

# Dove-Meyer Robinson Park and Alberon Reserve, Parnell, 19 Aug 2017

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The Auckland Bot. Soc. field trip for 19 August 2017 was advertised as visiting two parks, both in **Auckland's inner suburb, Parnell. They were the well-known Dove-Meyer Robinson Park (6.1 ha), more commonly known as the Parnell Rose Garden, and Alberon Reserve (2.5 ha) which is poorly known.** Both parks are included by Wilcox (2010: 96) in his **"Auckland's best public tree places"**. Dove-Meyer Robinson Park is a mixture of well-established specimen trees, planted thickets, rose gardens, mown lawns, and localised regenerating native areas on the steep east-facing slopes. There was a terrible weather forecast predicted for the morning: rain, heavy and thundery with hail, rain easing in the afternoon. The storm kindly held off until 1 pm, but it resulted in our visit to Alberon Reserve being brief.

**Participants:** Jenny Andrew, Yumiko Baba, Bruce Calvert, Ewen Cameron (stand-in leader), Brian Cumber, Frances Duff, Cameron Kilgour, Beth Gibbs, Peter Moosberger, Sharon Osborne, Suman Pancha, Helen Preston Jones, Juliet Richmond, Joshua Salter, John & Karen Staniland, Jack Walden, Elizabeth Walker. Mike Wilcox had organised the field trip and the draft species lists, but became unwell during the week and had to stand down from leading it.

## Slope up from Judges Bay carpark

**We began with Mike's draft species lists in hand** by the Judges Bay Road carpark at the bottom of the Dove-Meyer Robinson Park. The adjacent large pine tree (Fig. 1) caught our attention with some wind-damaged branches conveniently on the ground to inspect. The leaves were long, coarse and in fascicles of two; the cones long and narrow with a prickly umbo, making it maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*). This is the commonest naturalised pine around Auckland. It is recorded as probably the first conifer to be introduced to New Zealand because it was common enough to be wrongly described as native, *Pinus nova-zelandica*, in 1830 (Sykes 1988: 57). To its south side was a

youthful-looking *Araucaria columnaris* c.6 m tall. Next we looked at a large cedar (*Cedrus* sp.) – but which species? The three main species were all on the list. Using the outer branch tip rule: **a**scending = *C. atlantica*; **l**evel = *C. libani*; **d**escending = *C. deodara*, which made our tree *Cedrus deodara*. An 8 m-tall podocarp with long hanging leaves close by was: *Podocarpus henckelii* with male catkins. Up the slope we then searched under a *Macadamia tetraphylla* tree for nuts and they were empty – all rat-gnawed. Next a pink floral carpet (Fig. 2) made us look up to see where the flowers had come from: a tall Madagascan strawberry snowball tree (*Dombeya cacuminum*, Malvaceae) in full flower (Fig. 3).

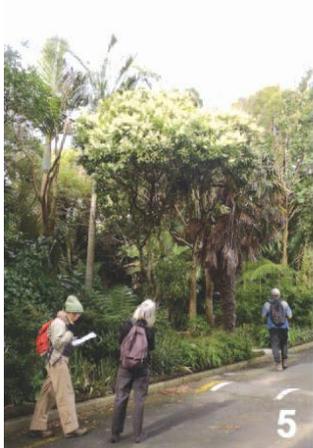
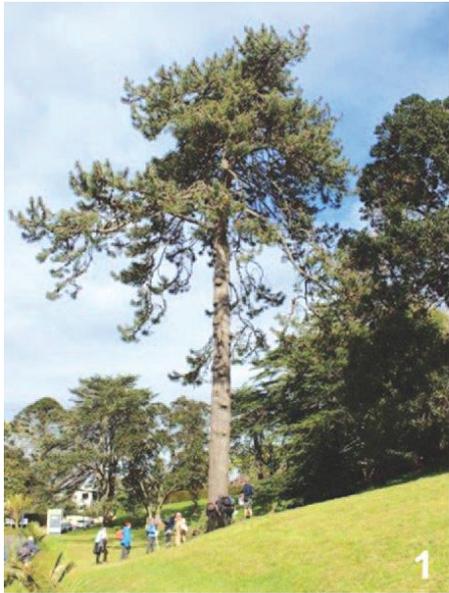
Under the trees as we went up the slope several familiar weeds were spotted: onion weed (*Allium triquetrum*), veldt grass (*Ehrharta erecta*) fruiting, *Carex divulsa*, and a couple of ochna (*Ochna serrulata*, Ochnaceae) seedlings – adult ochna were later seen up near the toilets. Swards of the native grass, *Microlaena stipoides*, were locally common. Small wildling Moreton Bay figs (*Ficus macrophylla*) were present epiphytically in some of the trees. As is usually the case, these wildlings were within 100 m of a seed source – two large cultivated adults were at the top of the slope.

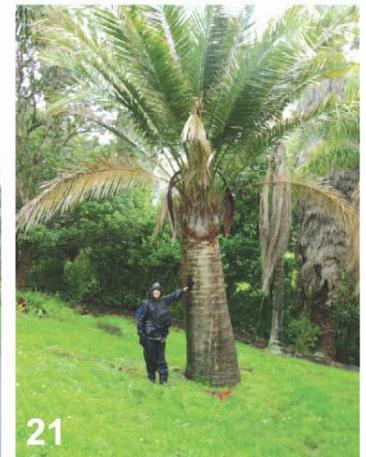
## Level area south of the Nancy Steen Garden, opposite the toilets and bunya pine

By the large Moreton Bay trees all the kawakawa shrubs (*Piper excelsum*) were in flower, but oddly they were all male – perhaps cutting grown? On the eastern side of the path there was another dioecious shrub, also with male flowers, the Japanese laurel *Aucuba japonica* (Fig. 4), which is now placed in the Garryaceae (ex Cornaceae). This one had green leaves but an adjacent one had **leaves splashed with yellow (cv. 'Golden Spangles')**. Looking some 40 m down the slope between a large pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) and a Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) was an

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**Figs. 1–10.** **1:** Maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*) lower slope of the Park. Photo: J. Walden. All photos in Dove-Meyer Robinson Park taken on 19 Aug 2017, unless stated otherwise. **2:** Pink flowers of the Madagascan strawberry snowball tree on the ground, petals 25–38 mm long; mid-slope. Photo: J. Salter. **3:** Looking up the tall strawberry snowball tree with **abundant 'balls' of flowers**. Photo: C. Kilgour. **4:** Male flowers of the Japanese laurel shrub with petals in fours. Photo: C. Kilgour. **5:** Ivory curl (*Buckinghamia celsissima*) in full flower, but too tall to reach the flowers. Photo: J. Salter. **6:** The characteristic protea-type spikes of ivory curl flowers. Photo: E. Cameron. **7:** A dragon-tree c. 8 m tall opposite the toilets. Photo: J. Salter. **8:** *Oreopanax capitatus* (Araliaceae) foliage photographed 8 years ago when the tree was c. 2.5 m tall; today it is c. 7 m tall and most of the foliage is out of reach. The coriaceous leaves are to 0.7 m long, half of that being petiole. Photo: E. Cameron, 9 Sep 2009. **9:** Shrub c. 2.5 m tall, *Synadenium compactum* var. *rubrum* (Euphorbiaceae) with finely serrated leaves. Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017. **10:** *Pyrostegia venusta* in full flower over a wooden frame by the rose garden. Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017.





old kanuka (*Kunzea robusta*) c.15 m tall – thought to be part of the original vegetation of the area. Also on the east side of the path was an old Bermudan juniper tree (*Juniperus bermudiana*) – its **small male catkins were evident. We couldn't locate** the female tree that used to be in this area in the 1980s (AK 175749) – died? Close to the juniper was a leafless *Erythrina* c.6 m tall, that appeared to be the South American cocksbur coral tree (*E. crista-galli*).

On the west side of the path there were several southern African *Strelitzia nicolai* (Strelitziaceae), which are tall banana-like plants, 4-8 m tall. They are in the same family as the superficially **similar but more tropical traveller's palm** (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) which is cultivated in the Wintergardens tropical house in the Auckland Domain. A tall daisy shrub, *Montanoa bipinnatifida*, with large flowerheads with white ray florets over-topped us. Three frequent Acanthaceae shrubs were in flower: Mexican shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*), *Odontonema tubiforme*, and *Strobilanthes anisophyllus*. *Monstera deliciosa* and *Clivia* spp. were frequent ground cover plants in shaded areas.

**Near the archway entrance, on the driveway's** eastern margin, there is an interesting row of woody species. From south to north they include: *Rhaphiolepis umbellata* with white flowers; a 16 m-tall Norfolk Island hibiscus (*Lagunaria patersonii*); a nearly-as-tall weeping paperbark (*Melaleuca leucadendra*); velvet groundsel (*Roldana petasitis*) – the Mexican shrub with large furry leaves – was in flower (yellow-rayed flowerheads); *Trachycarpus fortunei*; **Queensland's ivory curl** (*Buckinghamia celsissima*, Proteaceae) was flowering (Figs. 5,6); *Gordonia axillaris*; ochna – several shrubs with bright red new foliage and numerous flower buds – the showy yellow flowers were opening two weeks later; an erect stem of *Pandanus* (?) with a stem c.1 m tall and serrated leaves >2 m; bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*); nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*); a tall and well-branched dragon-tree (*Dracaena draco*, Asparagaceae) (Fig. 7) – Cameron (2015) discussed Auckland's **tallest and** unusual dragon-trees; lemon myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*, Myrtaceae) with green capsules and

strongly lemon-scented leaves is another Queensland native and it is also grown commercially in Australia, where the harvested leaves are dried for leaf spice, or distilled for the essential oil (Wikipedia 2017); *Schefflera arboricola* – is native to Taiwan and Hainan Island, long thin branches to 4 m tall, but spreading out over the road with 10 m-long branches; and the South African sedge *Cyperus albostratus* was present on the driveway border by the base of the ivory curl. This species is a frequent plant in old Auckland properties.

*Oreopanax capitatus* (Araliaceae), native from Mexico to South America (by a loop track from the driveway), is a 7 m-tall flat-headed tree with large leathery leaves (Fig. 8). The leader tried to avoid the several small palm species present, but taller palms *Trachycarpus fortunei*, bangalow palm and nikau were frequent. Juliet challenged the leader asking about a type of spurge bush in the shade with weak stems to 2.5 m tall, with copious milky sap (toxic) when a fleshy leaf was broken off. Later checking revealed that it was the East African *Synadenium compactum* var. *rubrum* (Euphorbiaceae) with reddish-green leaves (Fig. 9) – often wrongly called *S. grantii* which lacks the minutely toothed margin of *S. compactum* (Carter 1987). In terms of the woody plants this is the most diverse area in the Park and the group enjoyed the botanical challenges of the many unusual exotic species.

#### The west side of the driveway, by the toilets

Two Bignoniaceous climbers were admired: one endemic to the Three Kings Islands, *Tecomanthe speciosa*, over the pergolas at the front of the toilets (no flowers); and further to the north by the actual rose garden, *Pyrostegia venusta* from Brazil, covered in orange-tubular flowers (Fig. 10). The 20 m-tall bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) has a double trunk c.8 m from the ground; the dbh measured 151.8 m (17 Sep 2017). When the large female cones are nearly ripe the garden staff fence off the area for safety reasons. At the north end of the bed was a shrub 4 m tall, *Rogiera amoena* (Rubiaceae) native to Mexico and Central America, with sessile opposite leaves and umbels of narrow-pink tubular flowers (Fig. 11). Close by is a

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**Figs. 11–21.** **11:** *Clanthus puniceus* 'Albus' over the trellis in the Nancy Steen Garden. Photo: Joshua Salter. **12:** *Rosa laevigata*, white flowers to 11.5 cm across, over the trellis in the Nancy Steen Garden. Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017. **13:** *Rogiera amoena* (Rubiaceae) a pink-flowering shrub north of the toilets. Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017. **14:** Row of six interesting deciduous tree species on south side of the lawn just below the Nancy Steen Garden (top right). Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017. **15:** *Erythrina speciosa* with narrow scarlet flowers 65–71 mm long. Photo: E. Cameron, 3 Sep 2017. **16:** *Oxalis purpurea* in middle of lawn, the large pink flowers to 4 cm across with yellow centres. Photo: J. Salter. **17:** Lunch under the largest and most spectacular pohutukawa. Photo: J. Salter. **18:** Jack measuring the circumference of the famous pohutukawa. Photo: J. Salter. **19:** After lunch as the storm hit us, coats were put on and umbrellas opened. Photo: C. Kilgour. **20:** Inspecting an original kanuka near the vehicle entrance. Note – the tallest branch is partly cut-off in this image. Photo: J. Salter. **21:** A stocky juvenile Chilean wine palm (*Jubaea chilensis*), endemic to Chile. Alberon Reserve, with Peter next to it in the rain. Photo: C. Kilgour.

large flame tree (*Erythrina × sykesii* – labelled as *E. indica*) which was in flower. This hybrid is named after the New Zealand botanist Bill Sykes (Esler & Edgar 1997).

#### Nancy Steen Garden

We visited the adjacent formal Nancy Steen Garden within the Dove-Meyer Robinson Park. This formal garden is named in honour of Nancy Steen (1898–1986), who was a local artist, gardener and a rose enthusiast. The garden was developed by the New Zealand Heritage Roses group and the Auckland City Council; the garden opened in 1984 to showcase the beautiful and unusual roses collected by Nancy Steen over the course of her life (MyGuideAuckland 2017). Part of this garden is a fenced intimate area where all the flowers are white and the leaves are often silvery, e.g. *Astelia chathamica*. On the trellis a large plant of *Clanthus puniceus* 'Albus' with abundant white flowers (Fig. 12) covered 5 m along the fence. Sharing the trellis was a creeping rose species, the Chinese *Rosa laevigata*, **which wasn't in flower on the day of the field trip**, but it was two weeks later (Fig. 13). Behind the trellis was a 2 m-tall camellia (*Camellia* 'Cinnamon Cindy') with pale-pink scented flowers. On the south side of the garden is a Mexican hand tree (*Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*, Malvaceae) c.9 m tall, but not in flower. At a similar height on its eastern side there is a round-headed water gum (*Tristaniopsis laurina*, Myrtaceae) **of eastern Australia. Some "wrong-coloured"** monarch butterflies were flying around and the leader joked that they needed to plant some suitably coloured cabbages (*Brassica oleracea* cv.) to encourage common white butterflies (*Pieris rapae rapae*).

#### Margin of the lawn below Nancy Steen Garden

The row of six interesting trees on the southern margin of the lawn were a little challenging to identify because they were all deciduous and leafless at this time of year (Fig. 14). Some dead leaves on the ground helped to confirm their identity. Starting at the top (by the Nancy Steen Garden) and going down the hill:

- common lime or linden (*Tilia × europaea*, Malvaceae) – it even had an old name tag on the tree-trunk;
- *Erythrina speciosa* Fabaceae – an old multi-trunked tree with a tangle of branches 6-7 m tall, which had begun to flower (Fig. 15); Gardner (1992) discusses the parentage of this plant under the name *E. × orba* a hybrid which was described from this actual tree (Krukoff & Barneby 1974); Esler and Edgar (1997) claim that the stated distinctive features of the keel petals cannot be substantiated and therefore it should just be treated as the Brazilian species, *E. speciosa*;
- ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) Ginkgoaceae;
- liquidambar or American sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*, Altingiaceae) – native to warm temperate

areas of eastern North America south to Central America;

- Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera*, syn. *Sapium sebiferum*, Euphorbiaceae); and
- trident maple (*Acer buergerianum*, Sapindaceae) native to eastern China and Japan.

In the lawn to the north side were scattered large open pink flowers of *Oxalis purpurea* (Fig. 16); the yellow-flowered *Oxalis pes-caprae* was also present on the lawn margin – two style states were located in different populations. By the path on the north side was a c.8 m-tall, leafless tree, which our leader knew from previous visits as the Chinese happy tree (*Camptotheca acuminata*, Nyssaceae). Evidently its common name is a direct translation from its Chinese name (**xǐ shù**). It is used in cancer treatment. Adjacent to it, on the other side of the path, was the taller, narrower tree *Flindersia australis* (Rutaceae) – an evergreen with compound leaves well out of reach. It is a rainforest species from eastern Australia. By these two trees were three even taller California fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*). Up the path there were two fruiting *Howea forsteriana* palms.

At the top of the lawn slope, opposite the Rose Garden Function Centre ('Parnells on the Rose Garden'), on the margin of the driveway were several palms, including: a large clump of *Chamaerops humilis* 2.5 m tall x 5 m across with many trunks; a glaucous *Butia capitata* with a leaning trunk (and a dead one next to it); and a *Phoenix canariensis*. Two taller, erect *Butia capitata* to 9 m tall, each encircled by a seat, are old plantings at the back of the Function Centre. Two eastern Australian shrubs, *Leptospermum petersonii* with lemon-scented leaves, also grow here, one either side of the stone steps.

Below the driveway heading north an African olive tree (*Olea europaea* subsp. *cuspidata*) c.6 m tall overhung the path under a large, erect pohutukawa. **The olive's spherical fruit (green) and greenish-backed leaves confirmed its identity.** It is an additional Auckland location of this potential weed to **Cameron's list (Cameron 2017a). Jack located a second one further to the northwest.** The northern end of this path ended by a large silver dollar gum (*Eucalyptus cinerea*) c.10 m tall from eastern Australia – the juveniles were once fashionable Auckland plants in the 1960s.

On the western side of the park, near the Korean War Memorial, is a lemon-scented gum (*Corymbia citriodora*) from Queensland, standing out because of its smooth pale trunk. This tree replaces an earlier one that was blown over by Cyclone Bola in 1988.

The low, wide-spreading large pohutukawa towards the northern end of the Park is the most

magnificent tree of the Park. Its lower branches loop across the ground and root where contact is made with the soil. There is an image of the tree in Philip Simpson's book (Simpson 2005: 110). Burstall and Sale (1984: 55) rate it as "...the largest and best-sited pohutukawa to have been planted by a European...It is thought to have been planted by Robert Gillies c.1850". Simpson (2005: 207) claims it was planted by Sir John Logan Campbell in 1853. However, neither of these interpretations might be correct because there are other possible contenders who may have planted it, and it is also possible that **it wasn't planted at all, and that it was a natural wild plant** (Cadwallader 2014). We had lunch under it (Fig. 17), while Jack measured its diameter: 3.21 m above root flare (Fig. 18). From The New Zealand Notable Tree Register this tree was last measured on 23 Oct 2014 by Cadwallader (2014): diam. 3.15 m; height 14.0 m, and average crown spread 43.5 m. Compare this with the 55 m average crown spread of the Awhitu giant pohutukawa (Aspin 2008: 181(image), Cameron 2017b: table 1).

Although the storm had started we left the protection of the pohutukawa (Fig. 19) and Jack pointed out another original kanuka near the vehicle exit. Most of the tree is c. 8 m tall (Fig. 20), but a separate propped-up branch is twice this height. We then left the Park and headed for Alberon Reserve. Although we failed to see all the **trees on Mike's species list, we did manage to add to it.** Birds seen or heard during our visit:

welcome swallow, tui, grey warbler, eastern rosella, silvereye, magpie, fantail and blackbird.

### Alberon Reserve

We walked from Dove-Meyer Robinson Park up Gladstone Road to Alberon Reserve via Stratford Street, a distance of about 300 m. This small reserve (2.5 ha) tucked out of sight is packed with interesting palm species. Keith Boyer (1991) gives a brief history and records the Palm and Cycad Society's involvement, along with the Auckland City Council and local residents, in sourcing, planting and protecting palms in the reserve. It was raining quite hard, the wind was strong and our group was reduced to eight. We managed a quick loop through the dense palm plantings. Four tall palms (three bangalow palms and one nikau) had recently been vandalised by hacking them down and they lay across the boardwalk. Then a quick inspection of an unusual palm in the open (Fig. 21), a discussion about the foliage of a rose apple (*Syzygium jambos*) and then we hurried back to our cars as the rain continued. This unusual and interesting reserve requires a repeat visit in better weather.

### Acknowledgements

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