

SGAP CAIRNS NEWSLETTER

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Society for Growing Australian Plants, Cairns Branch

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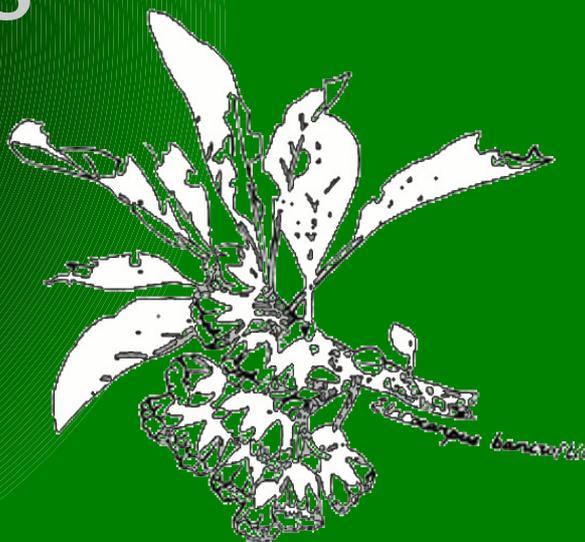
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Palaquium galactoxylum (Cairns Pencil Cedar). Photo by Rob Jago.

May Excursion Report: Cairns SGAP Revisits Goldsborough.

Don Lawie

Our last visit to Goldsborough was in July 2015, in the middle of our “winter” season. This year, late May weather has seen the end of a long hot summer and at last it is a pleasure to get outdoors. And what a pleasant outdoors the Goldsborough Valley is...

We lunched together in the small shelter shed, caught up with news and garden gossip, and enjoyed a plant

raffle, a feature of which was a mature specimen of the orchid *Pomatocalpa macphersonii* brought in by Patsy.

The National Park campground is extensive and well kept. It is the trailhead for the Goldfields walk across the range to Babinda Boulders, a trek well worth traversing by fit bush walkers. We settled for the 1.7km walk to Kearney’s Falls along a clear track made easy by strategically placed steps and ramps. The Goldsborough Valley, adjoining the upper Mulgrave River, is a high rainfall area of the Wet Tropics and the vegetation reflects the plentiful moisture.

The waterfall track entrance is framed by an array of impressive vines, including *Clematis pickeringii*, a reputed headache cure, October Glory (*Oxera splendida*) which will in a few months be covered in masses of white blossom, followed by peculiar potato-like fruits. *Entada phaseoloides*, the Matchbox Bean vine, climbed high into the canopy adjoining the track with several of the fruit – a flattish green pod up to 100cm long by 10cm wide containing up to 6 large seeds – dangling enticingly but way out of reach. The vines continue along the track with a *Derris trifoliata* 8cm diameter, source of the insecticide, and Fishtail Lawyer Vine *Calamus caryotoides* competing in the race to the canopy.

Our botanists Tony and Stuart were busy working on the day but we were privileged to have our Life Member Rob Jago with us to put names and attributes to the myriad of plants. The rainforest has many impressive, very large trees. My favourite for the day was the many flowering specimens of Cairns Pencil Cedar (*Palaquium galactoxylum*) with their space rocket buttresses and upright massive trunks, the ground speckled with thousands of fallen flowers. Rob estimates these trees as 45 -50 metres in height with a trunk diameter at breast height (DBH) of 80 cm, truly impressive. Other large trees noted by Rob were Spur Mahogany (*Dysoxylum peltigrewianum*) another tree with large plank buttresses, Silver Quandong (*Elaeocarpus grandis*) a truly grand tree, and a Lord of the Forest – an old Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*) Rob estimated as 40 metres high with a DBH of 70 cm, looking a bit battered but with a few hundred years of life ahead.

Not all the interest was in the canopy; smaller plants grew successfully in the gloom of the forest floor, most notably the Nutmeg Orchid, *Corymborkis veratrifolia*, a ground orchid which is prolifically scattered along the track side. Many of the metre high plants bore mature fruit as evidence of a productive flowering season just passed and reason for their large numbers since each orchid fruit can contain over a million tiny seeds. The rainforest cycad *Bowenia spectabilis* and the small shrub *Harpullia rhyticarpa* (?) with winged stems and pretty

flowers were plentiful. Also present but not in large numbers were Stinging Trees *Dendrocnide moroides* which, as Sharren can attest, can sting even through a strong cotton shirt. Another stinging tree, *Dendrocnide photinophylla* (the Mulberry Leaf Stinger) was noted by Rob at the wooden ramp at the end of the track at the waterfall. The innocent looking leaves overhung the track and although not as vicious as the *moroides* species it does constitute a danger to passers-by.



Corymborkis veratrifolia. Photo by Gary Wilson.

Two plants of note were seen: the endangered *Coronia pedicellata* and the endemic *Pseuduvaria mulgraveanum* var *mulgraveanum* which presented numerous flowers and fruit for the benefit of the photographers. The Herbert River Cherry *Antidesma bunius* was spotted by Rob but the edible fruit were not yet ripe.

We finished the day with smoko and chats and made plans for future activities.

Species list compiled by Rob Jago and Don Lawie

Conifers

ZAMIACEAE

Bowenia spectabilis

Basal Angiosperms

ANNONACEAE

Cananga odorata

Pseuduvaria mulgraveana var. *mulgraveana*

Monocots**ARECACEAE***Calamus caryotoides* (Fish-tail Lawyer Cane)**ORCHIDACEAE***Corymborkis veratrifolia* (Nutmeg Orchid)*Pomatocalpa macphersonii* (Blotched Orchid)**Eudicots****ELAEOCARPACEAE***Elaeocarpus grandis***FABACEAE***Derris trifoliata**Entada phaseoloides* (Matchbox Bean)**LAMIACEAE***Oxera splendida* (October Glory)**MELIACEAE***Dysoxylum pettigrewianum* (Spur Mahogany)*Toona ciliata* (Red Cedar)**MENISPERMACEAE***Carronia pedicellata***PHYLLANTHACEAE***Bischofia javanica* (Java Cedar)*Antidesma bunius* (Herbert River Cherry)**RANUNCULACEAE***Clematis pickeringii***SAPINDACEAE***Harpullia rhyticarpa***SAPOTACEAE***Palaquium galactoxylum* (Cairns Pencil Cedar)**URTICACEAE***Dendrocnide morioides**Dendrocnide photinophylla***In flower this month***Deplanchea tetraphylla* - the "wallaby wireless" or "golden bouquet" tree. A north Queensland native.*Dendrobium johannis**Graptophyllum**Dendrocnide morioides**Abroma mollis*

Revegetation at Rangeview

By Don Lawie

On 24 June the Barron River Catchment Committee extended an invitation for people to view and discuss a re-vegetation scheme on Frazer Road, Rangeview, near Tolga. The site was close to the road, which is unsealed. The area was described as Grassy Woodlands, subject to wildfires. It may have been cleared during the Second World War when there was a major presence here of the Australian Army. Vegetation before planting was relatively sparse; a scattering of small eucalypt woodland trees – *Corymbia tessellaris*, *Eucalyptus populnea*, *Lophostemon confertus* with a number of healthy, fruiting *Cycas media*. An understory of herbs and shrubs – *Commelina* sp., *Crotalaria* sp., *Indigofera pratensis*, *Dianella* sp. plus some native Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) was struggling against the inroads of introduced pasture grass *Brachiaria*, Molasses Grass (*Melinis minutiflora*) and a type of spear grass which we were told was named Thatch Grass (*Hyparrhena rufa*) – more difficult to exterminate than Grader Grass .



The soil was a rich dark red colour with occasional basalt stones – a deep volcanic we were told, and fertile. However I feel that there may be a key plant nutrition element missing – one of the weeds was Blady Grass *Imperata cylindrica* which I have always understood to be a marker for impoverished soil.

Pre-planting had included a mass spraying with Glyphosate which was effective in eradicating the problem grasses (and everything else) although they were making a comeback and need rapid attention.

The plantings are a thoughtfully diverse mix, aimed at developing a full ecosystem rather than just a tree lot. Lizards, finches and honeyeaters will find a home. Small shrubs planted for this purpose included *Pipturus argentea*, *Breynia* sp., and *Dianella* sp. Trees include *Lophostemon confertus*, *Acacia flavescens* and others native to the area.

There was much discussion about the future direction and since many of the 50 plus number of people (also their ages!) live in the vicinity, there was a rough plan formed to set up a "Friends" type of activity to take over care of the work done so far.

The Catchment Committee was well organised, with printed handouts in full colour (which I didn't manage to get) and a well prepared morning tea to round off the morning. It was interesting for Pauline and me to see the problems that face a dryer type of country than our own heavy rainfall place . It was also a very great pleasure to catch up with our friends from Tablelands SGAP, with whom we have shared many adventures over the years.

Excursion Report, June 2017. Munro Martin Park, Cairns

By Don Lawie

A winter day in the Wet Tropics, fine with the sunshine warm enough for us to appreciate the shade available. A small group today, and Mary was our only botanist, with Stuart and Rob away and Tony recovering from a serious operation – best wishes for a speedy recovery, Tony. Mary is having a run of ill-health but rallied to have lunch and chats and provide some rare and desirable plants for the raffle, then had to leave.

The rest of us did our best, which I think was pretty good, to identify and comment on the myriad of climbers, ground plants and trees that make this Parkland such a special place.



Thunbergia mysorensis (Golden Slipper Vine). By Toby Hudson - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,

We visited in August last year and had expressed concern at some of the plants, in particular an *Excoecaria* growing at ground level beside the path – it has since been entirely removed.



Excoecaria cochinchinensis "Firestorm", an attractive but potentially toxic garden plant. By Mokie - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,

In the ten months since then there has been considerable growth, in particular in the rampant vines trained on wire supports. Quite a few of the vines were flowering which made I.D. easier and we had fun racking our memories to come up with names for exotic flowers which are so tantalisingly similar to natives in a related genus. Notably in flower were *Tecomathe*, *Mussaenda*, *Thunbergia mysorensis*, and some other, unnamed species. There is a strong need for name tags for all plant species in the Parkland. Visitors find it hard to learn anything without a name to go by – modern Smartphones and their ilk make it easy to find info with a name to search.

Vines doing really well in growth were several *Aristolochia* species including *A. acuminata* formerly known as *A. tagala*, widespread in the Wet Tropics. The Cairns Birdwing butterfly caterpillars are munching away on my home *Aristolochias* and I was surprised to not find any on the Parklands vines. Perhaps the butterflies do not thrive in the urban air – could some caterpillars be introduced to the Parklands vines?

A vine that is truly doing well is the Flame of the Forest from New Guinea, incorrectly identified as *Mucana bennettii*. It is as well that this vine is supported on strong steel girders since in another year it will be massive. When it flowers in about three months it will be a traffic-stopper and camera magnet.

The bedding plants behind the amphitheatre steps are sensitively planted so that species are best displayed in complementary size, leaf and flower colour. The taller plants have been expertly pruned to hold them in check, and a large drift of black flowering Bat Plants (*Tacca* sp.) demands admiration. The pale white morph of the attractive ground orchid *Spathoglottis plicata* were flowering well but the pink and purple varieties seemed to be missing. Some *Crinum* lilies are under attack by the caterpillars of a moth which will utterly destroy any *Crinum* species in the Parklands.

The retained trees of the old Park are doing well, notably the ancient mangoes (*Mangifera indica*) with their pendant masses of Pencil Orchids which will soon be in bud then flower to delight visitors. The grafted *Brachychiton velutinosus* have grown very little and appear to be short of water.

In fact, there is an air of neglect in parts of the Parklands. The magnificent curtain of *Mandevilla* vines that frame the performance stage seems to have problems and some are in poor condition – as are a number of other vines including a dead/dying *Thunbergia mysorensis*. I have been trying to eradicate that species from our garden for 20 years and have not yet found anything that will kill it. Cairns has had reasonable rain recently but plants appear to need both water and nutrients. On a family visit a couple of months ago we saw no such plant stress – perhaps an auto watering system is faulty?

The Parklands are still on track to becoming a world quality facility but at this stage of development they need a critical appraisal and correction of problems. I look forward to our next visit, in 2018. In the meantime, I suggest that to correct some of the dearth of name plates, that Cairns SGAP approaches Cairns Regional Council and offers to pay for appropriate name plates for the native plants in the Parklands. That would be a positive approach.

(I must point out that my comments and opinions are mine alone and do not necessarily represent those of Cairns Branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants).

Mt Finnigan

Stuart Worboys

Travelling north from Cairns, the mountains of the Wet Tropics slowly diminish in height. From the State's highest peak of Bartle Frere, then to the high plateaus of the Carbine and Windsor Tablelands, then to Thornton Peak and Mounts Hemmant and Pieter Botte. Near the northern boundary of the Wet Tropics is the last high peak, indeed possibly the northernmost peak over 1000 m in Australia, Mt Finnigan.

It's well known the peaks of the Wet Tropics provide refuges for rare endemic wildlife, and Mt Finnigan is no exception. As part of the Australian Tropical Herbarium's ongoing mountain flora survey project, we visited this mountain in early June. After being welcomed with a smoking ceremony by the traditional owner representative, we were guided to the peak by the legendary Lewis Roberts OAM. Six of us spent three nights on the mountain. Our group included a Jabalbina Ranger, two representatives from our sponsor, the Australian Rhododendron Society, and a moss expert from the New South Wales Herbarium. The bryologist's survey turned out to be only the second moss study ever conducted on the mountain, and his results surprised all of us.

The weather gods were kind to us, with conditions clear but cold and windy. In our short time on the mountain, we found many of the classic mountain flora species expected on this peak: *Rhododendron viriosum* (which greatly excited our Rhododendron Society companions), *Zieria robertsiorum* (named for our guide), *Dendrobium finniganense*, *Dendrobium brevicaudum* and *Uromyrtus metrosideros*. But it seems visitors to this mountain have not spent enough time looking at the non-flowering plants. Along the creeks, the common and attractive tree fern, *Dicksonia herbertii*, had never before been collected from the mountain. It turned out to be the northernmost record of this genus in Australia.

Our bryologist writes: "I can't understand why Mt Finnigan is apparently so different from the rest of the Wet Tropics. It must be, because there are things up there that will have been recognised, had they occurrences south of the Daintree River. Things like *Lepidozia hasskarliana* [a moss like plant commonly called a liverwort] and *Metahygrobiella macgregorii* [another liverwort], the latter a new record for that genus in Australia would or should

not have been missed. But different Mt Finnigan seems to be, not just in the bryophytes but in the ferns, with *Oreogrammitis leonardii* being known only there [ours was the first collection since the species was discovered in 1948], and *Hymenophyllum reinwardtii* (apparently also a new record for Australia) having its only known occurrence in Australia there."

It was a rare opportunity to climb this mountain with the blessing of the traditional owners, to be guided by Lewis Roberts, and to view the world from its peak on a fine clear day. But combining that exploration with unexpected discoveries made the trip an experience to remember for a lifetime.



The distinctive (and extremely irritating) purple-brown hairs on Dicksonia herbertii. Mt Finnigan is the northernmost occurrence of this genus in Australia. Our expedition made the first collection of this species from the mountain.



Much of Finnigan's peak area is open and craggy, with mountain rainforest hidden in sheltered gullies.



The crew reached Mt Finnigan's peak on a clear but blustery day. We enjoyed a lunch of peanut butter and biscuits.

What's happening in SGAP north Queensland...

Tablelands Branch

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

Saturday 26 February 2017. For the first excursion this year Roger [Yuruga nursery] has invited us to visit his garden and that of his friend Russel Slater in Kuranda. Meet from 9.30 for 10 am departure at the recreational centre on Fallon Road, about 600 m from the highway, look for the tennis courts and don't cross Jum Rum Creek.

Townsville Branch

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. They are planning more outings to the Burra Range in July and September.

Cairns Branch

Meetings and excursions on the 3rd Sunday of the month.

Friday 14 July to Sunday 16 July. Cooktown Botanic Gardens working bee. Travel up Friday, work Saturday and Sunday morning, return Sunday afternoon. The invitation is open to Cairns, Innisfail, Tablelands and Townsville SGAP members.

Tasks over the weekend will include identifying specimens, attaching plant labels and recording the process (location, name etc) for entry into the database. This will include the gardens and the 3 walking tracks. Accommodation is camping at the Botanic Gardens on the edge of Queens oval next to the amenity block. There is one shower at the Natures Powerhouse, which is available during opening times - we just need to keep it tidy!

