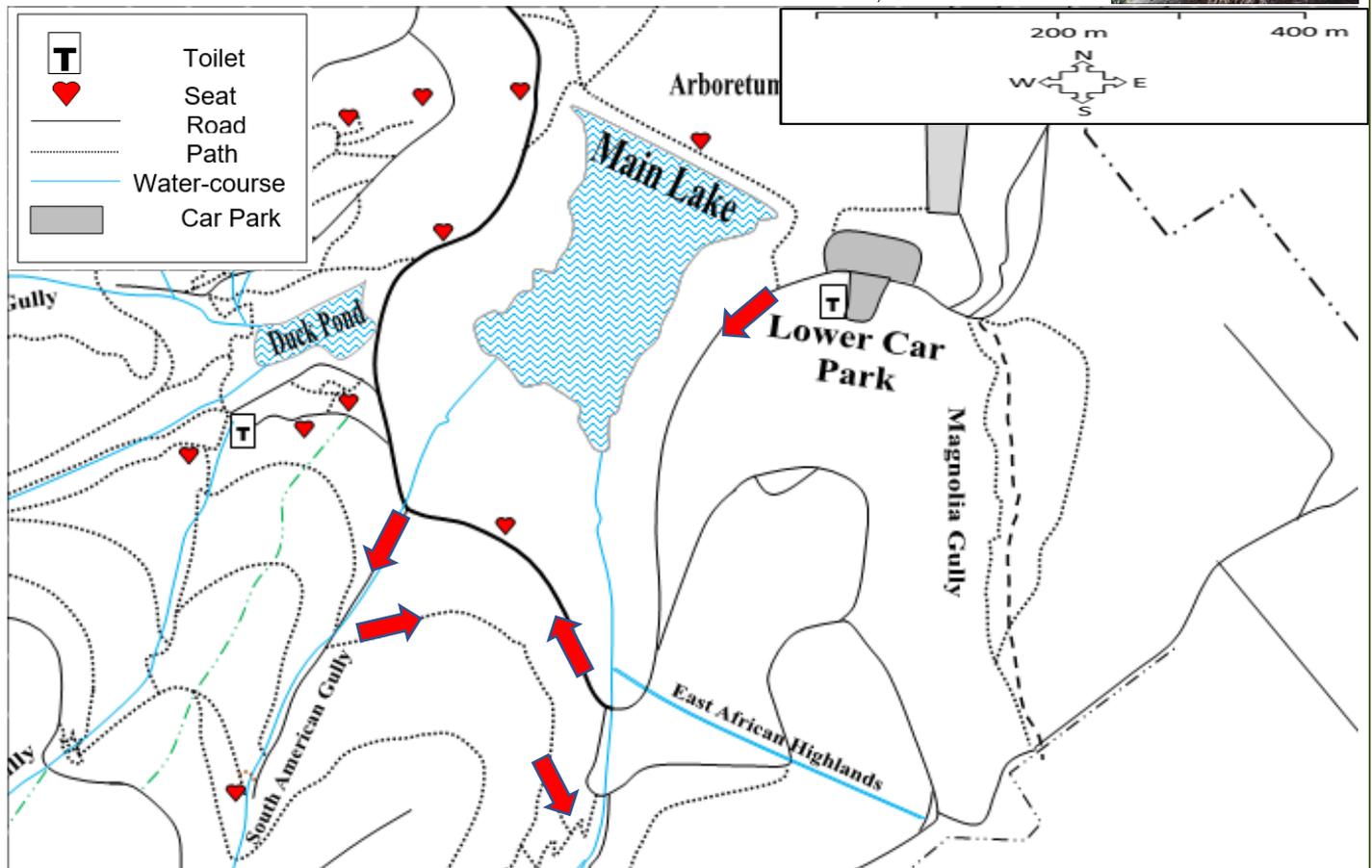
Take the path on the left into South American Gully and on your right is a drift of red-flowered ***Canna warscewiczii***, a species native to Costa Rica and Brazil, which flowers over summer and into winter until frosts inhibit flower development. Contrasting purple flowers may be seen nearby in another native from Brazil, ***Tibouchina urvilleana***, 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 first path to the left visitors may notice a 'curry' smell, which is associated with ***Escallonia* species**. One example, ***E. organensis*** is further up this path on the right and has glossy leaves with a leathery appearance. Flowering was complete in early autumn and featured terminal racemes of white, pink and red flowers. The curry smell is a breakdown product as the leaves compost on the soil and seems to linger throughout the area around the Escallonia collection. Continue the path and note the regrowth on the upper slope which has regenerated after a cool burn for fire risk reduction in 2018. This regrowth is dense with minimal weeds and now has many of the species native to the area as a reminder of what the area appeared before Europeans arrived in South Australia. The views out to the left show glimpses of the Main Lake, the last of the autumn colour and the Piccadilly Valley in the distance.

Take the path down to the left which has been upgraded from steep and uneven steps to a gentle series of switchbacks allowing, much improved access to this section of Fern Gully. On your right is a well-established ***Araucaria bidwilli***, known as the Bunya or false monkey puzzle tree. The bark is fascinating with rows of pebbly outgrowth. The tree is native to eastern Queensland and provided a significant annual food resource through its large cones to the Aboriginal people and is of cultural significance. Once at the bottom of the Gully either make your way up to the left to explore more *Araucaria* specimens or make your way back down and around the Main Lake path.



HM, RH and NF 05/2022



This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides and 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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