

# Bason botanic gardens trust

summer 2016 newsletter

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The orchids in the Conservatories have been through difficult times, owing to salt in their irrigation water. However, changing to rainwater has meant a dramatic improvement in their growth, reflected in their current burst of flowering.  
The Homestead Garden is also looking a picture





## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Terry Dowdeswell

One of the great pleasures of the Chairman's job is when you get to show people around the Bason Botanic Gardens. It's no different from showcasing the garden as

citizen Terry except for the fact that people seem to think that as Chairman you have something to do with making it so beautiful. To say so may be right, but only just, and emphasis is on the only just.

There are many people who have given a large part of their lives, from concept to fulfilment, to make the Bason what it is today and I'd like to tip my hat to you all. What an incredible job successive custodians and helpers have done. I've just been out there today. All aspects of the gardens, including the lime green pergola, are looking wonderful. Thanks to all you wonderful people who have helped to make it happen.

The Japanese Tea House gardens are now beginning to take hold. It will take a season or two for the plantings to develop, but most of the work is now done. The new curb and channelling, and sealing of the road that loops around the lake past the tea house makes a huge difference to vehicular access (no dust and potholes) but the tea house is still difficult to reach on foot without walking on the road. That is about to change.

Work will shortly begin on a walkway connecting "Picnic Flat" to the Japanese Tea House. This will not only offer access by foot but also provide vantage points for viewing and very much enhance the visitor experience. This is yet another project, funded by local benefactors, that adds substantially to the gardens. We need to acknowledge these magnificent contributions and respect what has been given for the pleasure and use of future generations.

By the time you receive this newsletter work should have started on fixing the safety issues preventing use of the new barbecues commissioned earlier this year. I am told they will be ready for use in the very near future and will keep a keen eye on progress.

Visit the gardens whenever you can. At this time of year they are changing rapidly. The daffodils are, of course, gone and the azaleas and rhododendrons on their last flowers, but the Homestead Garden is about to put on a magnificent show and the Gardens generally are looking beautifully manicured and growing magnificently. Get out and see it!!

Have a great summer in the garden

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## GARDEN PROGRESS

Wendy Bainbridge  
(Senior Parks Officer WDC and Board member)

By the time this newsletter goes out to you all, the Bason Botanic Gardens will have been assessed by the New Zealand Gardens Trust. Bason has a current rating as a Garden of Significance. The assessors will be looking at new developments, maintenance, facilities, and of course garden design and content.

The maintenance contractors have been busy preparing for the visit, not made any easier with the spring flush to keep on top of, camellia pruning, and summer planting. Thank you Vonnie Cave for providing guidance on the camellia pruning and passing on valuable tips to some new gardeners. We have a number of new developments to 'show off' since our last assessment, including the Homestead Garden entrance, the sculpture, the Japanese Tea House and the new BBQs. Quite a list for three years!

On the subject of the new BBQs, there is some work going on regarding the issues, including laying a drain to capture water running off the hill to stop the BBQ area from getting too wet. We hope to have these BBQs fully functional for this Summer.

..... and not forgetting the plants: my picks for November have been the rhododendrons and the iris bed, and I am eagerly awaiting the drifts of arthropodiums on the Millennium Hill.

**BOOKINGS:** Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk  
Wanganui District Council, phone 349 001.

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Become a **Friend of the Bason**, or **gift a subscription**, and support Stanley Bason's dream.

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Membership: Individual \$20; Family \$30; Corporate \$100; Life \$500

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**Account Number:** 03-0791-0463019-00

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Notification of payment can also be emailed to the Treasurer if you wish, at [alan.donald@clear.net.nz](mailto:alan.donald@clear.net.nz)

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## WOLLEMIA NOBILIS AT THE BASON BOTANIC GARDENS

Clive Higgle

Earlier this year, a *Wollemia nobilis* was planted at our Botanic Gardens.

Well, what's so special about this tree? Although it evolved about 144 million years ago and has been around ever since, it is new to us humans, in two ways. Firstly, *Homo sapiens* have only been evolving for about five million years. Secondly, it was only "discovered" by us humans in 1994.

About 100km out of Sydney (east and slightly north) is the Wollemi National Park. It's a wild, rugged area of many inaccessible canyons. It was in several of these canyons that this ancient conifer found refuge from massive changes in climate, from events like fire and, very recently, 60,000 years, from man.

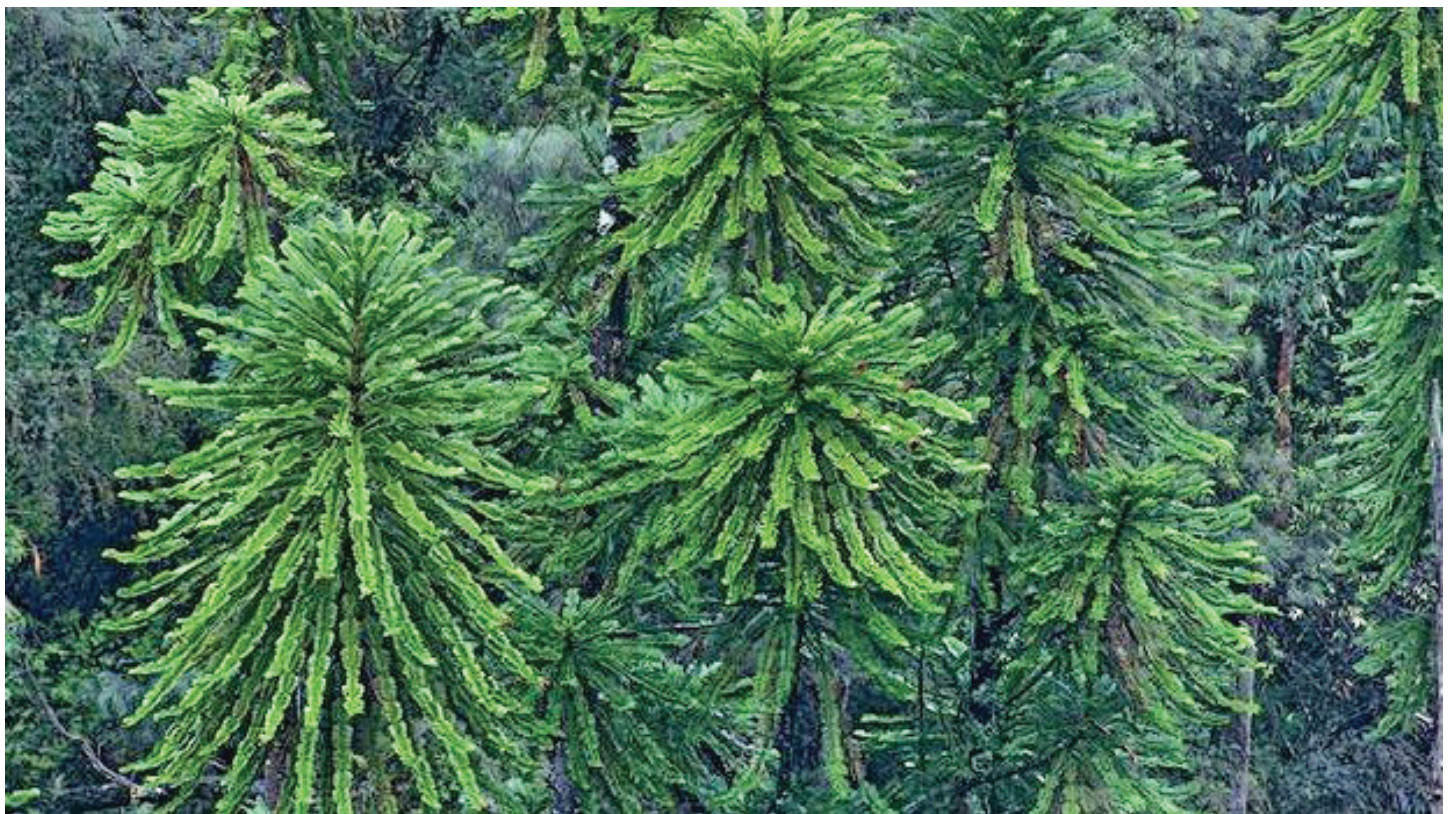
In the 1980s, Australian David Noble and his friends began exploring parts of this national park, abseiling and rock-climbing into previously unexplored areas. In 1994, David came across a tree that was totally unknown to him. To botanists, it was clearly closely related to the *Araucaria* family but it didn't fit into either of the two recognised genera in that family – *Agathis* (including our kauri) and *Araucaria* (Norfolk pine, monkey puzzle etc). It was eventually named and given a new genus – *Wollemia nobilis*. The genus name was given to reflect the national park in which it was found growing. *Wollumnii* is an Aboriginal word for "look around you" or "watch your step".

Although easy to propagate, it took ten or so years to spread around the world. The first plants were expensive and literally guarded against the snipping of seateurs. In short time, it became available in the normal nursery trade. Strangely, it took another decade for the first plants to become available in New Zealand. It's here now and it's exciting to watch how this newcomer adapts to our conditions. Just as it was, I imagine, with the other "new" tree species, for example *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (dawn redwood) in the 1940s and our own *Metrosideros bartlettii* in the 1980s.

Often called the Wollemi pine, it's no more a *Pinus* than our rimu is, but it seems the use of "pine" in a common name is a cross many non-*Pinus* conifers have to bear.

The young trees we have seen in Australia look somewhat like a redwood and like a *Cephalotaxus*. These Australian cultivated plants are just starting to bear cones, so it won't be long before seed will be available world-wide. One feature of the very old trees in habitat is that their trunks are covered in coco-pop-type rounded bumps. Very few people have seen these habitat trees for the authorities are worried about the potential contamination by pathogens on footwear. I believe the fine for wandering into this area is several years in jail or a couple of hundred thousand dollars in fine.

If you want to read more about this fascinating story, there is only one book I know of: "The Wollemi Pine" by James Woodford, Text Publishing, Melbourne, Australia.





Former Chairman of the Trust  
and Camera Club member Beverley Sinclair  
provided these pictures showing  
different aspects of the Gardens  
in spring.



Clockwise from top left:

- Mahonia lomariifolia by conservatories.
- Boothby Fern house.
- Tulips and Myosotis.
- Kiri, one of the keen Fulton Hogan staff.



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