

Our destination was the upper end of Davies Creek Road which branches from the Kennedy Highway 22.9 km beyond the Barron River Bridge at Kuranda. The trip in from the highway is mostly gravel, traversing some very scenic country as Davies Creek falls away below the road. Vegetation is mostly savannah-type with a large forest of white-trunked Eucalypts at one stage. *Tereticornis* or *grandis*, one or the other and very attractive (*Editor: both are present along the road*). About eight secluded campsites were noted: the area is under control of National Parks.

A picnic lunch and catch-up was enjoyed beside a clear, flowing creek with trees festooned with Climbing Pandan (*Freycinetia scandens*), and harbouring a Grey Flycatcher who amused us with his wagtail acrobatics. Patsy had brought along a bag of "show and tell" for info and I.D., and we decided that this is the ideal way to get rusty brains meshing into botanical terms and names. An interesting item of Patsy's was an *Achrotychia*



EXCURSION REPORT Davies Creek, September 2014

BY DON LAWIE

fruit and leaves, almost certainly species *acidula*, collected from the lower Russell River at near zero altitude. This tree is regarded as an upland plant. Another of Patsy's treasures was a branch, flowers and fruit of *Aceratium megalospermum* which is common near creeks in the Russell River area, and we found a specimen of the plant during our walk today. On the way home we saw yet another, growing as a street tree in McCoombe St outside the Pillow Talk building in Cairns. This species is quite an attractive member of the Elaeocarpaceae family, covered in bell/trumpet flowers just a few weeks ago and will produce heaps of small bright red fruit. *Aceratium* trees have a short trunk which branches early into a multi-trunked presentation, and the street tree had been carefully pruned to a pleasing shape.

We walked for an hour and a half and reached the Varch Creek turn-off – not a bad accomplishment for SGAP speed! The track is an old timber track, once wide and well-formed and now well maintained by NPWS. A feature of the track was the presence of many juvenile species of large rainforest trees. This was an indication of the trees that grew unseen around us, masked on one hand by a high bank and on the other by a steep drop. Young specimens of old friends from the lowlands such as *Evodia* – *Melicope elleryana* – mingled with numerous young plants of an upland species, Rose Silky Oak – *Placospermum coriaceum*. This is an attractive member

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of the large Proteaceae family, and is a mono-specific genus. They can be seen on the rainforest sections of the Gillies Highway. The generic name means “seed like a plate” according to Baines. Another upland plant was a small specimen of the palm *Oraniopsis appendiculata*, and nobody’s friend – a small stinging tree, *Dendrocnide moroides*, which cares not what the

altitude is and which proliferates after cyclone damages the habitat.

Although we had both Mary and Pauline with us, few orchids were sighted. Notable was a small clump of *Bulbophyllum macphersonii* on a fallen tree, so perhaps they were up there out of sight.

Giant granite boulders gave birth to a creek which ran through a large

pipe below the track; the boulders were surrounded by the very large King Fern, *Angiopteris evecta* accompanied by Bird Nest Fern, *Asplenium* sp., and more *Freycinetia*, to make a delightfully restful dell.

Plant of the day was identified by Mary (who was our Guru today) as a Northern Brush Mahogany – *Geissois biagiana*. Prominent rounded stipules surrounded the bases of large green leaves, and the young leaves were an attractive copper-red colour. Jones tells us that this plant grows into a large, well buttressed timber tree and the proof may have been demonstrated by a big, buttressed stump just past the juvenile. Baines says that the name relates to an overhanging roof tile (dinkum!) and that the seeds of *Geissois* plants have a similar appearance.

We ambled back to the vehicles for smoko and more chats to finish a pleasant and informative ramble through our wonderful habitat.

The Australian Tropical Herbarium’s director, Professor Darren Crayn, has recently returned from a trip to Panama, where he attended the final meeting of the Global Plants Initiative. The GPI was first set up to make high quality digital images of type specimens readily available to botanists via the internet. It was recognized that many type specimens, collected in the colonies of Africa and South America, were held in European institutions, a huge brake on botanical science in the nations of these two continents. With funding from the US-based Andrew Mellon Foundation, some 330 herbaria have joined up to bring botanical science into the internet age.

The goal of the GPI is to take high quality, full-colour images of every single type specimen in the world, and make them available to researchers via the internet. At the moment there are about 2.1 million objects photographed and uploaded – a pretty good achievement.



Pauline dwarfed by a massive old tree stump, Kahlpahlmin Rock Track.



Type specimen of *Melicope elleryana* held at Geneva. Photographed as part of the GPI. plants.jstor.org

One of the most elusive plants in the Wet Tropics is a tiny, pale, chlorophyll-free herb called *Corsia*. It was discovered as recently as 1968 by Bruce Gray – a new genus and new family for Australia, since when only 18 more specimens have been collected.



The single Australian species was named *Corsia dispar* by David Jones and Bruce Gray. Unlike many dry technical papers, it makes for an interesting read. It's worth quoting the introduction to their paper at length:

"Species of Corsia are seasonally deciduous, mycobeterotrophic [they are dependent on fungi for their survival] terrestrial herbs which are usually discovered by accident rather than design. They grow in high rainfall montane forests where there is an accumulation of surface litter. Most species grow in

Plants of the Wet Tropics

Corsia dispar, CORSIACEAE

Corsia

By Lalita Simpson and Stuart Worboys



areas of difficult access, have a short or limited flowering period, are only above ground when flowering or fruiting, and their life cycle is intimately associated with periods of heavy rainfall. The majority of species appear to be narrow endemics with a restricted range. In fact Van Royen (1972) notes that in New Guinea 'almost every mountain range seems to have its own species'. All species are generally so elusive and difficult to see in the gloomy surroundings where they grow, that they are undoubtedly under

collected, although occasionally they have been observed to be locally abundant..."

As Jones and Gray describe, finding a *Corsia* is rarely achieved through intent; it is more often a happy accident. Here, one of the Australian Tropical Herbarium's doctoral students, Lalita Simpson relates an encounter with this species on the eastern slopes of the Carbine Tableland:

"Recently [October 2013] I was joined by Kaylene Bransgrove and Tapio Linderhaus (ATH volunteer) on an adventurous hike to the 'Devils Thumb', a mountain top of the extensive upland region of the Carbine Tableland in Queensland's Wet Tropics. The top of the mountain, which reaches 1259 m, features massive rock outcrops known as 'Manjal jimalji' and more recently the 'Devils Thumb'. Manjal jimalji is an important cultural site for the indigenous peoples of the region, the Eastern Kuku yalanji, telling the story of fire creation.

The trail presents a challenging hike through lowland and upland rainforest with exposed areas featuring large granite boulders emerging from extensive patches of *Gleichenia dicarpa* (coral fern). The upland forest features many mountain top endemic species including *Leptospermum woornooran*, *Rhododendron lochiaie*, and several species of *Bulbophyllum* and *Dendrobium* orchids. Once reaching the 'Devils Thumb' we were rewarded with spectacular views of the coast emerging through the mist and the incredible sensation of flying as the clouds rush past.

A rare collection of the saprophytic *Corsia dispar* (Corsiaceae) was made thanks to Tapio's keen eyes, which will contribute to our knowledge of this family of which very little is known from few collections."



Upcoming Events

CAIRNS SGAP

Sunday 19 October

12 noon (or a little earlier if you want to barbecue some bangers before the meeting). Copperlode Dam. Meet at barbecue area near the kiosk. See map for details

Any queries, contact Stuart on 0488 788 768.

TABLELANDS SGAP

Meetings on the **4th Wednesday of the month.**

Excursion the following Sunday.

Any queries, please contact Chris Jaminon on 4091 4565 or email hjaminon@bigpond.com

TOWNSVILLE SGAP

Meets on the **2nd Wednesday of the month**, February to November, in Annandale Community Centre at 8pm, and holds excursions the following Sunday.

See www.sgaptownsville.org.au/ for more information.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

28-30 November 2014

Short Course – Rainforest Plant Identification. Three day residential course, held at Paluma. For more details on enrolments and prices, see alumni.jcu.edu.au/PIC2014



www.sgapcairns.org.au

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