



MOUNT ANNAN VISIT

The trip to the Plant Bank at Mount Annan Botanic Gardens was well attended with a dozen members meeting up at the gardens on 25 May.

The tour began outside the stylishly modern, purpose-built facility with information about the gardens itself and the important role it plays in conservation and education. Mt Annan was opened in 1988 to celebrate the bicentenary of European settlement. It is the largest botanic garden in the country, covering over 400 hectares, and is apparently the most visited tourist attraction in south-west Sydney, with more than 400,000 visitors annually. As noted on our previous visit, many members of the public attend the garden for purposes other than to inspect the plants. This time there were visitors attending Annan Aroma, a food fair held each season throughout the year, others picnicked in the lovely surrounds, there was a wedding and several people using the grounds for exercise including for yoga or jogging—however all those people were engaging with the natural environment in some way—so there is no doubt it plays an important role in enriching the lives of urban residents.

The gardens themselves contain more than 2000 species of Australian flora. Our guide explained that as it sits within the Cumberland plain, the gardens also play a vital role in maintaining remnants of the critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland.



Once we entered the Plant Bank, the tour turned to the processes involved in conservation of seed. Our guide described the way the horticulturalists gather the seed, and processes used to appropriately store it—quite involved, and

necessary not only to ensure viability of seed is maintained but also because significant quantities are sent overseas including to Kew Gardens.



Interestingly seed is X-rayed in order to check viability, and frequently this process reveals insects within the seed—it was quite eerie to see the outline of such critters within their seed coffin. Photography of microscopic work showed parts of seeds in extraordinary detail. Various artists have been in residence at the gardens and have turned images of X-rays and microscopic work into artworks.

We were also shown the different controlled environments used to germinate seeds or to grow tissue cultures. It was interesting to hear of the measures taken to ensure rigour of process. The Mt Annan botanic gardens is unusual in that research is also undertaken at the Plant Bank. A major focus of the work there is on the Wollemi Pine, *Wollemia nobilis*. The extraordinary story behind this plant—its discovery when thought to be long extinct, the secrecy surrounding its location in the wild and the measures taken to safeguard the plant by making it readily available through nurseries—is obviously one which captures the



imagination of the public.



After the tour we enjoyed our lunch in the welcome shade of one of the many picnic areas scattered throughout the gardens. We then wandered through the “Big Ideas” garden—a space devoted to encouraging water-wise gardening; demonstrating the benefits of appropriate plant selection for conditions; modelling the use of Australian native plants for unusual purposes such as formal hedging and topiary; and simple ways to reuse materials within a garden. We were all struck by the number of plants in flower, no doubt a response to the unseasonably warm autumn. The temperature during our visit reached 27 degrees! Some of the *Grevillea* were stand-outs, other pretty flowers included a large blue-purple *Isotoma*, *Melaleuca thymifolia* and some vivid paper daisies. Impressive foliage specimens included *Acacia cognata*, and there was a large tree near the Plant Bank which caught Greg’s attention, first thought to be an Eucalypt, but was later identified as an *Acacia*.



An interesting day, thanks for organising Jen. (Pauline)

WETLANDS NOTE

A BIG thank you goes out to Bill for the invaluable assistance he provided with the Wetlands gardens last week. Thanks to him, the fences are now removed from 3 of the gardens, which has made a huge difference to their visual appeal. Also the mulch has been topped up where it was needed, so our gardens are now all ready for the coming winter.

Thanks - Pauline

SOME DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS

In the Autumn newsletter of the APS Armidale group, two members wrote of their recent experiences with the prevailing dry conditions. What emerges when one compares the experiences described is that there are some differences. This is not surprising as it’s probably close to true that no two gardens are the same. Plant genera which were tolerant of the dry in one garden were not necessarily tolerant in the other. A common theme from each garden, however, was that the various forms of *Correa glabra* were drought-tolerant. Forms of this species have been propagated within the group so getting hold of some of these could be a worthwhile investment.

GARDEN DESIGN PRESENTATION

This event has crept up fairly quickly and is just a month away. Our presenter is Ben Walcott from Canberra and quite possibly his wife, Ros. If you have managed to glance through the recently-arrived *Australian Plants* magazine you will have seen an update on the progress of the Terra Australia garden that is part of the National Arboretum in Canberra - which we visited several years ago. Ben and Ros Walcott are the authors of this update and have been on the design team from its inception. The opportunity to see and listen to these people and to explore their ideas re garden design should not be missed by anyone who values a thematic approach to garden creation. So we strongly encourage members to register by emailing southerntablelands@austplants.com.au; this is primarily so that we know the numbers attending for the Workers Club information. It would be very good as well to have a good sprinkling of members among the general public. Registrations need to be in by Wednesday July 3.

NEXT WALK SATURDAY

This part of the Cookbundoons is a new destination for the group. Some of the *E. viminalis* (manna gum) and *E. elata* (river peppermint) for the wetlands were from seed collected nearby a few years ago by Rodney and myself. Having been in there years before that, I remember *Callistemon pallidus*, *B. spinulosa* and *Xanthorrhoea*.

CALENDAR

Sat Jun 8	Walk - Towrang/Cookbundoon
Sat Jul 6	Presentation/Forum
Sat Aug 3	Walk - Alison Hone Reserve
Sat Sep 7	Walk - Ettrema Gorge area
Sat Sep 19	Propagation
Sun Sep 22	Propagation
Sat Oct 5	Walk - Dalton Reserves
Wed Oct 16	Wetlands working bee
Sun Nov 3	Riversdale plant stall
Sat Nov 16	Walk - Penrose State Forest
Sat Dec 7	AGM + end of year function

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