



*Society for Growing Australian Plants
Cairns Branch*

NEWSLETTER

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*SGAP Cairns Branch July Excursion to Cooktown
Weekend Friday 11 to Sunday 13 July, 2025.*

The annual SGAP Cairns and Tablelands working bee at the Cooktown Botanic Gardens is on the second weekend of July. Details below



**June 2025 Excursion Report Vic
Stockwell's Puzzle**

Stuart Worboys

To the west of Mt Bartle Frere, in some the wettest and most biodiverse of Australia's rainforests, lies a grove of giant trees. Here, and in a few scattered locations in the shelter of Mt Bellenden Ker, grows arguably the Wet Tropics largest tree. Attaining 40 or 50 m in height, the great spreading canopies of these trees show up clearly in aerial photos. With their gnarled buttress roots, thick fissured bark and great size, it is surprising to learn these trees were not recognised as distinctive until 1971.

In that year, Keith Gould was using aerial photos to assess timber resources and noticed distinctive canopies in forests near Boonjie. So

Keith and forest ranger, Vic Stockwell, set out to inspect the area and find the trees seen on the aerial photos. When they got to the site they were indeed surprised to find trees of a species they did not recognise. They were surprised that Vic could not recognise them, as Vic knew all the large tree species in the area under his control. Immediately recognised as unusual, and quickly given the informal name of "Stockwellia", they were not named by western science until 2002, when they were formally described as *Stockwellia quadrifida*.



On Sunday morning, 15 June, a group of Tablelands and Cairns members met at the Gillies Cafe for a hot chocolate and cake, before departing for Boonjie.

A well-beaten, albeit muddy, track now provides access to the Boonjie Stockwellia grove. It starts at a tiny roadside clearing, and wanders through regrowth complex notophyll vine forest, sometimes on basalt, sometimes on granite. Along the way we spotted *Austromuellera trinervia*, *Calamus moti*, *Syzygium gustavioides* with clusters of aerial roots like a witch's broom, fruit of *Austrobaileya scandens*, *Spiraenanthemum davidsonii*, *Cyathea rebecca*, the incredibly rare recently described *Kayea meridionalis* (formerly *Mesua* sp. Boonjie) and tiny delicate *Abrodictyum obscurum* filmy ferns lining the side of the track.



At two kilometres, the track came to a poorly defined end, and the first of the Stockwellias. Beyond there we followed a series of taped trees down a ridgeline to a little gully which forms the centre of the grove. On all sides, the gigantic trees rise 40 or more metres. In the understorey there are beautiful *Oraniopsis appendiculata* palms, and species with restricted distribution such as *Garcinia gibbsiae*, *Cryptocarya cercophylla* and *Coelospermum purpureum*.



Some in the group had not seen the trees before, others had not been to the site for decades. We admired, we photographed, and Tablelands members shared stories of their visits in years before.



Our goals achieved, we tramped out and made our way home.

Rob Jago's detailed species list for this locality is available on request .



Our August excursion will be to the property of Patsy and Peter Penny at East Russell

July Excursion to Cooktown Botanic Gardens

The fully detailed information of the arrangements made for the Cooktown excursion is in the attachments to the covering email. This version is included in the newsletter to pique the interest of those who may wish to attend in the future.

Friday: Arrive in Cooktown. For those who are travelling early, there is a NAIDOC Week event in Cooktown at the Lions Park (Endeavour River side of Charlotte Street, just north of the Bowls Club), which starts at 9 a.m. and winds up at 2 p.m. The Botanic Gardens will be running a native plants stall at the event.

Saturday: Arrive at the Botanic Gardens nursery at 8.30 a.m. Nikko's suggested tasks for the day: SGAP Garden. Apparently the SGAP garden is in very good condition; he believes little maintenance work is necessary (although a some light pruning may be required).

Mulching. For the energetic, there is plenty of mulching to do.

Banks and Solander Garden. Nikko has requested plants for this Gardens. If you have any Banks and Solander species in cultivation that you would be willing to donate to the Cooktown Botanic Gardens, they would be much appreciated. Please email the list of plants to secretary@sgapcairns.org.au so Nikko can determine their suitability and space requirements. If you need to check, Rob Jago has made the definitive list of Banks and Solander collections from the Endeavour River - they can be found at: <http://www.sgapcairns.org.au/SpeciesLists/Species%20List%20for%20Endeavour%20River.pdf> Nursery. As always, there is plenty of potting up to do.

Nikko will organise a barbecue on Saturday evening. BYO wine and good cheer.

Sunday: Excursion to Elim Beach. Depart Cooktown 8.00 a.m. Meet at the Endeavour Falls Tourist Park at 8.30 a.m.

Accessible by two wheel drive, the road to Elim Beach will take us through sand dune country, with plenty of magnificent, colourful heathland species to see. Bring lunch, water and sunscreen.

WHAT TO BRING: appropriate safety gear for working in the gardens and for Sunday's excursion, including trousers and long sleeved shirts, gloves, water bottle, sun hat, sun glasses (really important when exploring the dazzling white dunes around Elim Beach)

WHERE TO STAY: Nikko, his wife Sarah, and son Alfie, have a spacious property about 20 minutes north of Cooktown, not far from the Endeavour Falls Tourist Park, and on the road to Elim Beach. They have kindly offered to let interested visitors camp on the property. You will have access to the family's guest toilet and shower. Alternatively, you can shower at the Cooktown Botanic Gardens. Nikko's property does not have mobile coverage.

If you wish to camp on Nikko's block, please let Stuart know as soon as possible (on or before Monday 7 July) and he will pass on directions.

Other options include booking your own accommodation at the Endeavour Falls Tourist Park or in the various campgrounds and motels around Cooktown.

RSVP Monday, 7 July. to secretary@sgapcairns.org.au to confirm:- how many people in your group - if you intend to camp at Nikko's property - what (if any) Banks and Solander species you will be bringing- dietary requirements for Saturday night barbecue

