The KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch of the Botanical Society of South Africa has its roots in the Natal Botanic Society, which was formed in 1870 when Natal was a British colony. The society was to see to the establishment of a Natal Botanic Garden in Pietermaritzburg, which was proclaimed in 1874 to serve as an acclimatization garden for the introduction of timber and other economically important species for use in the young colony of Natal. It must have done the job well, for the elegant Victorian garden survived well into the next century, with some outstanding Curators like W.E. Marriott who planted the famous avenue of London Planes. At one stage the Natal Botanic Garden was referred to as ‘the pride of Natal and of Kew’.

By 1969 the garden was in financial straits, and the Natal Botanic Society readily transferred it to the National Botanic Gardens which were looking to expand their stable of gardens. Peter Law was appointed as its first Curator and to him fell the task of eradicating the alien invasive species in the natural areas of the garden and restoring the wild area of the Garden to its original Southern Mistbelt Forest and Ngongoni Grassveld. By the time he retired in 1979, this had largely been achieved although preventing re-infestation is a constant battle.

The Botanical Society cordially welcomed all 164 members of the old Natal Botanic Society into their fold, and a new branch of the Society was established in Pietermaritzburg in 1970. The new branch undertook ‘to support and promote the interests of the Society, to promote interest in indigenous flora of South Africa in various localities in Natal, to enrol additional members and to offer assistance to any other society or club in the propagation of knowledge of indigenous flora’. This also involved taking the Natal National Botanic Garden under its wing. Prof. A.W. Bayer was elected as the first Chairman of the Pietermaritzburg Branch of BotSoc.

From early on, the Branch has been involved in environmental education. For many years there were regular scholarly lectures and courses from experts planned, all well attended, and ‘day outings’ were also popular. The Branch also raised funds for the Natal National Botanic Gardens and other causes, through plant sales and other activities. In the late 1980s, the Botanical Society Development Fund for the National Botanic Gardens came into being. Funds were channelled into the Natal Botanic Gardens through this fund, which included the completion of the dam across the Dorpspruit after it was flood-damaged in 1988 and the extensive upgrading of facilities in the garden in the 2000s.

The Branch continues to support the Garden, and in its quest to encourage indigenous gardening, it has incorporated the Pietermaritzburg Demonstration Garden into its programme under the title ‘Gardening with BotSoc’.

---

**New avenues to explore**

**Celebrating the flora, gardens and the people of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands**

![Image](image1.png)

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The Tea Party in the Avenue, 2010.

**ABOVE:** Christina Curry Potgieter, Chairperson, KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch of BotSoc and Solomon Biyasa, KwaZulu-Natal National Botanical Garden promoting the Tea Party in the Avenue.

**BELOW:** KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch members on a CREW outing to monitor grassland plants including *Helichrysum citricephalum*.

---

**c. 1870**
The Botanical Society of Natal came into existence with the aim of starting a botanic garden.

**1870**
Natal Botanic Garden in Pietermaritzburg established to serve as an acclimatization garden for the introduction of timber for the ‘colony’ of Natal.

**1908**
The famous avenue of Plane Trees was planted in the Natal Botanic Garden by the Curator, W.E. Marriott.
Get to but quite unforgettable, with large patches of Hilton Daisies in an amazing range of shades of red, orange and even yellow and pink. And a clearing in a damp little valley between the hills with a thick carpet of bright yellow Cyrtanthus.

During the many years while Lorna Kay was Secretary of our Branch, no outings were ever planned without a picnic lunch or at the very least a tea on arrival; and she and her husband Les always did this in grand style: with a little folding table, table cloth, chairs, a proper ‘knife and fork’ lunch and a good wine in tall-stemmed glasses.

While John Latham was chairman we also had some weekends together. John’s wife Eunice always supported our outings, and she always brought extra sandwiches and juice in case someone ran short. In those days KZN had only one branch and we had many outings to places along the coast as well – the mangroves at Mtunzini and the wonderful farm and conservation projects of Ian Garland at Twinstreams, Treasure Beach, Rocky Bay, Oribi Gorge, Weza Forest and Vernon Crookes.

Activities in the Garden involved talks in the restaurant (now the Clivia Room), sales and displays in the nursery or avenue, including Bonsai, indigenous gardening and propagation, and at the end of each year the Committee prepared and invited the BotSoc Branch to a party. Once we organized a competition for Botanical Art for High Schools in the Pietermaritzburg area – a lot of work for the Committee but rewarding. For a number of years, Ted Giddy took groups of primary school pupils for afternoon practical classes on subjects such as pollination, classification and seed dispersal.

I enjoyed being a member of the planting group and I also thoroughly enjoyed making an indigenous herbarium collection for the Garden. My husband and I became quite addicted to our early Sunday morning collecting walks up the hillside (the indigenous part of the Garden).

Some of our BotSoc members had a very exciting and stimulating week in the Drakensberg getting some tuition in botanical art from Gillian Condy and Elsa Pooley.

Mrs Dorothea Stielau, a long-standing member of our KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch and retired Secretary of the Branch, looks back on her association with the BotSoc.

Many of my BotSoc memories go back to times much more leisurely than ours today, and most of them remind me of outings, parties and activities in the Botanical Garden. And they are no less colourful for me than a collection of photos would be. A day outing with Ted Giddy, to the heights above Byrne Valley in the Natal Midlands: difficult to get to but quite unforgettable, with large

Leisurely times

Mrs Dorothea Stielau, a long-standing member of our KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch and retired Secretary of the Branch, looks back on her association with the BotSoc.

Many of my BotSoc memories go back to times much more leisurely than ours today, and most of them remind me of outings, parties and activities in the Botanical Garden. And they are no less colourful for me than a collection of photos would be. A day outing with Ted Giddy, to the heights above Byrne Valley in the Natal Midlands: difficult to get to but quite unforgettable, with large

Leisurely times

Mrs Dorothea Stielau, a long-standing member of our KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch and retired Secretary of the Branch, looks back on her association with the BotSoc.

Many of my BotSoc memories go back to times much more leisurely than ours today, and most of them remind me of outings, parties and activities in the Botanical Garden. And they are no less colourful for me than a collection of photos would be. A day outing with Ted Giddy, to the heights above Byrne Valley in the Natal Midlands: difficult to get to but quite unforgettable, with large