

Shire of Hepburn



Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens **Daylesford**
Conservation and Development Plan

- October 1995 • Revised October 1997

Print cover photo:

The view of Mountain ~~and~~ the western approach to the town has been much photographed since settlement and the ~~discovery~~ discovery of township identity.

The impact is strengthened by the road alignment ~~which~~ ~~leads~~ to suddenly embrace the view, the straight walk ~~formed~~ ~~by~~ the dip in the road, with ~~the~~ ~~transition~~ at the Courthouse, avenue ~~leading~~ and the scale of 19th century buildings and trees.

The Gardens' corner line forms makes a strong landscape statement by virtue of its dark, vertical massing, dominantly Douglas Fir, Western Yellow Pine and Giant Sequoia. The contrasting elm avenues are identified in autumn colour. As early as 1880, this feature was criticised:

... ~~regular~~ and narrow belts along each side of the walks ... running across the face of the hill produce a most disagreeable effect when seen from a distance, cutting the hill in slices as it were, instead of its slope being studded with groups and single trees in a picturesque manner.

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Statement of Cultural Heritage Significance

As one of a series of 19th century provincial botanic gardens across Victoria, the Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens, Daylesford, shares significance.

Significance is supported by its prominent location on Wombat Hill which allows 360 degrees prospects in the best 'picturesque' design tradition and affords its integration with the Daylesford township by shared landform and tree cover, as integral to the town image. The view from the Ballarat Road approach best captures this image.

Survival of the romantic 'picturesque' literary setting as described by Hortensis (Sangster) supports the Gardens' significance as inseparable from the town.

The 19th century exotic tree collection, dominated by conifers and contrasted with deciduous species is the most significant introduced feature, with many of the trees a legacy of Ferdinand Mueller from the early 1870s. Individual classified trees assume greatest status.

The fern gully walk and rustic fountain are significant as an example of a feature popularised by William Sangster, whilst the annual Tuberous Begonia display is significant as a continuing regional tradition.

The Pioneers' Memorial Lookout Tower which affords views over the town and countryside is of local significance.

No one period of development stands out as more significant than the continuum since foundation.

Summary of Recommendations

The Setting

- Conserve the Gardens' setting by ensuring that all new development respects the scale, vernacular style and 'picturesque' aesthetic already established. This is particularly important on the western hillside, where views from the Ballarat Road entrance to the town have long been appreciated (see photograph front cover).
- Investigate planning controls in conjunction with development guidelines, which would ensure sensitive new development.

Views

- Identify view corridors and selectively prune or remove trees.
- Restore the interpretive plaque with view directions in its original position on the lookout tower.

Garden Spaces

- Recognise spatial diversity in the Gardens as a primary design element, for the restoration of lost spatial experiences and the sensitive design of new ones. Reinforce existing spatial themes.
- Conserve the avenues as a single age resource by replanting sections where gaps are significant.
- Investigate the feasibility of continuing the avenues to complete the arrival of the paths at the summit or realign paths or design a compromise between the two.
- Do not weaken the conifer forest framework by random interplanting of deciduous or broadleaf plant species.
- Define the major lawn spaces and limit specimen trees to the truly spectacular.
- Investigate opportunities for planting specimen trees at path divergences.
- Define garden beds which enclose spaces and plan their planting themes. Maintain the 'gardenesque' style of planting to display individual qualities of each plant.
- Limit flower beds to areas where they have greatest potential impact eg. as viewed from a main path or entrance. Limit size to that which can be maintained in excellence and design each display for maximum impact.
- Design entrances in keeping with former known themes (see historic photos and on-ground evidence).

Note that further detailed design is required, which is outside the scope of this Brief.

Boundaries/Entrances/'Paths'

- Restore the Gardens' boundaries with fencing and Hawthorn hedges, according to on-site and survey evidence. (Note that consultation with adjacent property owners whose structures have encroached into the Gardens is required.)
- Redesign entrances at main southern entrance, northern Wombat Street entrance, southern pedestrian entrance and western Daly Street entrance. Design entrances in keeping with former known themes (see historic photos and on-ground evidence).
- Restore path systems to meet entrance points.
- Do not seek to increase Gardens area by purchase of additional land, but rather impose strict development guidelines such that 'picturesque' character is retained.
- Encourage or instigate planting of vacant adjacent land, to road boundaries.
- Restore the straight summit path alignment and terracotta channels at edges (see Figs. 8 and 19, Appendix 13 Summit Path Alignment).
- Close the main (southern) entrance to vehicles at sunset, on a 12 month trial basis and monitor effects.
- Investigate the feasibility of providing a new Gardens access point and link with the Convent Gallery.
- Prohibit the entry of large buses beyond the current maintenance depot site. Investigate the feasibility of providing a bus park, toilet facilities and disabled access paths (in conjunction with other proposals for the precinct) at this point (see 5.8 Structures).

Note that further detailed design is required, which is outside the scope of this Brief.

Summary of Recommendations continued

The Tree Collection

- Maintain the 19th century trees in good health and condition, within reasonable economic limits.
- Introduce a sustained amenity program to ensure a mixed age resource over a 120 year renewal period. Avenues should be considered within this program as a single-age replacement.
- Encourage the introduction of additional species (see 5.10 Plant Acquisitions) on an on-going acclimatisation trial basis, to complete botanic collections, whilst maintaining the existing balance of conifer:deciduous species.
- Investigate opportunities for additional plant collections within the OPCA collection guidelines (see 5.12 OPCA Reference Collection, Appendix 14 OPCA Objectives).
- Complete naming of trees and interpret aspects of the collection. (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).
- Investigate the nomination of additional trees to the National Trust Register eg. Horse Chestnut at summit.

See also Appendix 5 Tree Inventory 1995, Appendix 6 Plant Donations 1985 - 1990, Appendix 7 Index to Common Names of Trees in the Gardens, Appendix 8 Summary of Tree Families and Genera in the Gardens.

The Fern Gully and Rustic Fountain

- Preserve and maintain the fern gully as a significant (restored) feature of the Gardens. (Do not reconstruct the fernery.)
- Investigate the feasibility of restoring the 'waterfall' (fountain) within the gully to full working order. (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).
- Improve the diversity of fern species for aesthetic interest or as a botanic collection.
- Introduce the fern gully walk from its lower level in the Gardens, as a circuit walk (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).
- Interpret the significance of the feature and complete labelling of species.

The Tuberous Begonia Display

- Adopt the annual cultivation, display and exhibition of Tuberous Begonias as official Gardens policy.
- Improve the status of the display by obtaining additional varieties and naming them as part of the display. Attempt to rediscover the hybrid 'Daylesford', bred by curator Greville.
- Interpret the collection as a culturally significant tradition, first introduced by curator Gascoigne in the 19th century.
- Promote the annual display and support with information leaflet, Begonia sales, (etc.).
- Remove the 2 small glasshouses in the works area and construct one single house of sufficient size to support the growing-on of plants to flowering stage, in numbers required to fill the conservatory, with a few 'spares' to cater for plants that fail to meet the standard required. A more suitable site is required for the growing house than the area currently occupied by the 2 glasshouses.
- Grow a permanent collection of plants in the conservatory, such as genus Begonia, compatible with Tuberous Begonias, to ensure there is always something for the public to view (see 5.12 OPCA Reference Collection).

Structures

- Take all reasonable measures to preserve the lookout tower, through repair & restoration (see Appendix 10 Conservation Report for the Lookout Tower). (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).
- Plan to remove the residence, as part of the long term redevelopment of the precinct including the maintenance depot, in favour of new facilities offering increased visitor attraction. Investigate the feasibility of developing a new kiosk or tea house in the precinct, in conjunction with a visitor education/interpretation facility. The new building

Summary of Recommendations continued

and its surrounds should be sensitively designed and exhibit some architectural merit. (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).

- Investigate the viability of building a small caretaker's cottage at the main entrance, as first point of contact, for improved security of the Gardens by surveillance of entering vehicles, control of bus access and closure of the Gardens to vehicles at 'sunset'.
- Assess the condition, significance, vulnerability and safety of the two cannons, with a view to resiting in a more appropriate setting. A suggestion from the community consultation questionnaire was that the larger cannon be moved to Burke Square.
- Maintain the distinctive cast iron and timber seating and use as the model for all future seating in the Gardens.
- Design a sign system, including style and placement, for directional signs (Note strong community support - Appendix 15 Community Consultation Report).

Maintenance: Depot, Staff and Equipment

- Determine the Shire's position on future maintenance direction (including amalgamation and in-house council staffing versus CCT tendering) and the implications of a continued depot site and maintenance plant requirements.
- Determine requirements for depot size and investigate re-siting outside the Gardens' boundary, on land with direct vehicle access.
- Retain the current maintenance capacity equivalent to 2.5 persons per year and supplement with additional person-power for capital developments and voluntary labour as appropriate.
- Ensure that future maintenance conserves the significant components of the Gardens, viz. the mature tree collection, the fern gully, the theme planting, the begonia display and the lookout tower as a first priority.
- Introduce and maintain a mechanised-equipment log book to support the continued regular up-dating of equipment.
- Purchase a small Kubota-type tractor with a front-end loader attachment. (This recommendation is qualified by stating that in order to be cost-effective, down time of the proposed tractor should be no greater than 30%.)

Plant Acquisitions

- Based on a sustained amenity strategy, develop a program of plant acquisition to replace major tree losses, renovate existing collections, reinforce existing themes and develop new ones.
- Ensure plant acquisitions are in accordance with the Botanic Gardens Conservation Strategy, and observe CITES regulations in both acquisition and disposal.
- As a general collection displaying diversity, ensure the inclusion of plants representing both Gymnosperm & Angiosperm orders and the display of a diverse range of plant forms, adaptations, evolutionary specialisations and botanical curiosities.
- Favour *species* over modern *cultivars*.
- Generally, plant as theme groups rather than as single specimens.
- Consider the impact of a strong guiding colour theme eg. terracotta orange and lime yellow against the dark conifer backdrops. Severely limit the impact of 'white'.
- Design for lawn spaces, forest canopies and beds of dense shrubbery, for a variety of spatial experiences. (Do not clutter intended spaces with specimen trees.)
- Continue acclimatisation trials, recognising an element of survival risk in species selection.
Opportunities for sensitive new (theme) planting:
 - Replace known lost species (trees).
 - Plant representative examples of all of the evergreen trees and shrubs available in 1880 (see footnote 46), including all of the forest tree species donated by Mueller.
 - Plant Tasmanian cool temperate theme species in fern gully, including upper, middle storey & ground flora.