

# Young Horticulturist of the Year travel reports

## Royal Horticultural Society, UK, and beyond

### Rebekah (Rangi) Green<sup>1</sup>

The aid of the travel scholarships that I received as part of the Young Horticulturist of the Year (YHOTY) 2011 2nd placement enabled me to travel for 12 weeks across five countries. The insights and observations that I experienced were absolutely life changing. The skills and knowledge that I gained as well as those that I shared installed in me clarity, understanding and confidence. Without the support of the sponsors or the challenge of the YHOTY competition I would never have had such an opportunity, for which I am very grateful.

In May 2012 I entered into the voluntary internship programme at the Royal Horticultural Society Garden Wisley in England for a placement of six weeks. My specific placement saw me become part of the Trials Department on the Trials Field.

The scope and intensity of this placement provided me with many new horticultural skills as well as contact with the judging committees and scientific teams. The trials covered both field and poly-tunnels. Field trials (Fig. 1) consisted of vegetables (lettuce), fruit (currants, tomatoes), herbs (basil, lettuce, parsley) and ornamental plants (*Campanula*, *Clematis*, *Dahlia* and *Phlox*).

During my stay in England I was fortunate to attend the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. This was an amazing opportunity and a dream come true. The highlight for me, apart from the incredible scope of the displays, was the Artisan Garden exhibits where designers use natural and sustainably resourced materials in an artistic manner. The flower show was a great international experience that tied in horticulture, innovation and outstanding design.

In June I travelled down to Cornwall and had a dream come true! I visited

both the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan. The Eden Project was a truly inspiring encounter. The biomes and the ecosystems inside them really do challenge our 21st century ways of thinking. The Lost Gardens of Heligan was just as interesting but in an opposite way; shrouded in history and mystery with amazing plant habits and varieties.



Fig. 1 Rangi Green working in the RHS Wisley Garden Sweet Pea Trial, May 2012.



Fig. 2 Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, June 2012.

I then travelled to Scotland and had a personalised tour of the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (Fig. 2). I also saw some outstanding biblical gardens as well as castles (but sadly no Loch Ness monster!). I was lucky enough to travel right up to the Isle of Skye and the surrounding highlands where the scenery is truly picturesque.

I then caught the ferry across to Northern Ireland and visited both the Belfast Botanic Gardens and the amazing Giant's Causeway. The train ride from Belfast down to Southern

Ireland was colourful, both in people and scenery. The Dublin Botanic Gardens was spectacularly presented with such high standards and great plant collections.



Fig. 3 Chateau des Ravalet, Tourlaville, France, July 2012.

The ferry crossing between Ireland and France took 18 hours, but was well worth it. The use of New Zealand native plants in public spaces was overwhelming and nostalgic. I travelled right from the north to the south of France (Fig. 3) in the hope of reaching Spain; but sadly that will have to be at another time. The old castles, the chateaus and the national parks were well presented and maintained. Bayonne Botanic Garden (Jardin botanique de Bayonne) at 3000 m<sup>2</sup> is the smallest botanic garden I have ever seen but it truly packed a punch. I was also lucky enough to have two days in Paris and got to see some great landmarks (the Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame amongst many others).

A little over a week later I then flew to Vancouver, Canada. The main objective for me was to look at British Columbia's native plants and gardens. I visited many of Vancouver's natural highlights including Lynn Canyon, Stanley Park and Kelowna Valley. I visited Van Dusen Botanical Garden, University of British Columbia Botanic Garden and Burchardt Gardens.

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I walked across a suspension bridge, saw a moose, ate bush tucker, and found some endangered orchids.

I returned to Aotearoa-New Zealand 12 weeks later; refreshed, passionate and committed. My sincere thanks to the RNZIH Education Trust for making this experience possible. Fundamentally I was deeply inspired, gained much better understanding,

clarity and confidence as well as friends for life. It has further reinforced that I am committed to amenity horticulture and public green spaces, and I intend to be for some time yet!

**Rebekah (Rangi) Green works as a Collection Curator-Perennials at the Auckland Botanic Gardens, alongside amenity, asset, nursery and**

**curator teams responsible for the Garden's 156 acres and more than 10,000 plants. In 2011 Rangi was placed second in the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition.**

**Rangi's trip was partly funded by a Buchanan Award from the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.**

## Touring the Californian nursery scene

*Dave Harris<sup>1</sup>*

In April 2012 I was fortunate enough to travel through California with the help of the RNZIH Education Trust, and the International Plant Propagators' Society (IPPS New Zealand) to study the US nursery industry. I travelled from San Diego in the south, to San Francisco in the north, and found a huge range of nurseries and garden centres in between, both good and bad. What follows is a brief account of some of the most interesting nurseries and industry information from my trip.

My journey began with Gordon Harada of the J.R. Simplot Company in Southern California, a fantastic host who was willing to spend 10 hour days driving me from nursery to nursery. One of the first things I learnt is that the good nurseries were some distance apart, and locations on a map of the USA are not as close as they appear. The first nursery we went to was Color Spot Nurseries, San Juan Capistrano site (Fig. 1). Color Spot currently operates twelve wholesale nurseries in the southern US producing a wide range of ornamental and bedding plants. The San Juan Capistrano site is 200 acres (81 ha) and, like all of the nurseries I visited, their 250 staff were mostly of Hispanic descent. Other than the obvious cultural differences, I was struck by how similar the nurseries operated to those in New Zealand, including the range and types of plants grown. The main difference was the scale, and this was emphasised by the next nursery I

went to, T-Y Nursery, Pauma site, which had about 600 acres (243 ha) of growing area. Unfortunately about 20% of the site was bare, due to the downturn in the US economy. All of the nurseries I visited were hurting with the effect of the recession in the US, and competitors were cutting prices to unsustainable levels to try and hold market share. Some of the nurseries I visited were selling a number one potted shrub (2.8 litres) for as low as US\$2.30, about three times lower than the New Zealand market. There were signs of some recovery in the lower end of the market, however the large-grade tree side of the industry was dead in the water, with abandoned growing sites up and down the state.



**Fig. 1** Color Spot Nurseries load out and order area.



**Fig. 2** Botanic Building in San Diego's Balboa Park.

After a couple of days visiting wholesale nurseries, I headed down to San Diego to see some botanic gardens and parks. The 1200 acre (486 ha) Balboa Park in the heart of San Diego (Fig. 2) was a real highlight, not only does it house the world famous San Diego Zoo, it also contains nearly 20 themed gardens and 17 museums, and some fantastic Spanish colonial architecture.

After visiting some more retail nurseries and botanic gardens south of Los Angeles, I headed northwards to Santa Cruz where I was met by Cameron Smith from Scotts Professional (now Everris) who kindly showed me around some nurseries in the area. One of the aims of my trip was to study the use of advanced automation in the US industry and, surprisingly, I found very little. A low minimum wage and surplus labour means that automation is not yet economical except in exceptional cases. One of these cases was Floricultura, a brand new orchid growing site near Salinas just south of San Francisco, touted as the most advanced greenhouse in America (Fig. 3). The nine acre (3.7 ha) greenhouse has a fully automated stock handling system operated from a control room. You simply have to enter into the computer the table you want to work on and the benches will automatically shuffle until the tray you want is picked up by a crane and delivered to the central work area. This system would only work when growing a monocrop or crops with the

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same growth and care requirements, and the scale of the New Zealand industry is such that this sort of technology could only really apply to bedding plant or vegetable seedling production.

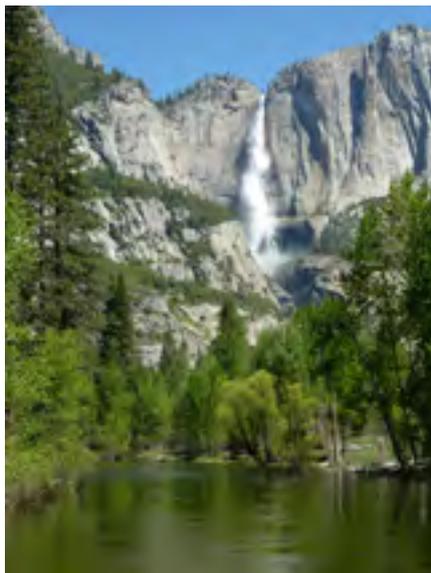


**Fig. 3** Floracultura's new automated 9 acre orchid greenhouse near Salinas.

As well as battling the economy, growers in the US are also currently faced with a raft of problems to do with introduced pests. Most of Southern California currently has quarantine measures in place to try and control the spread of the Asian citrus psyllid, which is transmitting the citrus greening disease (also called Huanglongbing or yellow dragon disease) throughout the state. No citrus or other host plants should leave the quarantine area without first being checked by a USDA (US Department of Agriculture) inspector, and all multiplication and mother stock is now required to be grown in positive pressure, insect-proof, USDA approved areas. Four Winds Growers wholesale nursery near Salinas was in the process of setting up a new site outside the quarantine area in order to continue producing citrus economically. The investment in creating an insect-proof growing environment which meets the USDA requirements is considerable. Further

north, the light brown apple moth is also causing problems, with a quarantine area in place requiring trapping, monitoring, control and inspection; all resulting in additional costs at a time when the industry is already struggling. It brings home how important biosecurity and border control is to the New Zealand industry.

By the end of the trip I had seen more than 20 wholesale nurseries, and countless retail nurseries and parks and botanic gardens. On a personal note, the highlight of the trip was when I went inland to see Yosemite National Park (Fig. 4), Tioga Pass, the giant redwoods and Death Valley. The scale of Yosemite was spectacular, both in terms of scenery and the sheer number of people travelling through the park. Standing next to one of the biggest trees on earth was a real buzz (Fig. 5), as was standing next to the bristlecone pines, the oldest trees on earth, some close to 5000 years old.



**Fig. 4** Upper Yosemite Falls.



**Fig. 5** Dave Harris standing at the base of 'General Grant', a giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), and the second largest tree in the world.

The trip was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me, and I can't thank the RNZIH and IPPS enough for giving me the chance to advance my career and have this experience. I'm sure the contacts and information I gained will serve me well in my future career.

**Dave Harris is Production Manager at Thirkettle Nurseries in Nelson. In 2010 Dave was placed second in the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition.**

**Dave topped up his travel grant from the YHOTY with a grant from the IPPS (New Zealand region) and used the funds to travel to California to view nursery production in April 2012.**