



# SGAP Cairns

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Society for Growing Australian Plants (Queensland Region) Inc., Cairns Branch  
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## Cooktown 2011

*By Pauline Lawie*

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Mary, David, Liz, Don and Pauline joined five Tablelands Branch members to work in the Cooktown Botanic Gardens this year. As we were all veterans of previous work parties we needed no more than an idea of what the Gardens curator wanted to get straight to work.

Tablelands Branch, as usual, brought some special plants with them and set to cleaning up the weeds in the SGAP garden before planting. It was time for the fence previously protecting the plants from wallabies to be dismantled – a job for some strong hands. Part of it was retained because of a well established, desirable (very technical) vine. Don and Liz, with just a little help from Pauline, spread a few ute loads of mulch over the Banks and Solander garden. It was amazing to see that there was no sign there had ever been any mulch here, yet those who have been on the end of shovels and rakes know better.

Mary and Pauline had to check out the orchids but could find very few, however, one in particular had obviously flowered and it is hoped it will spread its seed around. The orchid house near Natures Powerhouse has had a face lift and is now three times the size. We suggested that the plants housed there, not all natives, should be watered with greater care as many appeared to be droughted. Evidently a considerable amount of money had been expended to purchase Cooktown orchids and we did our best to arrange them in the nursery in the hope that they may be kept alive to put on a show in the orchid house next year. No attempts are being made to propagate orchids.

The general appearance of the gardens was most unexpected. The rain Cooktown had had earlier in the year saturated the hills and water was oozing from the hillside in several places. The cut flower garden was a quagmire and several areas were difficult to negotiate. On the other hand, the recent dry spell distinctly indicated, by swathes of browned off lawns, where sheets of sandstone were close to the surface – an excellent opportunity to map suitable areas for different plant populations.

This year we were guests of the Vela Family who very kindly allowed us

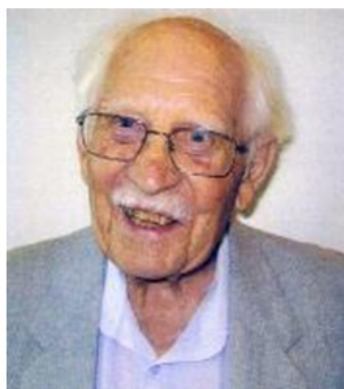


*Cooktown Orchids in their natural habitat, near Mt Carbine*

the run of their house and property off Quarantine Bay Road, a lovely setting for camping. They even arranged excellent weather for us – a bit chilly but perfect for working. Our working hours, as usual, were punctuated by smokos, with a much too generous lunch provided by Natures Powerhouse. Most of the party spent Sunday travelling up towards Cape Flattery, but those of us without amphibious vehicles entertained ourselves visiting favourite places closer to town.

## Vale Len Lawler

*Abridged from an article by Zia Ahmad, University of Sydney, with additional text from his testimonial card*



Len Lawler

Leonard Joseph Lawler was born in Drummoyne, NSW on 16 December 1925 and after basic schooling joined as a junior in analytical chemical laboratories. He enlisted in the army in 1944 and was posted to the 1st Australian Fields Trials Company based near Proserpine. Here he was involved in trials to determine effect of gases on troops with the aim of developing protection measures in case these chemicals were introduced into the war.

After discharge from the army in 1947, he obtained training as a Medical Technician. He continued his training in this area in the post-war decades, eventually gaining his Fellowship of the Australian Institute of Medical Laboratory Technology. He was the first President of the Australian Institute of Medical Laboratory Scientists (AIMS) and was recognised for his vision, energy and leadership towards this organisation with the award of the Inaugural AIMS Merit Award and the establishment of AIMS Leonard J. Lawler Prize at the University of Technology, Sydney.

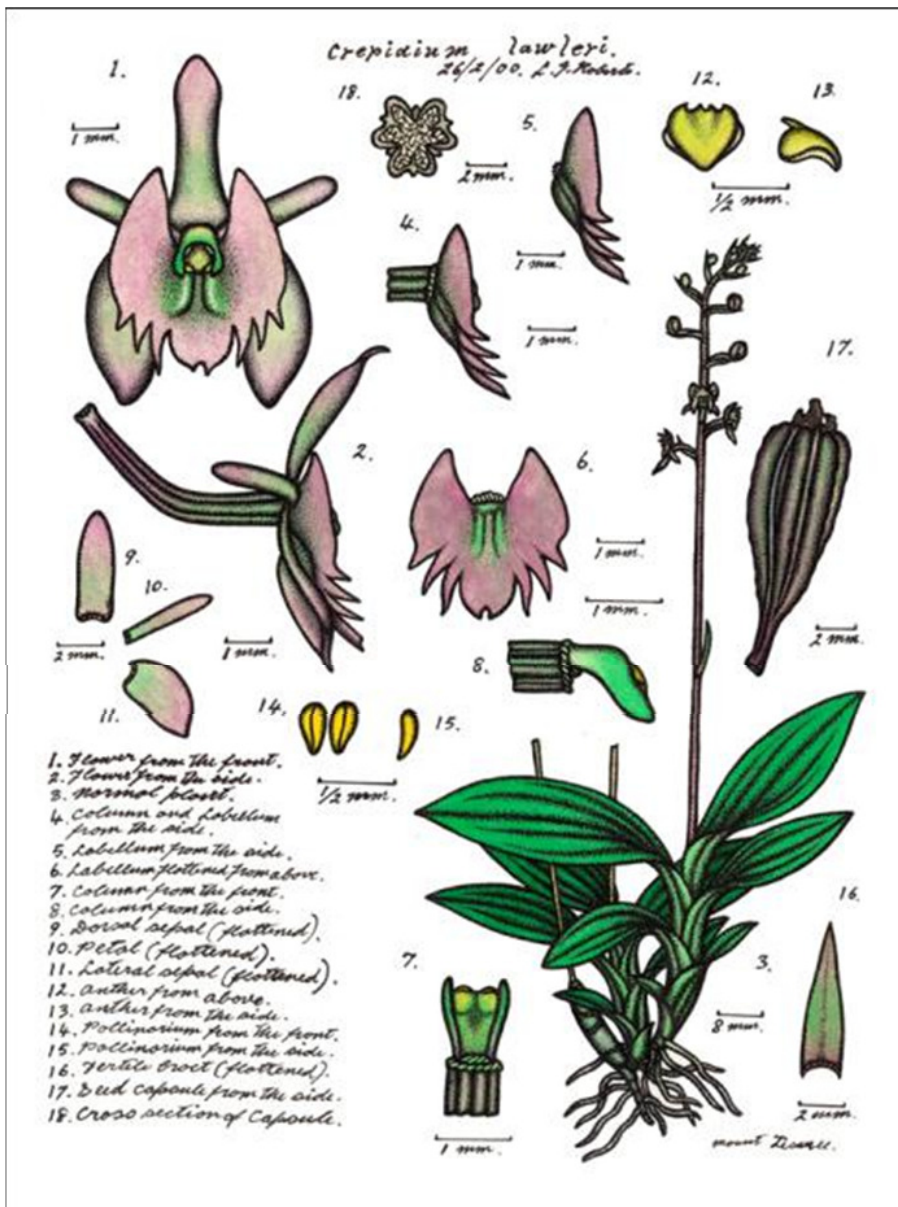
Len joined the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Sydney as a laboratory assistant in 1956 and retired as a senior professional officer in 1986. He married Katherine Fisher in 1970 who worked as a professional officer in the Nicholson Museum at the University. In 1986 after retirement, Len and Kate moved to north Queensland where Len passed away on 11 February 2011.

Len's research interests lay in orchids and he devoted his whole life pursuing his passion towards the study and uses of orchids. In his early days he investigated the possible medicinal value of 203 Australian orchids and 316 plants from New Guinea for alkaloids and antibiotic activity. He attended international conferences and organised symposia on orchids and was influential in the establishment of the Australian Orchid Foundation (AOF) serving as president of its research committee from 1981 to 1986. While in retirement in Queensland, he continued his research in this area and the Aboriginal uses of plants. He published about 40 scientific and popular articles on orchids and was a regular speaker at meetings and conferences on this subject.

In 1984 he made his mark in orchidology at the world level with his epic

study titled *Ethnobotany of the Orchidaceae*. This paper is 123 pages long and includes over 1000 references – a clear indication of Len’s breadth of mind and meticulous work. It remains the definitive work on the subject.

Len was kind, patient, keenly observant, careful in word and deed, a man of integrity who set high standards in his professional and personal life. He made substantial contributions both to medical science and to our knowledge of orchids. A great companion, he will be sadly missed by his many friends.



“Len was kind, patient, keenly observant, careful in word and deed, a man of integrity...”

*Malaxis lawleri* (syn. *Crepidium lawleri*), discovered near Cooktown by Len Lawler. Image © Lewis Roberts. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

## Lost treasures of the Wet Tropics

R.L. Jago

### *Embelia flueckigeri* F.Muell

Family PRIMULACEAE (MYRSINACEAE)

Order ERICALES

**SYNONYMS:** *Tapeinosperma flueckigeri*

**DESCRIPTION:** A shrub of laurel-like aspect, though of a rambling habit; leaves on short corrugated petioles, lamina attaining a length of 100 mm. and a breadth of 38 mm. shining on both surfaces, the under surface only slightly paler than the upper surface, texture firm, almost elliptic, blunt (rounded) at the base, pellucid dots not plainly visible, margins entire, the veins closely reticulate, glabrescent; panicle densely tomentose, numerous branched but short; tomentum brownish; flowers, unisexual, in racemous clusters, very shortly pedicellate; bracts rather large; calyx segments 5, rather long (about 3 mm.), narrow-elliptic; petals about 6 mm. long, very perceptibly dotted, much less pubescent than the calyx, membranous; stamens 5, about as long as the petals (about 6 mm.), linear, sparsely setaceous (covered in bristle-like hairs), free or almost so of the corolla; anthers broadly cordate (heart-shaped); ovary and the lower portion of the style lanuginous (woolly); fruit unknown. (This description is largely taken from Bailey, F.M.; Myrsineae; *The Queensland Flora*, Part 3; 947-952 (1900)

**HABITAT:** Presumably rainforest.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Known only from the type collection made by Stephen Johnson from the Russell River in 1892.

**PHENOLOGY:** The flowering period must presumably be in the early part of the year somewhere between January and March. The fruiting period is unknown.

**CONSERVATION STATUS:** Extinct in the Wild Wildlife under the *Nature Conservation Act* 1992.

**ETYMOLOGY:** Described by Barron Ferdinand von Mueller in Volume 8 of *The Victorian Naturalist* in April 1892 in honour, as it is a medicinal genus, of Dr. Federick Flueckiger, the meritorious Professor of Pharmacology in the University of Strassburg, at about the time of his septuagenarian's jubilee as a public scientific festival. March 1892. (The latter part of this sentence may be a typographical error and may perhaps have been meant to read "at about the time of this septuagenarian's jubilee at a public scientific festival in March 1892.")

**PRONUNCIATION:** em-BEEL-ee-a

**NOTES:** Stephen Johnson collected extensively in this area of the Wet Tropics in the period between 1891 & 1892. His collecting localities on herbarium voucher specimens are usually attributed to one of the following localities, Russell River, Upper Russell River, Towalla and Mt. Bartle Frere. His collection of *Embelia flueckigeri* could have been made anywhere from within the catchment of the Russell River between the Atherton Tableland and its outlet at Russell Heads. The coastal plain between the Golden Hole and Russell Heads is today largely cleared of its native rainforest vegetation and *Embelia flueckigeri* could well be extinct if Johnson made his collection from this section of the river. The upper reaches of the Russell River valley, the Francis Range and the old gold mining area of Towalla are today somewhat inaccessible. These areas were however, at the time of Johnson's visit, swarming with people. The traditional owners, the Nadjan, were still in residence and gold seekers from the four corners of the earth searched for and found gold in the many rainforest clad creeks, gullies and ridges of this stunningly beautiful area. Gold was won from the Russell River from near its headwaters in the Boonjee area downstream to the Golden Hole. Pack tracks suitable for pack horses and numerous others suitable for foot traffic criss-crossed the Russell Valley and Francis Range between the Atherton Tableland and the coastal plain. Johnson would have had relatively easy access to a vast area of rainforest country that is now inaccessible to all but the fittest of bushwalkers. It is possible, if Johnson made his collection from this section of the catchment, that *Embelia flueckigeri* thrives to this day, patiently awaiting rediscovery. Rainforests are very good at keeping their secrets.

### REFERENCES

Bailey, F.M. (1900) Myrsineae; *The Queensland Flora*, Part 3; 947-952.

Mueller, F.M. von (1892) *Embelia flueckigeri*: *The Victorian Naturalist*; 8: 200.



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**July Activities**

**SGAP CAIRNS BRANCH OUTING**

*Saturday 16 July*

Meet midday at Babinda Boulders (head to Babinda, follow the Boulders Road all the way to the end – see map below).

After lunch and a quick meeting we'll explore the nearby cyclone impacted rainforests.

**SGAP TABLELANDS BRANCH OUTING.**

*Sunday 31 July*

Any queries please contact Chris Jaminon 4095 2882 or [hjaminon@bigpond.com](mailto:hjaminon@bigpond.com)

**TOWNVILLE SGAP**

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

