

## The River Ramble

Several ferns grow alongside this walk including the shuttlecock-like *Blechnum magellanicum*, *Blechnum chilense* and the unaccountably rare *Blechnum cycadifolium* from Robinson Crusoe Island (part of the Juan Fernández Islands). Near it, growing in an amphitheatre of rock, are further specimens of the Chonta palm, *Juania australis* and *Thyrsopteris elegans* (an elegant tree fern), both of which are also endemics from the Juan Fernández Archipelago.

This sheltered walk possesses several fine trees including the original Victorian plantings of *Cryptomeria japonica* and a massive Monterey cypress, *Cupressus macrocarpa*. A little further on, visitors meet the exotic *Schefflera taiwaniana* (Edward Needham form), originating from the first ever introduction of the species by the Cornish plant hunter, the late Edward Needham. The *Schefflera* rubs shoulders with two Emei Shan (Mount Omei) endemics, *Aucuba omeiensis* and *Mahonia gracilipes*. I've been fortunate enough to climb Emei Shan, the sacred Buddhist Mountain in Sichuan province, China and to see both of these exciting garden plants. The Mount Omei *Aucuba* is a fantastic foliage plant, streets ahead of the more commonly encountered *Aucuba japonica*, forming small trees to 6m (20 ft) tall, and bearing leathery serrated leaves up to 30 cm (1 ft) long. *Mahonia gracilipes* is equally exciting, its pinnate leaves are polished silver beneath and the epimedium-like blossoms are purple. Helen Dillon grows the best specimen in Britain and Ireland in her famous Dublin Garden.

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