

Spring 2023

MOUNT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN WALK FROM THE UPPER CAR PARK



To help keep visitors keep COVID-19 safe we provide a copy on the Noticeboard at the Garden that may be photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website

(www.friendsbgadelaide.com/garden-guides)

This walk features the plant genus **Camellia**, and in particular some of the species found in this part of the Garden. Whilst many of us are familiar with the large colourful flowers which are popular in gardens and nurseries, there is a varied range of camellias to explore in this genus which originates from eastern and southern Asia. The walk will take you on a lesser explored route to the species camellia collection and include some other plants which display interesting features at this time of the year. Some of the Garden's native wildflowers are also included.

Commence by walking behind the noticeboard and down the path to the bitumen road. Along this path are examples of winter and spring blooming camellias with their dark green foliage, and flowers of many colours, shapes and forms. Many of these are nursery-bred cultivars of **Camellia japonica**, the Japanese camellia. Plant labels display the family name (Theaceae), then the genus name (Camellia) and then the species name (japonica). A common name may be included. If the plant is a cultivar, an additional name in single quotation marks eg **Camellia 'Nuccio's Gem'** is added. Other camellias species used widely for producing cultivars include **Camellia sasanqua** and **Camellia reticulata**.

The beds alongside the path also feature **Narcissus** (jonquils and daffodils), **bluebells**, **Helleborus** (winter rose), **Cyclamen** and **Viola** (violets), all of which thrive in the cool Mt Lofty conditions.

Turn left onto the bitumen road. More camellias line the left side. Also of interest is a series of three **Prunus subhirtella 'Pendula'**, or flowering cherry trees. You will note that these trees have straight or 'standard' trunks onto which the cultivar 'Pendula' has been grafted. A carpet of blue **Serbian bellflower** **Campanula poscharskyana**, along the top of "Stan's Wall" underplants camellias which were rescued from gardens in the path of the south-eastern freeway in the early 1960s. The leaves of the campanula are edible year-round, and can be included in salads.

On the left side of the road two **silver** or **weeping birch** trees **Betula pendula** have also been grafted onto standard trunks. This accentuates the weeping, or pendant foliage of the tree. Silver birch is native to Europe as far east as Turkey and has become naturalised in other parts of the world. There are over 30 species of birch and they are typically short-lived pioneers, widespread in the northern hemisphere, particularly in areas of temperate and boreal climates. The bark of all birches is characteristically marked with long horizontal lenticels, and often separates into thin, papery plates. A few more species will be seen during this walk.

Just after the sculpture by SA artist Greg Johns "Earth and Sky", turn right onto a small footpath. Here a new collection of small **snakebark maple** trees **Acer rubescens** will complement some established trees of the same species. This species has unusual green bark, red leaf petioles and red samaras or seeds which appear later in summer. **Acer rubescens** is native to Taiwan, and this planting heralds the East Asian focus of the plant collection in this area of the Garden.

A group of young **Korean birch** **Betula costata**, is displaying its characteristic peeling, smooth creamy bark. You will notice that one tree has been fenced off, and a close examination of the basal bark of an adjacent tree probably tells why. Damage by kangaroos and deer can be very significant to young plants.

Another of the birch species is prominent on the right of the path **Chinese red birch**, **Betula albosinensis** var. **septentrionalis**, grown for its pale peeling trunks, Mature trees shed large sheets of pinkish beige paper-like bark, with a white waxy bloom then revealing smooth patches of chestnut brown. This is an

excellent example of the benefit of seeing trees without their foliage in early spring as it is easy to miss such features when they are covered in leaves.

Just before the path turns right, notice an ant hill on the left and one of the native plants of the stringybark forest of the Mt Lofty Ranges, the **common flat-pea *Platylobium obtusangulum***. This small shrub has spiky triangular opposite leaves, and red and yellow pea-shaped flowers. Turn right at this point. In springtime there are more native flowers to discover here, including **common heath *Epacris impressa*** with pink (sometimes white) tubular flowers much sought after by birds such as the honeyeaters and the yellow flowered **spiky guinea flower *Hibbertia exutiacies***. Particularly prominent in early spring is a taller shrub known as **large-leaved bush-pea *Pultenea daphnoides*** with its wedge-shaped dark green leaves ending with a fine prickly point, striking brown flower buds followed by deep yellow flowers marked with red.

This is also a good viewpoint over the Garden, and you may be able to see the lake near the lower car park.

The camellia collection here comprises species which are those first collected in their native environment and from which all others have developed. The country of origin is displayed on the labels. The flowers on many of these are small, abundant and with many stamens, and often white. The collection comprises approx. 40 species, with supporting plants from their region of origin. Most of the camellias in this section originated from the Adelaide Botanic Gardens and were grown in the Simpson Shadehouse to survive Adelaide's summers.

Examples of species camellias include ***Camellia transnokoensis*** (from Taiwan) with its tiny pink and white buds opening to white flowers. A little further on is ***Camellia tsaii*** which has a graceful slightly weeping form, undulating leaves, and small white flowers. It is native to China, Vietnam, and Myanmar. The larger pink flowers of ***Camellia reticulata*** (syn. ***C. heterophylla***) from Yunnan, China may still be blooming too. The bell-shaped buds eventually open to flat flowers. This species camellia has been cultivated by Chinese gardeners for centuries, but only fairly recently by western gardeners who have extensively hybridised it with other camellia species. This species has the largest flowers of all the camellias and can grow to 15 meters in height. The seeds are used for oil in China.

A collection of **Japanese andromeda *Pieris japonica*** cultivars on the right side of the path is particularly colourful and eye-catching in spring, for both the white lily-of-the-valley type flowers and the red new foliage. Cultivars here include 'Forest Flame', 'Temple Bells', 'Saraband' and 'Christmas Cheer'. Like rhododendrons, pieris is a member of the family Ericaceae, and it likes similar growing conditions.

Turn left to see more camellia species, including the yellow ***Camellia nitidissima*** at the road edge. Unfortunately, very shy of flowering, and when it does the flowers are small and often hidden. However, the leaves are interesting with their shiny, attractive deeply indented veins, and reddish-purple new growth.

When you reach the bitumen road, turn right and then follow one of the paths back uphill through the delightful upper section of the Rhododendron Gully to the car park.

HM, LE, RH, DS, JH 8/23