

Garden Group Visit to Eric Olverson's Garden – 22nd September 2009

The new season of the Moraira-Teulada U3A Garden Group started off with a visit to Eric Olverson's garden at Las Vinas, near Moraira.



We arranged the visit for two reasons: one, because it was reputed to be a splendid garden, and two, to offer support to Eric in his quest to cycle the length of Africa (from Cairo to Cape Town) to gather funds for the Thamsanqa orphanage he is supporting in South Africa.

Indeed, the garden did turn out to be splendid and over 30 of us set off with optimism that the cloudy skies would not change for the worse to dampen our spirits!



Eric was our guide around his garden and he was enthusiastic in presenting the garden features that he had so painstakingly put together over the years.

His garden is large (3400 sq mts) and has been built up by Eric over a period of 10/11 years, from scratch. The plot, as with many around this area, was sloping having many pine trees and 2/3 olive trees growing there. The pines were taken down

although the olive trees were preserved and the sloping plot was then terraced, which was a major project, this itself taking nearly 2 years to complete.



The terraces are now an integral feature which makes walking through the garden a pleasurable experience. This is especially enhanced by the presence of a number of sculptures.



At the bottom of the plot there were huge eucalyptus trees that were removed and a number of fruit trees that were preserved - a wild strawberry tree, two almond trees, a pomegranate, grapefruit, orange and lemon tree. Eric then added to these a nispero, a Satsuma, a weeping mulberry, 3 fig trees, an apple tree and further orange trees thus making a mixed and very “appetising” orchard!

Indeed, there was opportunity to taste some of the fruit that was available at this time – not least from the wild strawberry tree! We’re not sure everyone was convinced that it was edible!



With the almond trees Eric pointed out that there was often a problem with a disease known as honey fungus which is quite contagious. The best way he’d found to deal with this problem was to spray with a product called Aliete.



In general the plants were selected for their drought tolerance so that, although Eric has a watering system in place this is rarely used. However, without some watering during the hot summer months the plants can look a little exhausted by the end of August. When watering becomes essential Eric uses water from a well that he had dug out on the plot. Amazingly this descends over 60 metres (nearly 200 feet!) but Eric did point out that a neighbour also successfully drilled for a well and succeeded in finding the same water reserve so there is somewhat less available during the peak months even to the point of it drying up during the peak months!

The opportunity to stroll around the garden was, however, cut rather short by a turn in the weather! It started to rain, and rain, and rain!



But that didn't stop us asking Eric questions or quickening our pace!



Eventually, however, we retreated into Eric's house and held our first garden group meeting which included a short review of our planned future events. These include talks by Jenny Bussy (soil preparation/seed planting) for the October meeting and, for November, a talk/question and answer session by Clodagh and Dick Handscombe (authors of books on Mediterranean Gardening).

Eric ended our meeting with a short talk on his proposed cycle ride, The Tour d'Afrique, which transcends the length of Africa (from Cairo to Cape Town) and, for Eric, is in aid of the Thamsanqa Orphanage. In fact Eric had his bike on display and an impressive mountain bike it looked, too.

To further help with his fund raising he made available plants and plant containers for sale situated on display around the pool area.



as well as sketches made by a neighbour of his, the multi-talented artist, John David Moorhouse.



John has exhibited his works on a number of occasions; currently he is working on his “Cathedral Series” of sketches and he offered many of them for sale, personally signed and at very reasonable cost to our garden members, as a contribution to the Thamsanqa fundraising.

This is what Eric wrote in his blog, post our visit - “To help with the fundraising, we had a garden open day yesterday for the Moraira u3a gardening group. What a marvellous group they are....and not one bit put out when the heavens opened and sent us all scurrying inside. (Apparently, if your garden is dry, just invite this group round; you are assured of plenty of water!!) With their donations and the sale of books and plants on the day, a total of 240 euros was made for Thamsanqa”

We ended with a buffet meal, prepared and presented in Eric’s lower apartment lounge by garden group member Ann Roger (also group leader of Entertainment at Home Group). This was a splendid spread with wide ranging and very tasty cuisine of both savoury and sweet together with an assortment of drinks. The weather certainly did not put a dampener on any of our proceedings and we look forward to more garden group activities in the months ahead!

Members, please remember to always bring your waterproofs!!

Chris & John Parsons September 2009