

U3A Port Fairy  
*Science...naturally!*  
**Koroit Botanic Gardens – Self-guided walk**

John Miller, 19 May 2020



*The magnificent Dragon Tree *Draceno draco*, a focal point for the gardens*

This is the 9th in a series of self-guided walks for U3A members around Port Fairy and district to help us get out and about safely during COVID-19 restrictions. The aim of the walks is to provide enjoyable outdoor activities that can be undertaken either by yourself or your family (with appropriate separation and other precautions). The implementation of the Stage 1 easing of restrictions as of 12 May allow us to undertake occasional day trips and this walk explores some of the delights of the lovely Koroit Botanic Gardens (KBG).

The KBG was listed on the Victorian Heritage Register in 2007 – a copy of the Heritage Council Victoria Report, which explains the importance of the gardens and also lists and shows the location of the significant trees, is appended to this walk. Most of the significant trees, and some others, are labelled.

The walk commences at the north entrance to the KBG on High Street, just north of the War Memorial, about 500 m the south of the main street of Koroit. The loop walk runs clockwise on well formed and maintained paths and includes some short sidewalks on mown grass.

Enter the gardens and take the path to the south (left). There are many interesting plants in the garden bed on your right nestled under the beautiful Queensland Kauri Pine *Agathis robusta* (labelled) including African Hemp *Sparmannia africana* (this one is the double flowered cultivar 'flore peno'), a large-leaved shrub native to southern African woodlands. You will also see several large Spear Lilies *Doryanthes palmeri*, endemic to northern NSW and southern Qld. As you move up the path you will pass a spreading Medlar *Mespilus germanica* with its strange edible (sort-of!) fruit (same family as apples and roses) and beautiful autumn foliage. Despite its species name it is a native of Iran.



*African Hemp*



*Spear Lily*



*Medlar in autumn grandeur*

Further along the path just after the Medlar on your right you will see a young Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba* with its fan-shaped leaves turning an autumn gold. Further up the path and again on your right you will see a young Coast Redwood *Sequoia sempervirens* with its flattened sprays of leaves and typically downward arching branches. This is the tallest species of tree in the world so when it grows up it could get to around 100 m tall. On the left of the path you will find a young, Australian endemic, Wollemi Pine *Wollemia nobilis*. Wollemi Pine was only discovered in 1994 growing in a rocky canyon in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney.



Coast Redwood



Ginkgo autumn leaves



Wollemi Pine

Move on to the south east corner of the gardens and follow the path around to the right. As you take the bend, note two species of *Araucaria* – the one on your right, with the beautiful bark shedding more or less in bands, is Hoop Pine *Araucaria cunninghamii* and the tall slender Cook's Pine *Araucaria columnaris* on your left (labelled). Hoop Pine occurs naturally from northern NSW to Townsville while Cook's Pine is confined to a few small islands off New Caledonia. Both are in the same genus as the more familiar Norfolk Island Pine.

The clump of what looks like bamboo near the Cook's Pine is Arundo Grass *Arundo Donax*, a sometimes weedy species of Mediterranean origins.

A little further on, on your left, is the very widely planted Australian native Silky Oak *Grevillea robusta* which can be recognised by its feathery leaves and, when in flower, its sprays of golden grevillea flowers.



Hoop Pine



Arundo Grass



Silky Oak.

As you move on down the path keep an eye out for some small greyish trees growing singly in the lawns. These are Cork Oaks *Quercus suber* which can be recognised by their overall grey appearance, small serrated-edge leaves and of course, their "corky" trunks from which wine corks may be harvested after the tree is at least 25 years old. They don't like shade which is why they are planted out in the open lawn areas.



Grey, serrated Cork Oak leaves



Corky bark developing on the trunk



Red Cedar

Just after a garden bed containing some tall Kurrajongs *Brachychiton* species and majestic fig trees *Ficus* species (all labelled) you will see a small tree in the lawn to the north looking a bit like a candellabre with four trunks. This is a Red Cedar *Toona ciliata* an important fine timber tree native to Qld and southern Asia. It can be readily identified by its divided (pinnate) leaf and green warty pendant seed pods.



When you reach the path junction, continue straight ahead across the grass towards the south-west corner of the gardens. Along the way you will see a number of young conifers including Deodar Cedar *Cedrus deodara* with clusters of needles to about 5 cm long; a Japanese Cedar *Cryptomeria japonica* with very sharp rigid spiny leaves in a tangled mess around the trunk; a Bunya-Bunya Pine *Arucaria bidwillii* with flattened spiny leaves to about 4 cm long that are shiny on top and dull underneath; and, in the corner of the hedge near a seat, a striking little "blue" Atlas Cedar *Cedrus atlantica* with clusters of short waxy needles.



Deodar Cedar



Japanese Cedar



Bunya-Bunya Pine

Much larger specimens of these species can be seen in other parts of the gardens.



Head back to the path towards the huge Deodar Cedar with its stout resin-covered cones sitting vertically on top of the horizontally spreading branches. This is what the little Deodar Cedar you saw earlier will eventually become, but it is going to take a few years!

On your left is a spectacular specimen of Dragon Tree *Dracena draco*. It is a native of the Canary and other nearby Islands and while it looks like a giant succulent it is actually in the asparagus family. The common name refers to the dark red resin exuded by the leaves and trunk when cut. The resin has been used for medicines, dyes and the odd bit of alchemy.



Walk down the path then turn right at a small half-dead pine tree into the lawn area. Some of the shrubs you will encounter in the garden beds include Tufted Honey Flower *Melianthus major* from South Africa, Silver Tree *Leucodendron argenteum* South Africa, Velvet Groundsel *Roldana petasitis* from Mexico and Central America; Ruscus *Ruscus* sp. (possibly *hypoglossum*) from central Europe recognised by its tiny flowers sitting in the middle of what looks like leaves but are actually hard bracts; and Violet Tube-flower *Lochroma cyanea*, a member of the tomato and tobacco family.



Tufted Honey Flower



Silver Tree



Velvet Groundsel



Ruscus



Violet Tube-flower



Huge Atlas Cedar

Return to the rotunda and the tour of these lovely gardens is complete.

As always, there are many more plants and other good stuff to discover along the walk so take your time, and your hand lens, and wander around the garden beds.

If you find a plant you want to know more about, email John a picture and a short description and he will endeavour to work it out for you. [jmiller3350@gmail.com](mailto:jmiller3350@gmail.com)

Please feel free to share this with anyone else who might enjoy the walk.