Jewels of the Garden Route – Bobbejaankloof

When we first visited BotSoc member Kathy Waddell in 2005 she inspired us with her philosophy which blends Bobbejaankloof’s huge evolving garden with the receiving environment - in this case defunct kikuyu grazing land spilling into natural areas. Adapting to the presence of wildlife, absolutely minimal pesticide use and reliance on rainfall instead of irrigation are not negotiable. The garden’s informal ambience lends itself very well to these constraints and welcomes bushbuck with a taste for young trees as well as bulb and rhizome loving bush-pigs and porcupines. In really desperate circumstances affecting new plantings, water is carted to the particular area by tractor and trailer.

With this background an invitation to revisit Bobbejaankloof (organised by Jean Sparg of the BotSoc Bitou Interest Group) could not be resisted. And yes, even in these drought-stricken times the garden continues to inspire. Characterised by expanses of mass plantings, combinations of strong colour are offset by white. The massed Watsonias from pale pink to dark cerise are an absolute delight in spring. This time we were welcomed by expanses of blue and white agapanthus.

The garden is loosely partitioned. The only formal area is a walled enclosure housing a wide variety of indigenous medicinal plants in raised beds. The woodland is a small forest area alongside the dam. Here much of the vegetation is natural. The inclusion of a variety of indigenous Crinum lilies, several Veltheimi, Clivias and Plectranthus groundcovers add to its appeal. A row of stately old Gums flanks the road to the homestead on one side. Across the road is a previously wattle infested area, now rehabilitated into swathes of sweet-scented pale cream and mustard-yellow Helichrysum sp. with odd pioneer species making a slow comeback – the rewarding outcome of an arduous and intense programme of clearing and numerous follow-up actions. Other areas along the road are given over to clumps of graceful restios (Chondropetalum tectorum & Elegia capensis) beautifully offset by a white gravel ground covering. Adjacent beds of intense blue Aristeas pay tribute to Kathy’s love of blue. The mixed garden zone is gorgeous – large robust Aloes, Cotyledons to tiny vygies offset by a variety of hardy indigenous perennials – very impressive in its variety of textures and colours. Finally we visited the memorial obelisk overlooking the kloof. This is place of quiet reflection and several large, elegant Ficus species grace the surrounds.

Manager Gerald Paulsen joined Kathy in 2005 and shares her vision and approach. It is clear that “growing up” with a project has many advantages. Gerald knows the garden intimately and his accumulated experience is evident in the small spotless propagation nursery and the overall health of the garden. A soft-spoken gentle-natured young man with a broad and easy smile, his love for his work is tangible and although the task is enormous he is undaunted and bursting with enthusiasm.

Both Kathy and Gerald love indigenous plants of all kinds therefore planting is not restricted to locally indigenous. They are creating an interesting and varied environment that copes really well in adverse conditions and blends unobtrusively into the natural areas. A Jewel indeed!

Photos by Bob McIntyre.