

DELIGHTS OF AN ARBORETUM

By Tim Saunders, Travel Correspondent



Research shows that 17,500 tree species are at threat of extinction according to a study by Botanic Gardens Conservation International. This coincides with our visit to Batsford Arboretum at Moreton-in-Marsh in Gloucestershire, which is home to a unique collection of some of the world's most beautiful and rare trees, shrubs and bamboos, spread across 56 acres. Thank goodness for Batsford.

'It is so peaceful,' says Caroline, as we sit down at a picnic table where we enjoy a spot of people-watching between mouthfuls. Afterwards the children are raring to go on the Hedgehog Trail where they need to find a certain number of hedgehog models dotted around the grounds. These trails are an excellent way of giving children independence and of learning how to read a map. 'We can relax,' sighs Caroline. 'It's wonderful.' The children tear off ahead of us but not too far away leaving us to mooch at our own pace. It is awe inspiring to look up at trees that are so tall and this gives us a chance to contemplate how very important they are and how we are probably all guilty of not appreciating how important they are to us all.

We arrive at lunchtime and spend the whole afternoon exploring the grounds where there are some stunning views of the rolling Gloucestershire countryside.

Trees from all over the world can be found here, from Austria, China, Japan, America. The dinosaur tree is incredibly rare and as the name suggests, actually lived at the time of these ferocious reptiles. It was originally discovered in Australia so it's quite amazing how it can be grown in the UK, which has

a considerably different climate. But it seems to thrive.

The heaven tree is aptly named because it is so tall and spirally, while the handkerchief tree is another interesting specimen, which flowers in May. We can see why visitors come here throughout the year so that they can enjoy the trees in their varying degrees of progress; leaves changing colour and some blossoming.

We really weren't expecting to see Anne Frank's tree; this was a great surprise. After all Anne lived in Amsterdam and she saw the tree growing in her yard. In fact this was her only association with the outside world during the Second World War. She sadly died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. And so it is quite remarkable that a horse chestnut is now flourishing. But this isn't the original because that blew down in 2010. This is a sapling taken from the original. Good will always prevail and this determined tree shows that in its own way – a worthy memorial for Anne, I think.

Another surprise is the Japanese Rest House; the centre of the Japanese area where there are maples and many other varieties. Inside is a homage to important people like David Douglas, a nineteenth-century Scottish botanist, who discovered the

Douglas fir.

The Hermit's Cave is a delight, too. Who would have thought that wealthy landowners used to create such attractions to keep their guests entertained? In Victorian times this was a real craze among the landed gentry, who would actually pay someone

to live the hermit's life in their gardens. However, by the time it was created at Batsford its popularity had waned.

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