

Newsletter

135

October
2013

October Excursion – Fitzroy Island

The long awaited Fitzroy Island trip is at hand!

The beautiful continental island is just 45 minutes boat ride from Cairns. If you haven't been there for a couple of years, you're in for a surprise. The resort has been completely rebuilt. Perhaps somewhat too large and ostentatious for its surroundings, the redeveloped resort covers a large area. Beer and snacks are still available to casual visitors, and

Getting there and home -

Fitzroy Island Resort Fast Cat services depart from Cairns Reef Fleet Terminal at 8:00 am and 11:00 am.

Services returning from Fitzroy to Cairns depart Fitzroy's jetty at 12:15pm and 5pm.

**Book for the Fitzroy island Fast Cat on 40446700.
When booking, don't forget to ask for a locals discount!**

You can choose stay overnight at resort (self-catering or take advantage of the restaurant), or book a camp site with council, or on the number above.

Bring a camera and togs!

SGAP Cairns

Society for Growing Australian Plants, Cairns Branch



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EXCURSION REPORT Stoney Creek, September 2013

By Don Lawie

A small but elite group met for lunch at the weir at the end of Stoney Creek Road, accompanied by the pleasant sound of the creek flow and the invigorating scene. We set off on the short walk to the old water intake (see photo above) but, having done it before, decided to take the link track that meets the Douglas Track that eventually goes past Kuranda to Speewah "Trailhead". Pauline and I had walked the top part of the Douglas Track from Speewah recently with Tablelands Branch SGAP and had met several groups of walkers heading for "the bottom".

Rob was in historical mode and suggested that we look at some of Robb's track, made to enable construction materials for the Kuranda railway to be built – well over a hundred years ago. The old track is faint but still discernible and easy to follow. The pack track ascends by easy gradients and we back-tracked to the creek where Rob pointed out a clearing where goods were stored at the end

of the dray road which is quite clear – a wide open patch now studded with large trees. A giant, canopy-emergent mango tree was a sure marker of former human habitation and a similarly large Cairns Pencil Cedar (*Palauium galactoxylum*) may have witnessed the busy site when still a seedling. John Robb also established a hospital on this site in 1887 since the railway builders were dying of various fevers.

We agreed to follow the pack track uphill to the Stoney Creek Hotel site – once the "world's best accommodation outside Charters Towers". After an hour's walking and marvelling at the diversity of plant growth we got to a massive Mackay Cedar (*Paraserianthes toona*) and decided to give the pub a miss.





NEWS FROM THE ATH

Last month, a group from the ATH took an informal trip to the *Stockwellias* at Boonjie.

Stony Creek, September 2013

We then backtracked to the creek and enjoyed the coolness and some interaction with the many young people walking and swimming in the pools.

The above all sounds pretty prosaic but in fact we had a very exciting day; after all we had Bob Jago as our guide! He showed us a stand of small trees and saplings of “one of the planet’s rarest trees”

Wetria australiensis (Euphorbiaceae), known only from this locality and PNG. Mature leaves are a lime green colour with a mildly serrated margin and young leaves are an attractive amber colour. Mature trees are not large and the bark has typical small dimples which make the tree easy to find. Rob says that there is only one other small

stand known, and this one, deep in the forest is safe from all but cyclones.

Recent cyclones which have devastated nearby forest in the Kuranda-Speewah area seem to have bypassed the Stony Creek forest and very large, old trees were frequent. Sovereignwood (*Terminalia microcarpa*) exhibited the typical bumps on the trunk that they develop in old age. Other large trees were Milky Pine (*Alstonia scholaris*), a variety of fig species – buttressed and intertwined with surface roots veining along the rocky ground, Daintree Hickory (*Ganophyllum falcatum*) Tulip Oak (*Argyrodendron perulatum*) and nearer the creek, River Cherry (*Syzygium tierneyanum*) became emergents. Smaller trees awaited their

chance at the light and we noted two small Kauri Pines (*Agathis robusta*) - worth revisiting in a century or so.

The forest felt timeless and must have looked the same to the men of the railway as they toiled upwards, making passable roads and in one spot a still-stable stretch of stone- pitching to cross a gully. The Governor of Queensland traversed this track on horseback while on a visit for Christmas 1887. The railway men utilised locally-available timber for both sleepers and bridges. Dorothy Jones in *Trinity Phoenix* lists hickory, satinwood, redwood, mountain ash, resin wood, white gum and bean tree, “and were to regret the decision within a few years as they replaced bridges”.

Although changed a little from my last visit, the access track was very clear, and without trouble we found our way into the patch of these huge, majestic trees. I always forget how large these trees really are.



We were reminded that *Stockwellia quadrifida* is the sister group to the eucalypts – this means that, long ago, they shared a common ancestor – they are both descended from an ancient rainforest Myrtaceae tree. The fate of the eucalypts was to dominate a dry, fire prone continent. The fate of the *Stockwellias* was to survive in tiny patches around the skirts of Queensland’s highest mountains.

Wetria australiensis



The fascinating story of *Stockwellia*’s discovery by Keith Gould and Vic Stockwell is told in the ASBS December 2002 Newsletter, to be found at www.anbg.gov.au/asbs/newsletter/pdf/02-dec-113.pdf. Although discovered in 1971, it was not formally named until 2002. It is heartening to note that the scientists who named the tree remembered its co-discoverer when naming the tree.

A friend recently complained that he had never been able to get an orchid to flower. I would guess he's never tried growing *Spathoglottis*! This is an incredibly easy orchid to grow, and rewards a little care with strongly coloured long-lasting blooms and attractive foliage.

The genus *Spathoglottis* sometimes goes by the common name "Ground Orchid", an unfortunately prosaic name which I will ignore. The genus occurs from India, through south-east Asia, the Philippines, Micronesia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands as far east as Tonga. David Jones reports two species for Australia – *S. paulinae*, occurring from Ingham to Cooktown, and the Northern Territory, and *S. plicata*, occurring from Cooktown to the tip of Cape York. The distribution of both species extends overseas as well.

Description

Both native species of *Spathoglottis* grow in grass-like clumps joined by underground stems. They often grow in grassy areas, which can make them hard to spot except when in flower. *Spathoglottis paulinae* is the smaller of the two, with flowering stems up to 15 cm high, and flowers 20-30 mm across. In contrast, *S. plicata* produces flowers 35-55 mm across on stems up to a metre high, and is probably the most desirable native *Spathoglottis* for cultivation.

Leaves are long, sometimes more than 1 m, narrow and pleated, with each flowering stem producing 3-4 leaves.

The flowering season is prolonged, (late dry season

Beautiful plants of the Wet Tropics

Spathoglottis, ORCHIDACEAE

By Stuart Worboys



Spathoglottis ?plicata with lurking crab spider.



Unknown *Spathoglottis*, Star Mountains, PNG



Unknown *Spathoglottis* with attractive mauve bracts, PNG

through to April). Flowers are pink, purple or rarely white.

Cultivation

As I've already said, this is one orchid that requires little attention to bring it to flower. Various websites suggest these plants love a well-drained, compost-rich medium. Following this advice, the specimens in my garden were planted into well composted cow manure. They're also given monthly doses of a low nitrogen fertilizer when in flower. My plants get full sun, which results in the occasional burnt leaf, but otherwise they are thriving. Mulching and an occasional prune to remove burnt leaves and spent flower racemes are important maintenance measures.

Finally, take care with non-native *Spathoglottis*. This genus has proven quite weedy in Hawaii.

Further reading

Anonymous (2008) *Spathoglottis plicata* Blume. culturesheet.org URL: culturesheet.org/orchidacea e:spathoglottis:plicata

Jones, D.L., Hopley, T. and Duffy, S.M. (2010) *Australian Tropical Rainforest Orchids*. URL: keys.trin.org.au:8080/key-server/data/08090a09-0d0e-410b-860c-020705070e0e/media/Html/index_species.htm

Mystery Musa

David Barrow, a new member from Silkwood, has sent through photographs of a rather lovely Musa that has appeared in his garden, in the hope that someone can identify it.

Is this the native *Musa jackeyi*, or an attractive exotic species?





Upcoming Events

CAIRNS SGAP

Saturday 19 October 2013

Fitzroy Island. See front page for details on booking.

Bring lunch, plenty of water, towel, walking gear, sunscreen.

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 hjjaminon@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

10-16 August 2013

ANPSA Biennial Conference, Sunshine Coast. Held every two years, this is the conference of our national parent organization.

See www.sgapqld.org.au/anpsa2013.html for more information.



www.sgapcairns.org.au

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