

**U3A Port Fairy
Science...naturally!
Botanic Gardens and Beyond – self-guided walk**

John Miller, May 2020



This is the 8th in a series of self-guided walks around Port Fairy to help relieve the tedium of COVID-19. The aim of the walks is to provide enjoyable outdoor activities that can be undertaken either by yourself or your family (with appropriate COVID-19 separation and other precautions).

This walk starts at the Port Fairy Community House. It heads north to Regent Street then across the Moyne River to the Port Fairy Botanic Gardens where it does a loop via the footy ground back to the entrance near the river and then back to the Community House. The walk is flat and is mainly on paved paths and roads so is suitable for all mobilities. The walk takes you to various interesting shrubs and trees along the way, all of which have been planted and are not native to Port Fairy



Commence at the U3A Tree of Knowledge – an Olive *Olea europaea* – planted in the Community Garden in 2018 to commemorate the commencement of U3A in Port Fairy. Naturally, it is growing well!

The large eucalypts hanging over the fence on the western side of the car park just north of the Community Garden are the Western Australian endemic Tuart *Eucalyptus gomphocephala*. Tuart, which is covered in a rough shaggy bark and has large gum nuts on a flattened stem, occurs naturally on the narrow coastal plain from Yancheep to Busselton. It has been widely planted in Port Fairy and is one of the most common large eucalypts you will see around town.



As you enter Regent Street and walk towards the Moyne River you will see some large specimens of Norfolk Island Hibiscus *Lagunaria patersonia* growing on the southern nature strip. They make a lovely mid-sized street tree with their pink hibiscus-like flowers and light green foliage. Unfortunately, they also shed small fibres which are an irritant to many people.



Turn left into Gipps Street and head for the river. Have a look at the last Norfolk Island Pine *Araucaria heterophylla* tree on your left. On the lowest branch on the river side you should be able to see a well developed female cone – something that you don't see all that often with this conifer species.

Walk across the Moyne River and arrive at the entrance gates to the Botanic Gardens. The gardens are now over 160 years old and, while they may not have the grandeur of many other botanical gardens, they nevertheless house some interesting tree and shrub specimens.

As you enter the gardens you are greeted by a magnificent gnarly old Olive tree, palm trees and a range of interesting shrubs. About 10 m inside the gates on your right you will see a straggly specimen of Wigandia *Wigandia kunthii* with its thin brown stems to about 2 m tall, large crinkly oak-like leaves and sprays of large five-petalled purple flowers in spring. Wigandias are native to Central and South America but seem to do quite well in our climate.



Wigandia flower



Wigandia leaf



Newly planted Washington Palm

Take the path to the right where you will see some recently planted Washington Palms *Washingtonia robusta* which will in time grow to around 10-12 m tall. Note the strong sharp spines along the stems of the fronds.

As the path arcs to the west look up at the row of tall single-trunked pine trees with a beautiful orangish tessellated bark. These are Stone Pines *Pinus pinea*, the pines from which culinary pine nuts are harvested. They are fairly easy to identify by their flat top looking a bit like a tall mushroom.



Row of Stone Pines



Tessellated bark of Stone Pine



The distinctive flat top of the pines

Now walk along the bitumen road towards the tall Canary Island Date Palms *Phoenix canariensis* and then north towards two log sculptures where you will see some fine Moreton Bay Fig *Ficus macrophylla* trees near the rotunda.

Just to the north of the rotunda is a small tree within an enclosure. This small Chinese Elm *Ulmus parvifolia* was planted in 2009 by the Mayor to mark the 150 year anniversary of the Botanic Gardens. So this tree is now 21 years old – slow progress.



Canary Island Date Palms



Moreton Bay Fig and sculptures



Commemorative Chinese Elm

Return to the Squatters Place road and walk north past the entrance to the footy oval and follow the road around the northern side of the oval.



The row of trees planted around the oval are Bhutan Cypress *Cyperus torulosa* trees – a cold-hardy species from the Himalaya, China and Vietnam where it grows on limestone soils – which probably explains why it is doing so well in Port Fairy!

Walk on until you are adjacent to camping site 318 and look to the north. You will see a row of Aleppo Pines *Pinus halepensis* trees all of which are characteristically growing with a leaning trunk. It occurs widely around the Mediterranean and its resin is used to flavour Retsina wine – arguably one of the most appalling culinary corruptions known to the occidental world.



Spot the difference. Pine trees have long needle-like leaves (3-15 cm long) and more or less oval cones (usually >5 cm long). Cypress trees have tiny scale leaves (1-3 mm long) and small round or oval cones (1-3 cm long) with flat scales on a pedestal.

As you walk towards the netball courts and the back of the clubrooms you will see some more Stone Pines with their flat tops and the familiar Monterey Cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa* widely planted as a windbreak in western Victoria.

Continue walking south and take the road to the right (by the fire hose) which runs adjacent to the river. On your left you will see a young London Plane *Platanus x acerifolia* tree recognised by the large maple-type leaf and hanging seed balls. It is the tree you will see at the "Paris end" of Collins Street in Melbourne. Further along, at the back of camp site 71/72 you will find a small multi-trunked Box Elder *Acer negrundo* tree with leaves comprised of three leaflets a bit like a giant clover.



Flat topped Stone Pine



London Plane Tree



Multi-trunked Box Elder

Walk past the ablutions block and back into the Botanic Garden this time taking the track adjacent to the river.

Plants to look out for as you return to the entrance gates include:

- A bedraggled Bunya Pine *Araucaria bidwillii* which naturally occurs in south-east Queensland and is a relict species from the Jurassic period around 200 million years ago when dinosaurs ruled the world.
- A Southern Mahogany *Eucalyptus botryoides* which naturally occurs around Lakes Entrance in East Gippsland but is grown widely in Victoria as a street tree.
- A lovely lemon-scented geranium *Pelargonium crispum* cultivar. Brush the plant to release the powerful fragrance.



Bunya Pine a bit worse for wear



Southern Mahogany



Lemon-scented Geranium

You can now retrace your steps back to the Community House.

If you find a plant, shell, bird, whatever, and want to know what it is, email me a picture and a short description and I will endeavour to work it out for you. jmiller3350@gmail.com

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