

# FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Summer 2024/2025

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## News from Fernglen

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*text and photos by Kelly Hayward*

Welcome to the first Fernglen newsletter for 2025. The new year is off to a good start at the gardens. New curator, Cameron Thomas began in January 2025 and he has been settling in to the position. Work on improving the seating around the education room, replacing of the gazebo roof and tidy up of the fernhouse will begin soon.

On the 14th of February 2025, a memorial for Ann Hartley, QSO, former Birkenhead and North Shore Mayor, Local Board member and politician, was well attended at the Northcote Rugby Club. It was a tribute to a strong, determined lady who contributed so much to our community. In the spoken reflections the theme of her tireless commitment and vision to improve the recreation, education and conservation for local people was echoed. It was mentioned about her being instrumental in the purchasing and securing of Shephards Park, Kauri Point Domain and Chelsea Estate Heritage Park. Fernglen was another property whose future she secured. In the book, 'Fernglen The Muriel Fisher Story', Muriel writes that in 1987, after the passing of her husband Bill, she was approached by land agents to sell part or all of the property (Fernglen) and how this was not an option for her to consider as she wished to protect the gardens. She consulted Ann Hartley, at that time Mayor of Birkenhead, who was sympathetic of her situation and also believed it should be preserved in its entirety (p83). The process of acquiring Fernglen then occurred, an amalgamation of local bodies took place and, as first mayor of North Shore, Ann Hartley and her deputy Peter Thomas, persuaded the Council to take on Fernglen as a council reserve. A significant amount of the property was gifted to the Council, and it was always such a relief to Muriel, that Fernlen would be safe guarded into the future.



Ann Hartly and Muriel Fisher planting a *Metrosideros bartletti* on the opening day of Fernglen Gardens



The *Metrosideros bartlettii* 33.5 years later



# FERNGLEN

NATIVE PLANT GARDENS



**Sunday 6th April 2025**  
**10 am-3 pm**  
**36 Kauri Road Birkenhead**



- **Speciality garden tours by gardening specialists**  
**10:30 am and 1:30 pm**  
Book ahead at [fernglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernglen.nz@gmail.com)
- **Seed collecting & propagating workshops**  
**10 am and 1pm**  
Book ahead at [fernglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernglen.nz@gmail.com)
- **Self-guided tours at your own pace**
- **Lesser-known native plants for cash sale**
- **Nature journaling by botanical artist Lesley Alexander**  
**art work for sale**
- **Historic information**
- **Educational, fun activities for children, incl nature trail & gecko**
- **Kawakawa tea & refreshments available**

**This event is part of EcoFest 2025**

It is nearly that time of year again, Ecofest's month long enviro and sustainable events across Auckland will begin on the 22nd of March 2025, [www.ecofest.org.nz](http://www.ecofest.org.nz).

We are proud to be included in the calendar. Fernglen's annual Open Day on Sunday 6th of April 2025, is soon approaching. Run by our own generous and experienced volunteers, Fernglen has a number of engaging events 1) botanical tours and 2) seed and propagating workshops. Check the attached poster for times and book at [fernglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernglen.nz@gmail.com)

If you have questions about where and how to plant natives, gurus will be available on the day to answer your queries. All day on the grass area will be children's conservation activities, some include, a nature trail and potting of seedlings. Botanical illustrator, Lesley Alexander, will be demonstrating botanical art and journaling in the education room and, as always, you'll find refreshments including kawakawa tea. We always appreciate your support in attending. Please remember to bring cash for sales of 'not so commonly known native plants' and botanical art. We are also hopeful of our guest, a jewelled gecko or two being able to make it on the day. We hope you can join us too!



*Davallia tasmanii*



*Hebe pinguifolia*



*Hebe brevifolia*

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## Curator Introduction

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Kia ora,

I'm Cameron, the new curator for Fernglen. My journey into horticulture has been shaped by a lifelong love for Aotearoa's native flora and fauna, though it wasn't always the path I planned to take. Like many, I grew up appreciating our unique plants and wildlife, but as adult life got busier, that connection faded. It wasn't until the Covid-19 lockdowns that I rediscovered my passion through gardening. What started as a simple pastime quickly became something more, leading me to pursue a horticulture certificate and volunteer at the Auckland Botanic Gardens - a decision that opened the door to an exciting new career.



During my time at the Gardens, I became deeply involved in the Regional Parks Revegetation Project, particularly in seed sowing. I helped grow over 100,000 native seedlings and created reference spreadsheets for species commonly used in Auckland revegetation projects. My focus also expanded to the conservation and propagation of critically at-risk native plants, strengthening my commitment to not only protecting Aotearoa's unique flora, but learning all about them.

Outside of work, I've been developing my own nursery, cultivating a mix of native species and unusual citrus varieties - an interest sparked by my previous role managing the former citrus grafting and production nursery for Kings Plant Barn. Choosing a favorite among our diverse native plants is nearly impossible, but I have a particular love for our native pea family members in Fabaceae, including kōwhai (Sophora), kākā beak (Clianthus), Montigena (the brilliantly named 'scree pea'), and Carmichaelia, our native brooms, most unusual of them all. Each one tells a story of resilience, adaptation, and the beauty of Aotearoa's natural heritage.

I'm excited to bring this passion to Fernglen and look forward to helping care for and share in its incredible collection of native plants.

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## Annual Survey of Pōhutukawa Flowering – November/December 2024

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*by Neville Arbury*

The first sign of flowering was observed on Monday, November 13th, small bunches of flowers on random trees. By the following week there was significantly more flowering, but once again there was no obvious pattern. Amazingly at this time a mature pōhutukawa behind the Mt. Albert library was in full flower with large deep red blossoms. Other pōhutukawa in close proximity were displaying very few flowers.

By the end of November I was guessing that it was going to be one of these 'bitsy' seasons, with some trees in full bloom while other neighbouring trees will hardly display any flowers at all.

Through the first two weeks of December flowering remained random. Incredibly, some major stands of pōhutukawa had no flowers at all while displaying significant vegetative growth. By mid December a pattern had become abundantly clear. 'Patchy' is probably the best word to describe the flowering of pōhutukawa in 2024. Often one tree amongst a cluster of pōhutukawa would be coloured in flowers while the remainder showed no signs of flowering. Even more mystifying were trees that would be free flowering in parts of the canopy, while other parts would have few flowers.

By Christmas day, as is usual, most pōhutukawa had finished flowering, apart from the odd specimen, that could be observed in full flower!

It is worth noting that last season was an outstanding year for pōhutukawa flowering. Does this mean that a prolific flowering season is invariably followed by a poorer season? I am not sure.

It will be most interesting to observe pōhutukawa flowering in November, December later this year.

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## A walk on the New Canopy Walkway at Kauri Glen Reserve in Northcote

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*by Neville Arbury*

Over the Christmas/New Year period I visited for the first time, the Kauri Glen Reserve in Northcote to check out the new canopy walkway. I was most impressed, as were the many visitors who were in the reserve at the same time.

The new 60 metre tree top walkway is 18 metres above ground level and provides spectacular view of the trees, shrubs and tree ferns below and adjacent to the walkway. The walkway provides the first canopy access in Auckland. The project was initiated when Kauri Glen Reserve was identified as a significant stand of kauri trees that was vulnerable to kauri die back, and was in need of protection. Some of the trees in the reserve are 300-400 years old. The walkway was officially opened on the 28th April 2024 and was constructed at a cost of just under two million dollars.

The reserve itself has a loop track of around 2.5 kilometres. It is very easy walking on an excellent metal surface and with well-constructed steps where necessary.

Judging by the number of people I encountered on the walk, the canopy walkway us going to be a great success!





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## Book Review: *The Forager's Treasury – The Essential Guide to Finding and Using Wild Plants in Aotearoa* by Johanna Fox. Revised Edition 2021.

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by Neville Arbury

An incredibly comprehensive guide for foraging in New Zealand. Early in the book the author poses the question, *"Why forage?"* Her answers:

- To keep healthy
- To save money
- To explore terroir
- To provoke thought
- To restore ties to the earth

Author Fox outlines the rules and regulations for foraging, suggesting the foragers familiarise themselves with the relevant guidelines and legislation. They pass on a reminder to always identify what you gather, be aware of any poisonous plants or ones that may cause allergic reactions.

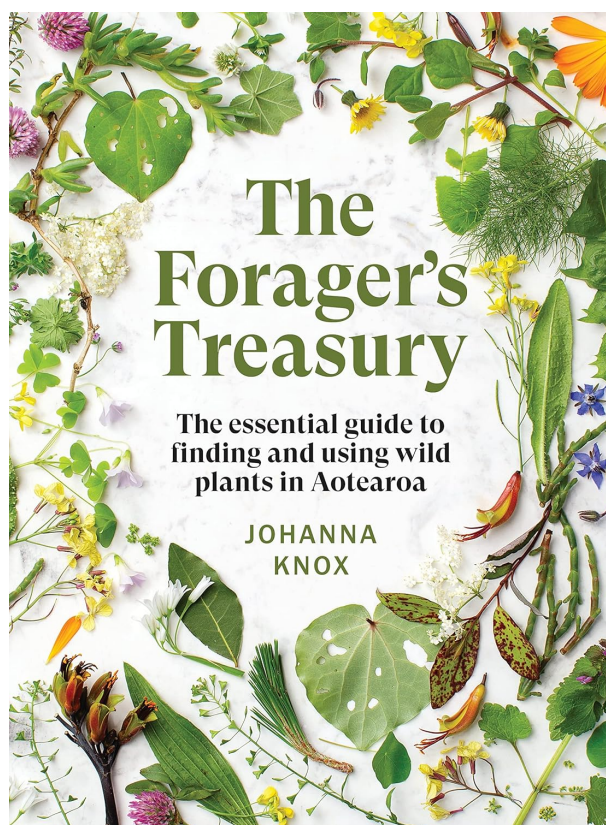
A large sections of this publication is titled *"The Treasures"*; listing plants that can be used and how they can be used, e.g. edible, fragrance etc.

The section on preserving the harvest makes excellent reading, what the author labels *"How to catch and tame the qualities of produce harvested"*. There are also excellent guidelines on hygiene and storage.

Of course this book would not be complete without recipes. As the author writes,

*"Creative cooks are by nature foragers, they forage for ideas as they do for great ingredients"*.

There are further chapters on natural healing and wellbeing, perfumes and colours, all well researched and written. This book is an exceptionally comprehensive publication. Providing all the information required to be a successful and safe forager. Highly recommended.



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## The Hidden Fernery at the Auckland Domain

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*by Neville Arbury*

Almost hidden from sight, between the tropical and temperate glasshouses at the Auckland Domain, is a remarkable structure and series of paths housing a collection of ferns and associated plants. Below is a brief history of this fernery, that is well worth a visit:

- The fernery was constructed in 1929.
- The depression meant the Auckland Council couldn't afford the cost and it was part-funded by twenty local businessmen.
- The construction work was carried out by one hundred men in just five weeks, part of an unemployment project.
- The fernery was originally stocked with 74 ferns donated from a prize winning collection of native plants.
- After just two years there were more than 80 native species ranging from tiny maidenhair ferns to giant tree ferns.
- Native orchids and climbers, rata and clematis were added to the collection.
- War time neglect (WWII) was a real concern in the early 1940s. Local ferns and weeds invaded the fernery.
- A survey in 1955 listed 35 native species.
- A survey in 1987 listed 25 native species.
- And in 1992 there were just 14 species.
- 1994 the fernery was fully restored.
- Today the fernery is well maintained. As well as ferns there are other native species including nīkau palm, cabbage tree, kawakawa, rengarenga, astelias and our native ghania.

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## Book Review: *Twelve Trees and What They Tell Us about the Past, Present and Future* by Daniel Lewis

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by Neville Arbury

The publication is one of those absolute gems that comes along from time to time! Daniel Lewis as well as being a writer, is a colleague professor and environmental historian. He manages in this book to very skilfully include an enormous amount of information in a way that is easily comprehended by the average lay person with an interest in plants.

To quote from the blurb on the inside cover,

*"Lewis takes us on a sweeping journey to plant breeding labs, botanical gardens and research facilities. He takes us inside museum collections, to the tops of some of the tallest trees and even underwater to explore the incredible ways that these trees survive."*

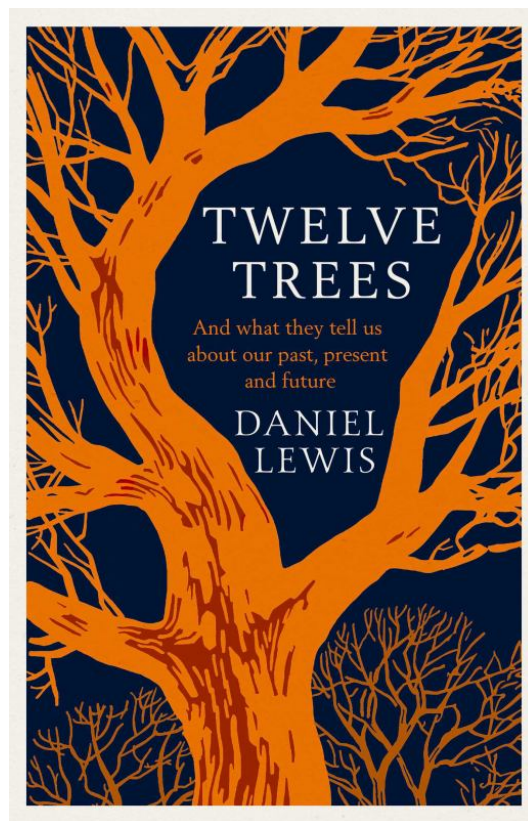
While the author writes extensively about twelve trees, for me the most interesting were in chapter 2 about coastal redwoods and chapter 10 about the African baobab.

In chapter 2 the author ponders the question, why do the coastal redwoods grow so big? And why are they not even taller? He writes,

*"Every species of tree is unique, but with the coastal redwood, oddities and contradictions proliferate. It's what botanists call a late successional species, or a climax species. Having survived for a long time its reached a state of equilibrium as is as stable as can be."*

Chapter 10, the African baobab, *Adansonia digitata*. This tree is often described as Africa's most iconic tree, and is my favourite non-native tree. Sadly, as the author documents the tree is dying across the continent of Africa. The tree is under attack from large elephants, almost all African baobabs are covered with scars from elephant assault. The care of both, elephants and baobab is a complex one, more elephants means greater baobab mortality, when elephant numbers drop, baobab numbers recover. Fortunately, the tree is easy to propagate and transplant into the wilderness.

One of the very best books I have read concerning trees for many years. Very highly recommended!



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## A Rare Native Hebe Thriving at Ben's Ridge

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*by Neville Arbury*

Very near the top of Ben's Ridge, close to the native grass section are a number of specimens of *Hebe barkeri*. A plant classified as vulnerable. The smaller plants are seedlings that have naturally germinated and appear to be growing quite happily.

*Hebe barkeri*, the tallest of our native hebes, growing up to 7 metres tall is only found on the Chatham Islands, including Pitt Island and South East Island. The plant naturally grows in scrub and open forest. The reasons for the vulnerable status of this hebe are habitat destruction and grazing of young plants by livestock. Fortunately the plant is quite easily grown from cuttings and seed.



*Hebe barkeri* flowers



*Hebe barkeri* at Ben's Ridge

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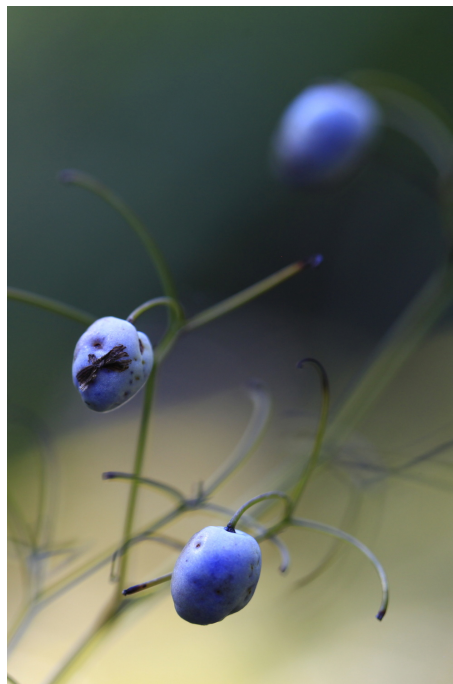
## Seed Collection Time

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by Neville Arbury

One of the most rewarding aspects of having a native garden is collecting, germinating and growing species you wish to add to your collection. While many native seeds ripen in autumn, there are a number of species that ripen in the February/March period. They include:

- *Arthropodium cirratum*
- *Astelia banksii*
- *Dianella nigra*
- *Dodonaea viscosa*
- *Hibiscus trionum*
- *Pittosporum crassifolium*
- *Pittosporum eugenioides*
- *Pittosporum tenuifolium*
- *Pittosporum umbellatum*
- *Pomaderis kumeraho*
- *Tecomanthe speciosa*



*Dianella nigra*

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## What's Happening at Fernglen?

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### Working bees

Regardless of the weather, working bees occur at Fernglen **on the second Saturday of every month from 9am onwards, until about 12 noon.**

The working bee is a great way to meet others, learn more about native plants, weeds and pest control. There is always a job to be done in the garden or in the education room.

No gardening experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. Gloves and gardening tools can be supplied.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

### Educational tours

Are you involved with a school or an education group and would like to learn about New Zealand native plants? A unique collection of plants from all over New Zealand grows at Fernglen. To see what is on offer please contact us

on email: [fernglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernglen.nz@gmail.com)

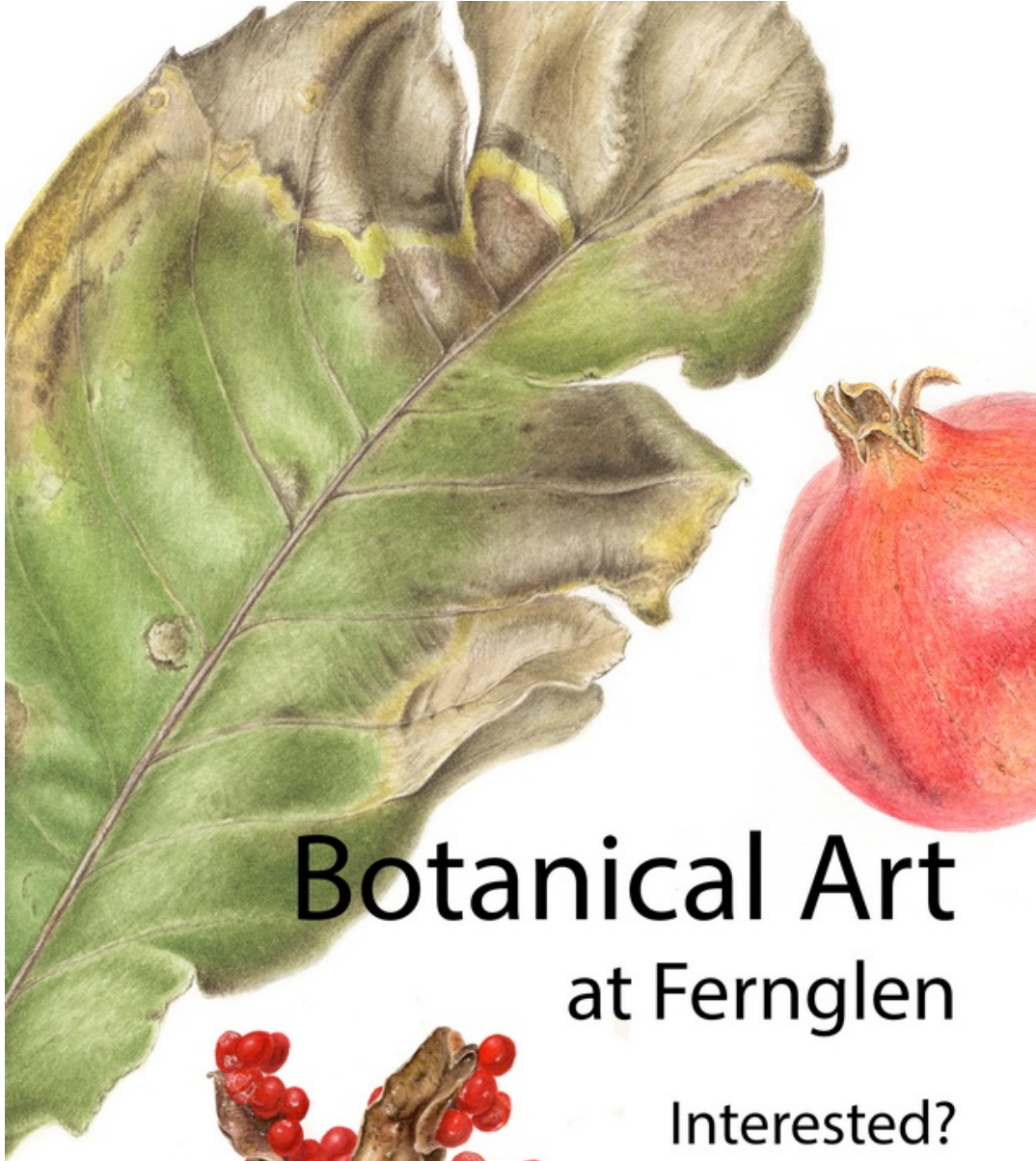
or phone: 021 236 5800

### Room hire

The Fernglen Education Room is available for hire at very competitive rates. Please contact us

on email: [fernglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernglen.nz@gmail.com)

or phone: 021 236 5800



# Botanical Art at Fernglen

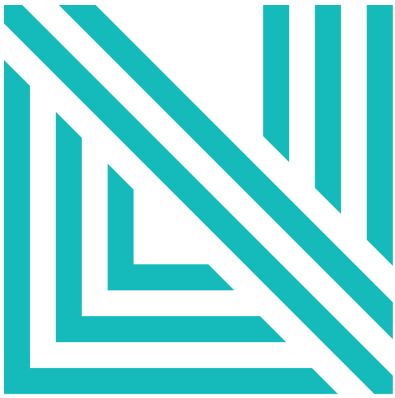
Interested?

contact  
Lesley Alexander  
021 161 7070 or  
email [lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com](mailto:lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com)

## Naylor Love

Naylor Love are committed to seeking sustainable construction practices. Their history in New Zealand makes an interesting read on their website:

<https://www.naylorlove.co.nz/about-us/our-history/>



# Naylor Love

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