

Heritage Tree Walk

This information describing some of the very rare trees will provide insight into significant trees which are on the National Trust (Victoria) Significant Tree Register. The images and map which can be downloaded will help you to identify them. There are other important trees as well, but these are some of the more unusual ones which have adapted to the soil and climate of Geelong.

The walk will commence at the entrance to the 21st Century Garden and take you through the older parts of the GBG finishing at the Tea House. Take your time, look up and all around you, retrace your steps if you have time, and note how some of the trees are part of old boundaries and popular carriageways of earlier times. Some of the trees are in different parts of the Geelong Botanic Gardens eg the Bunya Bunya or *Araucaria bidwillii* and most have prospered very well.

Start of walk at front steps

1. Walking on the left path past the Bottle Trees and looking over the fence, you will observe a very tall and slender **Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea malacophylla*)** which is well supported. Believed to be a natural hybrid and well over 500 years old, this specimen was transplanted to this position. It grows naturally on the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range from Sydney to Brisbane.



2. Whilst in this area right on the fence you will see another mighty specimen commonly known as the **Blue Box (*Eucalyptus baueriana*)** which was planted by the second Curator, John Raddenberry who favoured this tree. Remnant populations can still be found around Lerderderg Gorge. It is uncommon in cultivation.



3. Now walk a little, turn to your right and look upwards beyond the other fence to the car park. The iconic **Bunya Bunya (*Araucaria bidwillii*)** from Northern Queensland is clearly visible (a younger one is growing well in the 21st Century Garden and is right in front of you as you look across). You will see more huge Bunyas in the older part of the gardens near the camellias and rhododendrons. Important as a food source and boasting many legends for indigenous Australians, the Bunya Bunya is evergreen and part of the ancient Araucaria family of conifers now extinct in the northern hemisphere.



- Your eye can now focus on another heritage tree with its very visible supports. What a sight! The **Dragon Blood Tree (*Draceana draco*)** is not really a tree and is a member of the lily family, but it is certainly an endangered species from the Canary Islands. Smaller plants propagated in the nursery are growing well to the left of the Hanson Gates in the section which showcases plants from South Pacific islands close to Australia. Lots of stories abound in relation to the reddish sap like the blood of dragons!



- Now is the time to move through the wrought iron gates so that you can see the **Variegated Elm (*Ulmus minor "Variegata"*)** on the conservatory lawn. You will need to walk past the silver bed under the Washingtonia Palms, walk down the steps near the heritage roses, then on to the lawn, looking left. This tree exists from the time when an avenue was planted in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee. When you return to the car park you will see more of these elms which were planted as an avenue (the curve is visible).



- In this vicinity your eye will be drawn to several very tall trees here, in particular the **Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*)** and the **Queensland Kauri (*Agathis robusta*)** - both heritage listed. Spotted Gums grow naturally along the south eastern coast of New South Wales and in a single population north west of Orbost. This pair of trees was planted by the original curator, Daniel Bunce, close to the entrance of the original botanic gardens with the one surviving Yew to the right.

Here you will also catch sight of the **Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*)** which produces clusters of fiery orange flowers in summer. All three of these great trees are distinctively Australian!



- Another rainforest conifer which grows naturally in gullies in NSW and Queensland and which is behind the Spotted Gum is the heritage listed **Brown Pine (*Podocarpus elatus*)** whose fruits were valued by indigenous Australians.



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8. The next section of this walk will mean taking the winding paths right up to the highest point next to the fence. Veer left and your eye will be drawn to a huge evergreen tree with a sign denoting that it is on the Significant Tree Register of the National Trust of Victoria. Behind the fence is an old house (the Superintendent's House). You are in the right spot to see a very old and endangered tree called the **Canary Island Laurel** (*Picconia excelsa*). This specimen probably came as seed brought here by an enterprising captain keen to trade with botanists and horticulturalists establishing private and public gardens like the Geelong Botanic Gardens.



9. Come down the paths now close to the Perennial Border and the fountain. Turn round and look up to the sky. You will see probably the biggest tree in the Geelong Botanic Gardens. This is the **Giant Redwood or Big Tree** (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). Known to live up to 3,500 years in its native Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, this specimen was planted in 1873 by Sir George Bowen, Governor of Victoria. The Dalai Lama blessed a much younger Sequoiawhich looks across from the right hand side, wondering if it can grow to such heights here in Geelong.
10. Following the path past the Big Tree you will come across an evergreen tree from Chile and Peru. The **Soap Bark Tree** (*Quillaja saponaria*) as the name implies produces a soapy lather with medicinal properties. It is believed that this particular tree is the largest specimen in Victoria. It is rare in cultivation.



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- Close by is another heritage tree which likes the alkaline soil. The **Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica f.purpurea*)** is native to Europe where it forms extensive forests, growing to a height of 25 metres. With its broad, rounded canopy and light purple leaves, this tree in the Geelong Botanic Gardens is about 150 years old and is the largest known specimen in Victoria. Oil from the seed of the beech can be used for culinary purposes.



- It is time to walk down into the centre where the old fernery existed (look for the photo nearby) and where the next tree, the **Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*)** was planted in 1869 to adorn the timber lattice fernery. Edible sweet palm honey and an alcoholic beverage can be made from this unusual tree, but only when the tree is felled. This tree is the emblem of the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens.



- If you want to see a very unusual heritage tree which has a right-angled formation of its branches (like elephants' elbows), take the path into the shady area or just follow the spectacular bell-shaped pink flowers all over the ground during summer. Once again this lovely tree named the **Queensland Lacebark (*Brachychiton discolor*)** is reputed to be the largest known example in cultivation in Victoria.



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14. Now it's time to see what many regard as the piece de resistance of the Geelong Botanic Gardens. Continue walking until you come to a grassy area with sculptures on the left and a truly massive, very unusual tree in a prominent position. As the sole survivor of a once flourishing race in dinosaur times, the **Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*)** here in the Geelong Botanic Gardens is striking for its aerial growths (looking like melted wax) which are expected to eventually reach the ground. It is believed that the Otway Ranges was once a Gingko forest. This tree probably arrived as a seed obtained from a ship's captain. The medicinal benefits from the by-products are many and varied, apart from being a tree symbolic of longevity.



15. Time now to enjoy the cool, shady area with the mighty **American Black Walnut Tree (*Juglans nigra*)** which is considered the most valuable tree because of its highly prized timber used for furniture.



16. You can also marvel at the widely-spreading evergreen **Moreton Bay Fig Tree (*Ficus macrophylla*)** with its large buttressed trunk, massive roots and shiny, dark green leaves.



17. Continue the path through the camellias and rhododendrons, looking up to those sturdy Araucarias and head towards the Tea House for a refreshing break. The big tree with the bluish grey tinge and just in front of the Tea House is the **Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*)** from Morocco and Algeria.



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The self-guided walk is now completed. Come again if you want to see more of the wonderful trees, do another self-guided walk at your leisure or join a group on a Discovery Walk led by Guides from the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens. Keep in touch because there are all sorts of activities happening here as shown on the website, Facebook and the links.



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FGBG Volunteer Guides at Geelong Botanic Gardens (January 2014)



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