

## **The Galloping Gardeners Tour of New Zealand**

I arrived in Auckland at 6am on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006. I got there a day and half early so that I could acclimate to the time change and long flight. I took advantage of the time to check out a few museums and some of the local sights. On Saturday night Jo Conner, our New Zealand guide, hosted a dinner in her home. Before dinner Jo took us to the top of Mt Eden for a champagne toast to kick off the tour. The mountain had a view of the 50 dormant volcanoes that make up the Auckland metro area.

### *Day 1 Sunday, October 29 - Auckland*

We hit the ground running and visited four gardens. We started off with 'Totara Waters' a sub-tropical garden. It was begun in 1999 and specializes in rare and unusual plants. That was followed by 'Eden Garden', a public garden carved out of an old rock quarry beginning about 40 years ago. The topography adds greatly to this garden. The last two were both small residential gardens. 'Pacifica Garden' was designed by retired florist; his garden reflects his love of color. The last garden was the home garden of Geoffrey Marshall, a landscape architect who creates a more contemporary design.



### *Day 2 Monday, October 30 - Auckland to Hahei, Coromandel Peninsula*

We headed out of Auckland stopping at The Auckland Botanic Garden on the way. The Auckland Botanic Garden is 65 acres specializing in native plants but also has many other collections. Next was 'Ayrilies' the 12-acre private garden of Bev McConnell, who toured us

around her garden. She has built from a bare site over the last 40 years. Her garden has been featured in 'Great Gardens of the World' and is the best known garden in New Zealand. It combines a number of styles and is a true plant collector's garden. Below the garden is a wetland area that connects the garden to the Hauraki Gulf. Bev hosted us for lunch in her garden.

Next stop was at 'Joy Plant Nursery'. They carry a wide assortment of native plants but also propagate Northern Hemisphere perennials, which are disappearing from the trade in New Zealand due to the government's tight regulations on importing non-native plants.

Late afternoon we arrived at Hot Water Beach where we had small beach cabins for the evening. Jo has a beach house there and hosted another dinner for our group and a spooky beach walk stalking Glow Worms.

*Day 3, Tuesday, October 31 - Hahei to Taupo*

First stop was the garden of Trish Williams, a wetland area planted with a variety of native grasses. Next was 'Naturally Native Nursery', which is one of New Zealand's top nurseries for propagation and distribution of native plants.

We traveled on to Rotorua and the Te Puia Thermal area. Te Puia also includes the Maori Arts and Crafts Institute. We had a Maori guide tour us through the art institute and thermal area. We then traveled on to Lake Taupo where we were staying for the evening. Next to our lodge were hot springs which were very relaxing.



*Day 4, Wednesday, November 1 - Taupo to Marton*

Our first visit was the private garden of Gordon Collier. He is a well known and respected gardener and garden writer. He created this small garden at Lake Taupo four years ago, after moving from his large country garden, Titoki Point. It is one of the best-designed small gardens that I have seen. We took a short walk along Lake Taupo because the *Sophora* trees were in bloom.

We traveled along Lake Taupo to Tongariro National Park. Here we had a guided walk with botanist Nick Singer, who showed us alpine plants, trees, ferns and mosses of the area. We then visited the Whakapapa Visitor Center at the park.

Next stop was 'Rathmoy', the 6-acre private garden of Suzannah and Christopher Grace. It was a combination of lakes, magnificent trees, large borders and sweeping lawns.

We ended this day with a farm stay. We each stayed in a private residence. Mine was with a couple named Sara and Jim. They were sheep farmers and had a passion for bearded iris. They were to host the International Iris Conference the following week. Their garden was quite wonderful.

*Day 5, Thursday, November 2 - Marton to Wellington*

After our farm stay we were back on the road, and our first stop was 'Paloma Garden'. Owner Clive Higgie toured us around his 10-acre garden situated in the middle of a large sheep farm about 5 miles from the Tasman Sea. The mild climate allows him the opportunity to grow a variety of palms and cycads.

After lunch we headed toward Wellington, the capital of New Zealand. Along the way we stopped at Otari-Wilton's Bush. It is the only public botanic garden dedicated solely to native plants. It consists of 100 hectares of native forest including a sky walk through the canopy of the trees. We had a guided walk with botanist John Dawson, whose book, *Nature's Guide to the New Zealand Forest* had just been released. Finally we arrived in Wellington and our accommodations were very centrally located.



*Day 6, Friday, November 3 - Wellington*

This was a free day so I took the opportunity to visit the Wellington Botanic Garden, The Te Papa Museum of New Zealand, the parliament buildings and the waterfront.

Throughout the trip when we had free time I tried to spend time with all the different members of the group to help them feel part of the group. I also tried to answer any questions during the trip, which were often about plants. Many of the plants I was unfamiliar with so it was fun to learn together.

*Day 7, Saturday, November 4 - Wellington to Christchurch*

We flew from Wellington to Blenheim, which is on the south island; this only took about 20 minutes. It was a long five-hour drive to Christchurch so we did see a lot of countryside this day. The first garden we stopped at was 'Barewood Garden'. We were guided by the owners, Joe and Carolyn Ferraby. It was developed within the framework of mature trees and century old homestead. It had wide verandahs, sweeping lawns, large borders and one of the best vegetable gardens that I have seen. It was patterned after Rosemary Verey's at 'Barnsley House'.

We stopped along the water for a picnic lunch before going to 'Flaxmere Garden'. We were guided around it by the owner and creator, Penny Zino. It sits at about 1,000 feet above sea level close to the Southern Alps. It has long vistas, stone walls and sheared shrubs which create a very formal garden. It also has five ponds that create a great habitat for wildlife. Penny also is an art dealer and many of her pieces were displayed in the garden.

After a very long day we arrived in Christchurch.

*Day 8, Sunday, November 5 - Banks Peninsula - day excursion*

We started off the day by visiting Texture Plants Nursery. It is quite fun to see a nursery with a different selection of plants. The first garden was 'Ohinetahi', the garden of Sir Miles Warren. He is a landscape architect and has created a number of gardens on the South Island. Sir Miles's own garden was a collection of a number of garden rooms punctuated with strong architectural elements. The whole property overlooks Lyttelton Harbor.

We then had a couple of hours in the little village of Akaroa. It was a charming little seaside village that was first settled by the French. After lunch we went to a little residential garden called 'The Giant's House'. The owner of the garden is an artist who specializes in ceramics, and the garden is filled with oversized figures covered in ceramic tile. It pretty much defies description.

The next stop was 'Garden at French farm' owned by Bryan and Nancy Tichborne. Nancy is a painter specializing in watercolor. She toured us around her 11-acre garden. The garden close to the house shows her interest in color while the garden down the hill is very much controlled natives.

The last stop of the day was at a local winery that had a wonderful native garden.

*Day 9, Monday, November 6 - Christchurch*

This was another free day. I checked out Christchurch Cathedral, the Art Centre Museum and the Christchurch Botanic Garden. Later that evening Jo had arrange a get together with the Seattle chapter of WSNLA, who were just starting a tour in Christchurch and the Christchurch sister city organization. Christchurch is one of Seattle's sister cities.

*Day 10, Tuesday, November 7 - Christchurch to Dunedin*

We left Christchurch bright and early. Our first stop was Trevor Griffiths Rose Garden in Timaru, a formal rose garden designed by Sir Miles Warren.

We stopped mid-day at 'Centerwood Farm'. It is an old rhododendron garden owned by Jo and Johnnie Sutherland. The farm has been in Johnnie's family for five generations. They also do farm stays and incredible lunches which was our primary reason for stopping there.

Next we were off to the Dunedin Botanic Garden for a guided tour from the director Barbara Wheeler. The garden dates back to 1863, one of the oldest public gardens in New Zealand. It is a very well-maintained public garden with a number of amazing collections.

We ended this day with dinner at Larnach Castle on the Otago Peninsula. I had the good fortune to sit next to Margaret Barker, the owner of the castle. She is an amazing plants woman. She has traveled all over the world, including Seattle, collecting plants which she has incorporated into this remarkable garden.



*Day 11, Wednesday, November 8 - Dunedin*

We started the day with a private tour of the castle gardens with Margaret. She was very interesting while she explained how she built the garden. Much of the work was hands on. We then went down the mountain to 'Glenfalloch' which is Gaelic for 'hidden valley'. This garden was started in 1917, so many of the trees and shrubs have reached maturity. It had a panoramic view that stretched all the way down the harbor. After a walkabout with the head gardener we returned to the castle to explore the gardens on our own. Later that afternoon we had a little side trip stopping at a sheep farm to buy wool products produced on the farm and then to the beach to see the yellow-eyed penguins in their native habitat



*Day 12, Thursday, November 9 - Dunedin to Queenstown*

We left Larnach Castle and headed for Queenstown. Along the way we stopped at 'The Big Picture'. It was a winery co-op for local vineyards. Then another stop at a lavender farm called 'Briar Dell Nursery'. This was a very aromatic garden. At the end of the day, after we had settled into our hotel, we had a coach tour of Queenstown then a farewell dinner at Amisfield Winery.

*Day 13, Friday, November 10 - Queenstown*

I met many of the group and said good bye as each headed off in a different direction. Myself, I took a bus up to Glenocky at the end of the lake (40 miles). From there I took a speed boat up the river for an hour and then went on a guided walk back through a native *Nothofagus* forest. Many of the trees were five- to eight hundred years old. It was very humbling. It was also the mountain range where they filmed 'Lord of the Rings'. What a magical way to end to a magical trip.