

# Isel Park Tree Walk



Isel Park was part of the land purchased by early settler Thomas Marsden. His property was bounded by Songer Street, Main Road Stoke, Arapiki Road and extended up into what is now known as Marsden Valley. Marsden and his wife Mary eventually built their home where Isel House now stands. Thomas and his son James commenced a series of plantings from 1845-1865, some of which can be seen today. Isel Park is famous for containing one of the oldest stands of mixed conifers and other exotic trees in New Zealand.

Early settlers brought seeds with them to remind them of home, and the historic stands of trees around Isel are reminiscent of stands of trees around farms in England providing shelter for flocks and homesteads. Victorians also had a fascination with exotics and rumour has it that seeds from the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851 made their way to the park courtesy of William Songer, another early settler in Stoke. Plants could also have come from sea captains who were often commissioned to bring exotic plants from lands they visited.

Archibald Nicholls purchased 12 acres and Isel House in 1938 from the Nelson Diocese Trust Board. He cleared some overgrown areas near the house and planted rhododendrons and camellias. Later in 1960 the City Council purchased the property and the area was landscaped, roads and paths put in and extensive plantings done. The Park now has an impressive collection of rhododendron well worth an inspection.

Start at the front of Isel House where a large Southern Magnolia **1** has large creamy blossoms in late summer. This was planted c1865. Across the lawn is a traditional English Holly, **2** a much loved evergreen for Christmas decoration despite its rather savage thorns.

Further towards the creek is a giant Tulip Tree **3** over 37 metres high that was planted in the 1850s,

and considered to be the tallest specimen in New Zealand. Although it has sustained some storm damage over the years, it continues to delight with its large tulip shaped yellow flowers which appear in summer. Even taller are the two groups of Corsican Pines **4** at either side of the area at the front of Isel House. The tallest at around 41 metres is considered to be one of the most outstanding exotics in New Zealand.

Go back across the lawn where two European Beech **5** planted in 1845 can be found, and towering above them is the 'Guardian of the Homestead', a beautifully shaped Californian Big Tree **6** planted in 1856. This is one of a group of three of this species, the other two are closer to the entry gates.

There are four excellent Douglas Fir **7** specimens in the Park, with three over closer to the fine rhododendron plantings that make such a pretty show in spring. The fir is a hardy conifer from the USA and these were planted in 1850 as was the Canary Island Pine **9**. The tallest of the three of these specimens in the Park is reputedly one of the tallest in New Zealand. The Monterey Cypress **8** and Monterey Pine **10** both come from California and seem to thrive in Nelson's climate, however these tall trees have borne the brunt of the freak easterly storms and are showing their age. These storms have caused havoc in the Park every 20-30 years and reduced the heritage collection. The Norfolk Island Pine **12**, is usually a very formal symmetrical pine. This specimen planted in 1856, sitting beside the Nelson Provincial Museum Archives building lost its proud top knot in the last storm in 2008.

The trusty English Oak **11** is well represented in the park with around 20 specimens growing. A traditional delight for children is to make fairy cups from the acorns as they picnic with their families in this historic woodland. See onsite information panels and displays within Isel House for more information.



# Isel Park Tree Walk

Isel Park contains many remarkable trees. Use this map to guide you on a voyage of discovery in this heritage woodland that bursts alive in a glorious show in spring, provides cool restful spaces in summer and celebrates autumn with a riot of colour.

More heritage trails including **Saunter in Stoke** and **Settlement in Stoke** plus more detailed information on plants featured in this walk can be found on [www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz](http://www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz) (search phrase *heritage walks*)

