

FRIENDS OF GEELONG BOTANIC GARDENS



Introductory Walk to the historic and contemporary Geelong Botanic Gardens

Geelong Botanic Gardens (GBG) was established in 1851 on 81 hectares. The Geelong Botanic Gardens and surrounding Eastern Park are both heritage listed. GBG is the fourth oldest botanic garden in Australia.

Look at the map and pictures as you walk through these heritage-listed gardens.

You are about to see three distinctive landscapes.

Landscape 1: 21st Century Garden. The walk will start at the top of the steps where you will see the modern sculpture and nautical theme linking the gardens to Corio Bay. This entire land was revered by the local Wathaurong people. Standing on the “boat” close to the **Bottle Trees (*Brachychiton rupestris*)** and looking into the gardens, you will see rocks and a pond where water is harvested from run-off. The contemporary 21st Century Garden was opened in 2002 and was designed to showcase plants that exist in dry conditions (regional Victorian plants, Australian, South Pacific Islands, African and Chilean plants).



1

You can walk right or left, but before you do, look straight ahead to see the dramatic sand bowl setting off the Dragon Tree (supported by stakes) with the striking cacti on the right. **The Dragon Tree (*Dracaena draco*)** was planted by the first curator in the 1850's and moved from outside the Garden gates to the current site.



2

Looking even further into the distance you will see some wrought iron gates (Hanson Gates) which lead into **Landscape 2 (20th Century Garden)**. Before you venture into this next part, look upwards to see the huge old trees, in particular the **Bunya Bunya pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*)** or native conifers from Queensland planted in the 1860's (one outstanding specimen is outside the fence on the right).



3

Landscape 2: 20th Century Garden. Now is the time to walk through the gates. In the distance straight ahead you will see well-established trees, fountains, roses and green lawns to the right ... a grand vista. Time to pause. Let your eye feast on the **colourful bollards** linking the gardens to the foreshore. These bollards depict the first curator of the gardens and a lady visitor. To your left is the historic Conservatory now undergoing a complete restoration. Walk down the path surrounded by the plants of the Silver Border (designed by FGBG members to commemorate the Silver Anniversary of FGBG in 2010) until you come to steps and the Heritage Rose Garden cared for by the Western District Heritage Rose Group. Look right to see more heritage trees and the Tea House (established in 1992 by FGBG). Now smell the fragrant roses if in flower and move into the next landscape which is the oldest landscape in the Geelong Botanic Gardens and most memorable.



4

Landscape 3: 19th Century Garden (with some modern additions). You will note some massive trees and an old Yew Tree (*Taxus baccata*) on your right. This Yew is the marker to the original entrance of the 19th Century Garden. As you walk down the path you will see a colourful **Perennial Border** which is also maintained by FGBG volunteers. Plants on the left are more suited to shade, and those on your right like the bright sunlight. Looking straight ahead you will see a definite rectangular shape which was where the old Fernery, Nursery and Aviary existed (the sign shows a picture). Here plants were trialled and acclimatised. This section of the gardens now boasts changing displays of interest to visitors.



5

Whilst near the Perennial Border, take a few steps left and look upwards to see the remarkable **Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)** planted in 1873 by Governor Sir George Bowen. Note the Hitchcock Fountain which was relocated from Market Square, like the Traill Fountain, further down in this 19th Century Garden. Walk around the area where the old lattice Fernery existed and imagine ladies in crinolines and men in hats and gloves enjoying the plants and invigorating air of Geelong.



6

Look upwards yet again and you will see the ageing **Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*)** with the baby companion nearby to ensure that this emblem of the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens is not lost! In this older part of the gardens you will see more historic trees (details in another self-guided walk) and a very significant showing of *Salvias*.



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As you walk past the fountain take one of the paths in this shaded area which leads to the Temperate Garden (Asian inspired). Here you will be astonished to see the very famous **Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*)** with its unique growth pattern admired by people from all over the world.



8

In this cool and quiet part of the Geelong Botanic Gardens, you will see some distinctive **Japanese bronze sculptures** which were brought to Geelong in the 1870's for the owner of the St Albans Stud. Like various other historic structures in the Geelong Botanic Gardens, the original location was outside the gardens.



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Wander around here and you will see the **Old Customs Office** believed to have been prefabricated in Sydney in 1838 and linked to the Eureka uprising. You won't want to miss the Pelargonium Conservatory with its huge array of colourful plants.



Nearby is the Summer House or **Raddenberry Shelter** (reconstructed and based on the original 19th Century one).



Now it is time to retrace your steps to find a restored wooden shelter, the **Cabman's Shelter** (erected in Geelong in 1905) and moved to Eastern Park when trams were introduced. Pause a little, if you have time, to see some more of the giant Araucarias referred to earlier.



If you are really into history you might want to see the sunken **Pit Glasshouse**, an historic greenhouse used in colder climates and now used for special exhibitions such as plants linked to alcohol production, orchid displays etc. The ancient tiered and old brick terraces to the left showcase different plants and were constructed for the trial of plants.



Throughout this walk you will probably have noticed irrigation/hose equipment of different colours which is all part of the new irrigation system being used with reclaimed water from neighbouring East Geelong streets. The Geelong Botanic Gardens will be fully watered from this valuable harvested water which flows into the newly-created storm water dam in Eastern Park and then pumped into the garden's reticulation system.

To conclude this introductory walk you may find the following description on the Victorian Heritage Database 17/3/2011, to be of interest. "Geelong Botanic Gardens is of aesthetic significance for its highly ornamental character derived from the mature plantings, the vistas within the gardens, the physical and visual protection afforded the Gardens by their being at the centre of Eastern Park, and

the collection of features such as the former Gate Lodge, Superintendent's residence, Cabman's Shelter, kiosks, fountains, urns, statues and timber and iron seats that contribute to the ornamental design of the garden landscape”.

To finish this walk and time permitting, you can take other paths to see more delights such as the **Camellia Walk**, the **Otway Forest Glade** reconstruction (behind the Tea House) and additional Australian plants close to the Conservatory. Other self-guided walks will focus on different aspects of the Geelong Botanic Gardens and will cover detailed information on such topics as heritage trees, the Araucaria collection, plants as food and for well-being etc.



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FBG Volunteer Guides at Geelong Botanic Gardens (January 2014)