

REPORTS

Trip Reports

Visit to Prof Baylis's garden, 20 Oct 2001 – *Robyn Bridges*

This is not a garden for the pusillanimous! Viewing this magnificent garden from the upstairs verandah is breathtaking and gives a true perspective to the garden's grand size and scale.

'Threave' was built as a retirement home in 1903 for the first owner, Walter Shennan, who set up the first merino stud in New Zealand. His plantings of Copper Beech, Atlantic Cedars and a huge *Sequoiadendron* form much of the present canopy layer (which is almost at eye level from the verandah) and the backbone of the garden. He also planted, what is now a very large pohutukawa near the entrance. Apparently by 1903 frosts were becoming less severe, enabling more of these northern imports to become established. It is probable that many of the large specimens round Dunedin date from this period.

One of the attractions of this splendid garden is its mixture of natives and exotics. Of particular interest were the plants Prof Baylis has introduced from the Three Kings Islands. These include the Three Kings fig, *Streblus smithii*, and *Pennantia baylisiana*, both of which bear flowers on their trunks (cauliflory), and *Tecomantes speciosa*, a vigorous creeper. *Pennantia baylisiana*, now propagated by commercial nurseries and available at a price, was a cutting taken from the only remaining specimen found on the Three Kings. Like the form of the large pohutukawa, the *Pennantia* has a solid base of multiple stems. As Prof Baylis succinctly put it, 'Why have strong apical dominance if you get your top blown off!'

A large *Magnolia campbellii* is the biggest tree planted by Prof Baylis. A runner up is a very handsome Dawn Redwood, a deciduous conifer found in China in the 1930s. A rare sight was the unusual Handkerchief tree, *Davidia involucrata*. The name is taken from its large drooping white leaf bracts, which look as if someone had spilt a box of tissues over the tree.

Kahakitea, kauri, rewa rewa, tree ferns (*Cyathea medullaris* and *C. dealbata*), maples, luxuriant *Fuchsia procumbens*, rhododendrons, large Spanish bluebells (which have double the chromosomes of their smaller counterpart), colourful pockets of *Pleiione* growing on old tree stumps, a large avocado tree (sadly it doesn't set fruit, well not yet), naturalised *Cardiocrinum* lilies, frost tender *Meryta sinclairii*, together with many naturalised plantings of herbaceous border species, make for a stunning mix.

Prof Baylis has a simple planting guide. 'You plant it where it should grow, where you would like it to grow and where you're sure it won't grow'. The results speak for themselves.