

A scenic view of a garden featuring a stone and log structure. The structure consists of several stone pillars supporting a roof made of horizontal logs. In the foreground, there are numerous bright pink tulips. The background shows a path leading through a wooded area with green foliage and a large tree trunk on the left. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Araluen

an unexpected paradise



Araluen Botanic Park in Roleystone isn't your typical nature reserve or national park, but has a special place in the hearts of many Perth residents and visitors. Landscaped garden beds, some featuring brilliantly coloured displays of tulips in spring, creeks and pools, the autumnal colours of deciduous trees, and a backdrop of native vegetation along the steep slopes of a valley all add to the particular aesthetic of the park. Management of Araluen has undergone many changes over the years, with the latest seeing the Department of Environment and Conservation assume management on 1 July 2010.

by Joanna Moore

Less than an hour's drive from the Perth CBD, Araluen Botanic Park is an unusual but beautiful park which features developed gardens within a natural bushland setting. Some 14 hectares of the 59-hectare park consist of culturally significant terraced gardens including native and exotic plantings, water features such as waterfalls and ponds, and mature trees of many varieties. This creates an eclectic character, cherished by the community, and has made Araluen a popular tourism and recreation destination in the Perth hills.

The park is managed primarily as a passive day-use recreation site. The developed section of the park is set aside for horticultural display with non-native plantings—such as Araluen's famous tulips and daffodils in spring and the stunning colours of deciduous trees in autumn—combined with landscape features and gardens, and timber and stone structures of recognised heritage value. These heritage gardens, structures and buildings—constructed by the Young Australia League (YAL) in the 1930s—



have led to the Roleystone property being classified by the National Trust of Australia (Western Australia) and listed on the Heritage Council of WA's State Register of Heritage Places.

Strong public support for the preservation of Araluen Botanic Park influenced the government to purchase the site in 1990, some five years after it was sold by YAL. It is owned by the WA Planning Commission (WAPC), which purchased and protected the area as a park. In 1995, WAPC leased the park to the Araluen Botanic Park Foundation (ABPF) for management. ABPF is a

not-for-profit volunteer organisation, dedicated to the restoration, preservation and development of this very special place.

On 30 November 2009, the state government approved the transitional transfer of management of Araluen Botanic Park to the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) for three years from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013. DEC has contracted the services of ABPF to assist in managing this unique park and the foundation's staff and volunteers continue to play a significant role there. The park's management continues to be funded by WAPC.

Heritage-rich environment

Few parks in WA have such a rich and unique European cultural heritage. Araluen Botanic Park is a key representative of parks established in the 1930s for recreation and holiday accommodation, the only other local example being Yanchep National Park (see 'Yanchep National Park: a unique underground on Perth's doorstep', *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2010–11). The park is also significant for the construction of the buildings, which are strongly influenced by the strong Canadian linkage in the early YAL days. Construction was carried out with rough stone and timber sourced nearby and represents the craftsmanship of the era. The current condition of these buildings varies greatly—from the Shepherdson Bungalow, which lies in ruins, to the fully restored Aspro, Totterdell and City of Brisbane bungalows, the Roundhouse and the Chalet Healy. Araluen is also significant for its gardens, which are in good



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Main The Margaret Simons Pergola is an impressive structure in Araluen Botanic Park, built in 1940.

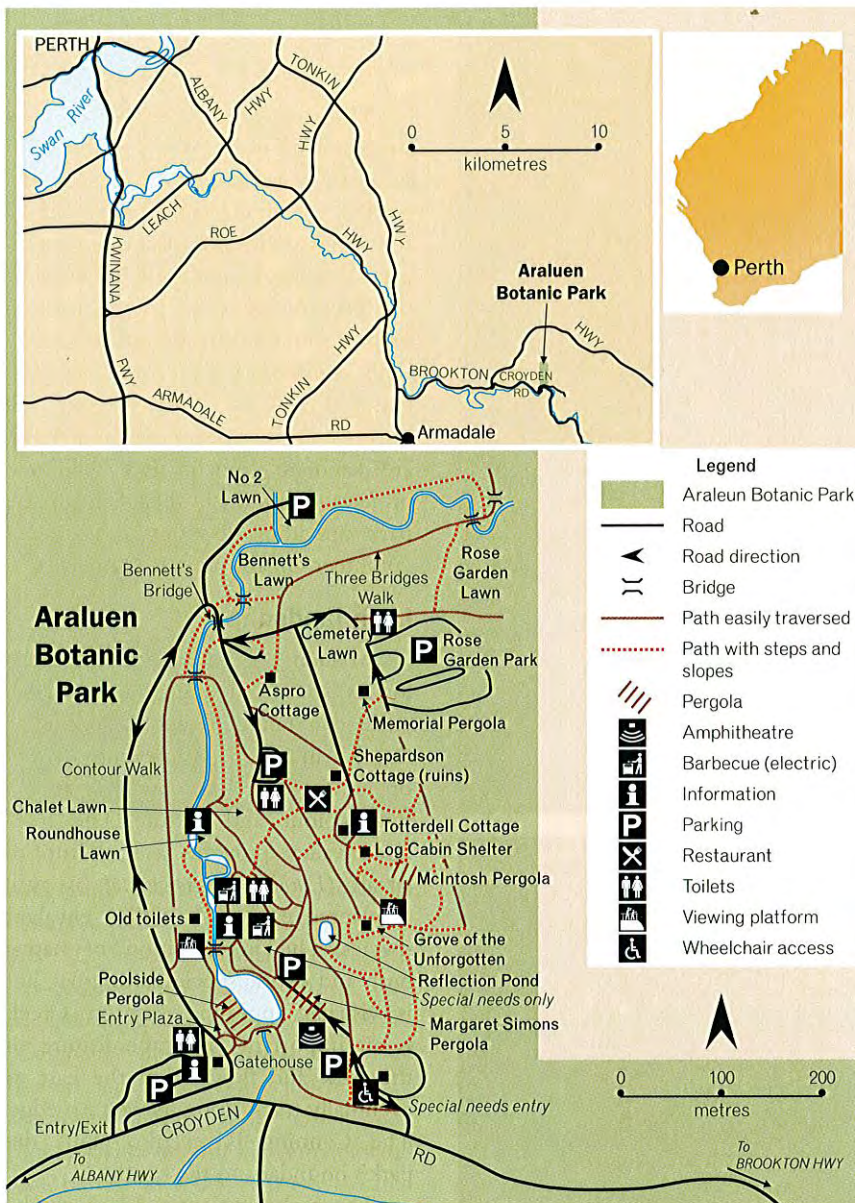
Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

Above Magnolias.

Photo – Araluen Botanic Park Foundation

Left Families enjoy Araluen in the spring.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies



Above Explore Araluen's gardens along a series of pathways.
 Photo – Renee Evans/DEC

condition, thanks to the work of ABPF staff and volunteers over the past 16 years.

The park maintains a high degree of integrity and authenticity. While no longer used for camping, Araluen retains its original value and purpose—a site for recreation within an environment with both natural and created points of interest. Much restoration of both gardens and buildings has occurred and the rest are capable of being restored. The park also has a high degree of authenticity, with most of the original landscape features and built structures remaining and few new materials introduced.

As well as degree of significance in rarity, representativeness, condition, integrity and authenticity, heritage places are assessed on criteria such as historical, social, scientific and aesthetic value. Araluen Botanic Park rates highly across these categories.

Young hands at work

In terms of historical value, Araluen is a key reminder of the establishment of YAL. League founder John Joseph Simons bought and named Araluen in 1929, using a New South Wales Aboriginal word meaning 'singing waters', 'running waters' or 'place of lilies'. This youth organisation aimed to educate young people through travel, as well as through sport, music and community service.

Araluen was set up as a youth recreation camp and thousands of boys stayed there across a number of decades. Many of the heritage buildings, as well as paths and roads, are the work of YAL members who visited on weekends and holidays, as part of the organisation's goal of 'betterment of boys' through 'brotherhood, service and patriotism'. From the 1950s, girls also stayed at

Araluen and, in 1962, it was estimated that 21,000 young people had visited the park. The architectural design of Araluen's buildings and its association with JJ Simons and benefactors of the league and camp add to its historical value. Renowned 'art-deco' style architect and YAL member William Bennett designed the buildings, while much of the stonework was the creation of master stonemason Jack Italiano.

Social values

Many generations of young people have camped at Araluen. Up until recently, groups from YAL continued to stay at Camp Simons, to the south of the park. Over recent years the park has hosted large community events such as the Perth Chilli Festival and the *It's Springtime at Araluen* tulip festival, drawing large crowds to the park.



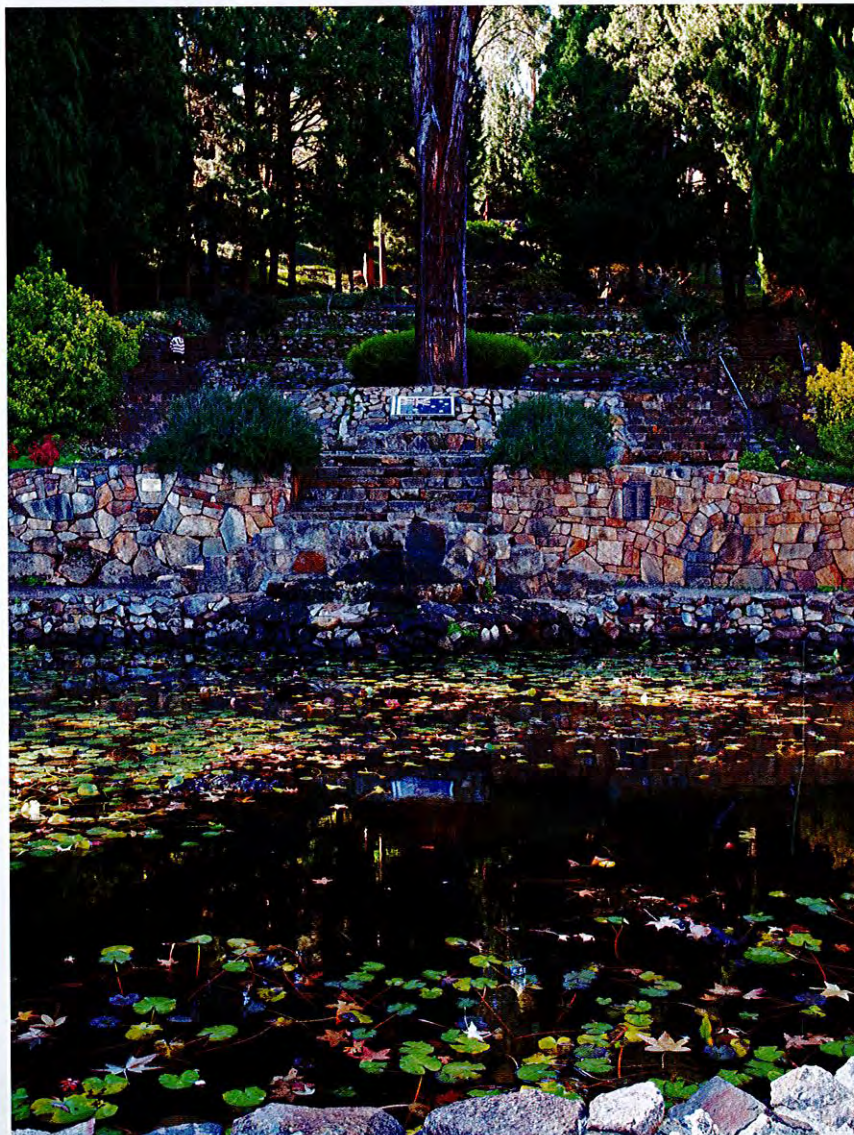
The foundation is supported by a strong team of volunteers who assist in many ways, from working in the gardens weeding, pruning and planting, to assisting staff at the gift shop and entry gate. Volunteers continue to support the planting of tulips in the park in preparation for spring, and also assist with community education programs and in driving the shuttle bus and train during busy periods. DEC and ABPF are keen to initiate new volunteer projects within the bushland area of the park, providing new opportunities for volunteer engagement at Araluen.

Lush landscape

Araluen is a unique setting—the loamy soils and high rainfall have enabled a range of exotic species to flourish in the valley, creating a scene of almost English cottage garden-style colour and texture. The tree-lined valley provides a backdrop of jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) as well as planted eastern Australian eucalypt species. The juxtaposition of native bush and exotic species is unusual, but is visually appealing. Stinton Creek is an important landscape feature of the park and flows from the east to eventually track along its western edge. The Canning River also abuts the park's boundary to the south.

The park is orientated in a north-south direction within a Darling Scarp valley, creating a semi-shaded, sheltered aspect with a mild microclimate. The valley floor has relatively fertile, deep, alluvial soils of loamy clay. In contrast, the soil at the top and upper slopes of the steep valley is weathered granite with small rock outcrops. Plant species differ between the extremes.

From the early YAL days, JJ Simons brought plants back from his interstate and overseas trips including American



Above left A fireplace from one of the original log cabins in the park is now the feature of a covered area.

Photo - Araluen Botanic Park Foundation

Left The Grove of the Unforgotten is a memorial to Young Australia League members who died during World War I.

Photo - Marie Lochman



Left Visitors can enjoy a train ride through the park. Here the train travels through the Margaret Simons Pergola.
Photo – Araluen Botanic Park Foundation

Above Be soothed by the sounds of running water at Araluen Botanic Park.
Photo – Bill Belson/Lochman
Transparencies

sweetgum or redgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), brush box (*Lophostemon confertus*), western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), manna gum (*E. viminalis*), Queensland black bean (*Castanospermum australe*), bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*), red flowering ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon* var. *rosea*), holly (*Ilex* sp.), rhododendrons, camellias and wisteria. Since 1995, ABPF has cared for these trees and other garden plants, which are now well established.

The foundation continued the planting tradition by expanding the camellia and rhododendron collections, and adding to the eucalypts with karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*), tuart (*E. gomphocephala*) and jarrah. Visitors to the park can see the colourful blooms of lilacs, paeonias, magnolias and daphnes and the many hundreds of bulbs scattered through the gardens. While developed gardens are not everyone's cup of tea—and certainly not the typical focus of *LANDSCOPE* magazine—on visiting Araluen, few can deny their beauty.

Visiting the park

Visitors to Araluen Botanic Park experience the unique setting and the tranquillity it creates. In spring, the bulbs are in flower and a stunning sight to behold, but there's something to

attract visitors at any time of year. The microclimate created within the valley accounts for an estimated 30 per cent more rainfall and less severe summers experienced than on the Perth coastal sand plain just five kilometres west.

Wander through the garden area of the park along a series of pathways, across bridges and boardwalks, under pergolas and shelters. Take a picnic and make use of the facilities such as barbecues and open grassed areas. Visit Chalet Healy—opened in 1937 and one of the most important buildings in the valley—to find the café, or seek out the Roundhouse—which was built in 1931, added to in 1941 and recently restored—to visit the gift shop. And don't miss the opportunity to stop and smell the roses; literally—make sure you take a down-wind wander past the rose garden, where the scented breeze is bound to lift your spirits.

The park is also a wonderful place for children. Small creeks with stepping stones, grassed nooks and overhanging tree ferns create fantastic places for nature play and exploration, under the watchful eye of guardians of course. Staff at the park are excited about the introduction of DEC's *Nearer to Nature* program, which ran its first activities at Araluen in the July school holidays.

In addition to the various log cabins, the park features two prominent constructions—the Margaret Simons Pergola and the Grove of the Unforgotten. The former, also known as the Rose Pergola, was built in 1940 as a memorial to JJ Simon's mother and consists of 38 stone pillars topped with large jarrah logs. The structure, reported to be one of the largest free-standing pergolas in the southern hemisphere, supports 80 climbing roses of many varieties and is a key focal point of the park. The original timbers have been replaced with new jarrah logs due to deterioration.

The Grove of the Unforgotten commemorates those YAL members who died in World War I. This stone terraced waterfall on the eastern slope of the valley features a 'Pool of Reflection' at its lowest point. A fringing collection of conifers forms the shape of a lyre, the symbol of music and therefore a reference to one of the key values of the YAL. It was designed to have 89 stone steps and 89 pencil pines as a memorial to the 88 league members who lost their lives during the war. The 89th conifer and step was for the Unknown Soldier. The water cascading down through the memorial was intended to represent music from the lyre strings, which finally succumbs to the still of the reflection pool.



Right Volunteers help at the park in many ways, including at the gift shop.

Above The Roundhouse gift shop.
Photos – Araluen Botanic Park Foundation

Below Araluen gardens in spring.
Photo – Renee Evans/DEC

Park management and planning for the future

DEC formally assumed management of Araluen Botanic Park on 1 July 2010 and, through a management contract, ABPF continues to play a key role in managing the park, providing services to DEC such as garden and infrastructure maintenance, financial management and marketing and promotion. The contract also enables the foundation to run community

involvement and volunteer programs, as well as look after Chalet Healy and the Roundhouse gift shop.

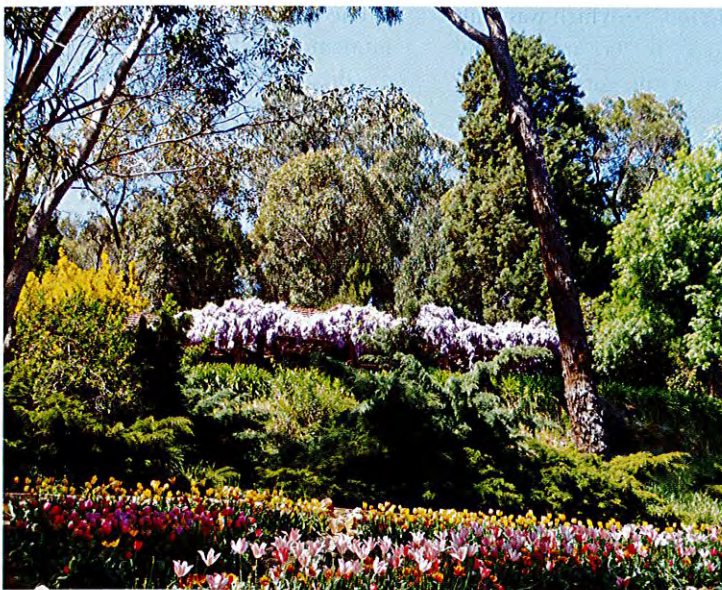
As the manager of Araluen Botanic Park, DEC oversees the park with a hands-on role in the bushland, developing a park concept plan and implementing capital works. Volunteers continue to play an important role at the park, as they have done for many years.

The park concept plan for Araluen guides capital works in the park. One of the main objectives of the plan is to ensure any new works complement the special character and features of the park. It is intended that new facilities and amenities will be arranged to enrich the visitor experience and make effective use of space, as well as reflect the park's particular charm and intent.



The concept plan will also explore options for the re-development of the park's entrance—which is an opportunity to create something new, inviting and dynamic.

Significant work has occurred at the park since it was purchased by the state government some 21 years ago. From a state of deterioration, Araluen's unique gardens and many of its heritage buildings have been restored and the special heritage values of the site protected. This amazing park, just 30 kilometres south-east of Perth, provides a popular recreation site within a unique ornamental garden set to a backdrop of native bushland. It is hoped the history of strong community involvement and investment in Araluen Botanic Park will continue into the next phase of management.



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Araluen Botanic Park is located at 362 Croyden Road, Roleystone and is open daily from 9am to 6pm. Entrance fees are \$4 for adults and \$2 for children and all profits are used in maintenance of the park's gardens. For more information phone the park on (08) 9496 1171 or email info@araluenbotanicpark.com.au.

To find out about volunteering at Araluen, contact the park on the details above or DEC's community involvement coordinator on phone (08) 9334 0468 or by email (hugh.maclean@dec.wa.gov.au).

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