

Boardwalk surrounding Guilfoyle's Volcano

This recent article in The Age newspaper (dated 20th March 2010) features the impressive boardwalk constructed by GR Design & Construct surrounding Guilfoyle's volcano at the Royal Botanic Gardens in South Yarra.

Botanic Gardens' volcano gets ready to rumble

DENISE GADD
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The restored Guilfoyle's Volcano in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens and (inset) what it looked like in July 2008.

GUILFOYLE'S Volcano in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens has risen again.

Built in 1878 by the second director of the gardens, William Guilfoyle, the volcano - part folly, part reservoir - officially opens tomorrow.

The second coming of Guilfoyle's vision has taken three years from planning to construction. In an artistic display, large boulders from Port Fairy and smaller rocks and stones have been strategically placed around and down the cone to simulate debris spewed from a volcanic eruption. Red stones planted with flat succulents course down the sides, simulating lava flows.

The volcano's bluestone-lined crater, now full of water, is home to floating islands, reminiscent of giant lily pads, with native and indigenous plants and water filtration systems that will eventually connect to a wider irrigation project.

A timber boardwalk winds around and down the cone, with its spectacular vistas of the city and surrounding gardens, and rusted steel handrails imitate reeds around a pond.

Two meeting places have been designed in the lower gardens under canopies of Queensland bottle trees and silk floss trees.

Comprising hardwood decking and an intricate feature handrail the boardwalk was completed by GRDC in conjunction with Streetscapes late last year but will be officially opened this Easter.

The design was created by resident landscape architect Andrew Laidlaw. The last steps in this historic botanic journey were the plantings.

Cacti and succulents in all shapes and sizes, with native plant material for a softer texture, dominate the landscape. They should have been in place by late last year but construction delays meant planting did not finish until earlier this month.

"Planting so late was to our peril because of the heat and the hail two weeks ago that damaged and bruised many of the plants and stripped leaves from trees," Mr Laidlaw said.

"The worst affected were the large-leaved succulents and small natives that got really squashed, plus the pole cactus has been heavily scarred. But they will heal eventually."

Mr Laidlaw said that while Guilfoyle would not have approved of the overall planting scheme, he wanted to show visitors a different palette of plants for today's climate.

As well as being a 19th-century folly - all the rage at the time in the "mother country" - the volcano, which was built at the highest part of the gardens to create a landmark, was also designed to hold water to irrigate the gardens.

This plan never eventuated.

In the 1950s the reservoir dried up and it was fenced off and finally cut off in a tangle of overgrown shrubs and weeds.

It resurfaced in 1997 when an upgrade was planned as part of the gardens' masterplan.

Philanthropic donations from the Myer Foundation and local residents whose properties overlook the volcano will help fund a \$2.2 million project to harvest stormwater from the surrounding streets - including from Government House - to irrigate the gardens and break their dependence on mains water.

William Guilfoyle would be a happy man.