



Society for Growing Australian Plants Cairns Branch

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EXCURSION REPORT – APRIL 2015

Stuart Worboys

Far north Queensland is blessed with a vast diversity of habitats, with a rich and diverse flora to match. From high mountains to coastal mangroves, desert-like sand dunes to rich basaltic soils, rivers to lakes and swamps, we can boast the richest and most diverse flora in the nation. We tend to be more enamoured of our coastal and tablelands rainforests than of the habitats further inland. Only naturally – what is closest to home is also closest to our hearts. But for us coastal people, explorations just a little further inland can be extremely rewarding.

The landscape to the west of Herberton has been a popular excursion site for SGAP Tablelands for many years. But sad to say, SGAP Cairns has not made the trip often enough in recent years. The rugged rolling hills between Herberton and Petford here are home to a tough but beautiful flora, including several rare and restricted species (Australia's only purple wattle, *Acacia atropurpurea* is one famous example). April's excursion took us to one of the highest accessible points in the hills to see what was in flower. We were well rewarded.

Immediately to the west of Herberton, the hills rise to well over a thousand metres. A combination of cool upland climate, low but reliable rainfall and really crappy soils provide conditions ideal for an almost temperate zone heathland flora – with peas, lilies, ground orchids, tea-trees and guinea flowers more reminiscent of the flora of southern Australia than the tropics.

It's this flora that Coralie and I set out to explore on a fine sunny Sunday.

Coralie parked her car where the Powerlink high voltage powerlines cross the Herberton-Petford Road, and we toddled off down the rough gravel track that provides maintenance access to the lines. A broad swathe of the powerline corridor is kept free of trees – a benefit for those of us looking for weird and wonderful things amongst the grasses and subshrubs of the ground layer.



Eye catching coral fungus

We were greeted at the start of the walk by some handsome Gympie Messmates (*Eucalyptus cloeziana*). Hiding amongst the grasses, Coralie spotted a fluorescent orange coral fungus. Further on, our eyes were caught by bright patches of red around flat rocky outcrops. These turned out to be the massed tiny flowers of *Gonocarpus acanthocarpus*, an attractive perennial herb. In poorer soils along the road grew tufts of an insignificant grass-like plant – common but far from eye catching. One of these tufts surprised me by having a small, almost colourless, three-petalled flower. This one flower enabled me to track

down a name for this mystery plant – *Laxmannia gracilis*.



Utricularia caerulea - a delicate carnivore

Seepages along the track provided moist homes for some tiny but delicately coloured bladerworts (*Utricularia caerulea*). Thick grass, mostly kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) provided shelter for the lovely ground orchid, *Diuris oporina*, which is known only from the woodlands on the western edge of the Wet Tropics.



Diuris oporina - a donkey orchid

Grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea johnsonii*) were everywhere,

many in full flower, with bees, flies and wasps buzzing excitedly around the sweet nectar rewards.

Further along, the track took a sharp right turn and headed steeply downhill. Attractively gnarled *Eucalyptus shirleyi*, no more than four metres high, dominated the vegetation, and at their bases grew the native pea *Mirbelia speciosa subsp. ringrosei* showing off their stunning purple flowers. At the bottom of the gully, a tiny trickle of water was still running over rocks and little waterfalls. A few handsome cypress-pines (*Callitris intratropica*) grew in the gully. In moist patches on the rocks, we caught rock violets (*Boea hygroskopica*) at the very end of their season. Our final find for the day was a prickly little shrub of the heath family, as yet unnamed: *Astroloma sp.* Baal Gammon.



Astroloma sp. Baal Gammon

Our explorations over, it was time to turn around and head back up the hill. We returned to the car sweaty and well exercised, and very pleased with the sights of the day.

Herberton Power Line Species List

* indicates an introduced species.

Gymnosperms

CUPRESSACEAE

Callitris intratropica

Monocots

BORYACEAE

Borya septentrionalis

LAXMANNIACEAE

Laxmannia gracilis



The tiny flower of Laxmannia gracilis

ORCHIDACEAE

Diuris oporina

POACEAE

Mnesithea rottboelioides

Themeda triandra

**Urochloa mosambicensis*

XANTHORRHOACEAE

Xanthorrhoea johnsonii

Eudicots

ASTERACEAE

Coronidium newcastlianum

Xerochrysum bracteatum

CASUARINACEAE

Allocasuarina inophloia

Allocasuarina torulosa

DILLENIACEAE

Hibbertia longifolia

DROSERACEAE

Drosera peltata

FABACEAE

**Chamaecrista rotundifolia*

Crotalaria calycina

GESNERIACEAE

Boea hygroskopica



Boea hygroskopica – Rock Violet

HALORAGACEAE

Gonocarpus acanthocarpus

LENTIBULARIACEAE

Utricularia caerulea

MYRTACEAE

Corymbia citriodora

Eucalyptus cloeziana

Eucalyptus mediocris

Eucalyptus shirleyi

Lophostemon suaveolens

Melaleuca borealis

Melaleuca viminalis

PICRODENDRACEAE

Petalostigma pubescens

RHAMNACEAE

Cryptandra debilis



Cryptandra debilis, a tiny subshrub

STYLIDIACEAE

Stylidium graminifolium

VALE ANN RADKE

Mary Gandini

Ann Radke from Yuruga Native Plant Nursery lost her battle with cancer on April 29th.

Her funeral was held on Tuesday May 6th at Atherton. It was a very moving service attended by family, friends and many people whose lives had been touched by Ann.



Ann Radke with husband Peter.

The many eulogies revealed not only a loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend, but also a very talented person, a first class honours student and an excellent business woman- someone who readily shared her knowledge.

Ann, together with husband Peter, was instrumental in forming both Tablelands and Cairns branches of Society for Growing Australian Plants. They were very active in growing and promoting the use of native Australian plants and, with the establishment of Yuruga Nursery, provided a source for gardeners to obtain desirable species for home planting and revegetation.

The introduction of clonal production of *Eucalyptus* for plantations made them well respected around the world.

At a time when few knew the names and characteristics of the many plants in our region Ann produced a couple of little booklets with hand drawn illustrations, e.g. Cape Flattery, Mclvor River, Irvinebank, and contributed to other publications such as an illustrated reference to many of our Proteaceae. Many plants were discovered, propagated and put into horticulture by Ann and Peter.

We send our condolences to Peter and his family.

Vale Ann, may you rest in peace.



Lilian Suzette Gibbs - An early ascent of Mt Bellenden Ker

Last year, whilst researching the work of Eric Mjöberg, I came across this fascinating paper by L.S. Gibbs. Further investigation revealed that L.S. Gibbs was a Miss Lilian Suzette Gibbs, a talented self-funded botanical explorer, who, amongst other feats, was the first botanist to climb Mt Kinabalu. This paper, edited from volume 55 of the "Journal of Botany British and Foreign" tells the story of Miss Gibbs' ascent of Mt Bellenden Ker in March 1914 in her own words.

In March 1914, proceeding from Dutch New Guinea to Sydney via Macassar, I stopped at Cairns in North Queensland, for the purpose not only of ascending Bellenden Ker, 5400', the highest mountain in the country, but also of spending some weeks at Kuranda, at 1000', on the Barron River, to enable me to form some idea of the vegetation in this outlying portion of the Malayan-Papuan floral region.

Both these localities had been visited by Dr. K. Domin, of Prague, during his long stay for botanogeographical work in North

Queensland. I was indebted to him for a most interesting account of the fine mixed forest, of which in present times the heavy rainfall permits the development in this comparatively small north eastern corner of the Australian continent, but which, as Domin rightly states, "is only a small remainder of a flora spread formerly over large areas, now mostly sunk under the sea".

As March is the height of the summer or rainy season in these parts, it was not considered a very propitious time for work on Bellenden Ker, all previous ascents having been made in the winter or dry season. The relatively high number of new species obtained is possibly attributable to this fact.

A spell of fine weather prevailing at the time decided me to proceed at once to Harvey's Creek in the Mulgrave valley, the base from which the highest or central peak of the Bellenden-Ker range is most accessible. Here, the enterprising landlord of the local hotel very kindly making all arrangements for me, I was enabled to start the

Thursday morning after my arrival, accompanied by Claude, the small son of the house, a very enthusiastic companion, and four natives or "blacks" as they are generally but not very correctly called, to act as guides and carry tent, provisions and possible botanical booty. This last, owing to the sterile nature of the granitic shallow soil, and consequently limited character of the vegetation, proved very much less than my Papuan experiences had led me to anticipate. The altitude of the mountain being low, and a break in the fine weather to be expected to any moment, arrangements were made to spend only one night on the summit.

...[The] lower slopes of this range [were] quite easy to penetrate. Here the undergrowth consists principally of the very general endemic tree-fern *Alsophila rebecca* [*Cyathea rebecca*] with entire pinnules, a *Macrozamia*, and the peculiar *Bowenia spectabilis* in very young examples, only showing simple branches like deltoid fronds in appearance.

A graceful little palm, *Bacularia minor* [*Linospadix minor*], about 3 metres high—with stems as thick as a walking-stick, the red fruit crowded at the apex of flexible peduncles which radiate beyond the leaves,—was a very common representative of an Indo-Malayan and Papuan genus. *Mackinlaya macrosciadea*, a slight undershrub, 2-8 m. high, with light green foliage and flowers and white fruit, was also common—a Papuan species which here reaches the limit of its distribution, recalling the closely allied *Anomopanax arfakensis*, equally abundant in the Arfak Mts. of N.W. New Guinea, in habit and colouring, the latter, however, with green fruit.

Always rising, we crossed two fine torrents with the widespread *Angiopteris evecta* on their banks, also at the limit of its distribution... On a rock overhanging the second stream, at about 1000', the very pretty *Boea hygroskopica*—representing the last outlier of a family widely spread in India, Malaya, China, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands—formed an unexpected patch of bright purple colour.

Behind this stream the ground, always exposed and sterile in character, rose much more steeply, with the *Macrozamia*, *Bacularia* and *Mackinlaya* still conspicuous amongst the scanty undergrowth. Swinging sharply to the left we passed up some slopes of loose dry soil and leaves, open enough to afford a view over the Mulgrave River valley and the hills bordering to the south; then turning sharply to the right we stepped on to a long ridge plateau about 2000', running apparently east to west and quite different in

the character of its vegetation.

A most delicious scent made me hunt round till I found a group of *Randia disperma* [*Crispiloba disperma*], a bushy shrub about 3-4 m. high, with dark green leaves, bearing very few of the delicate long, tubular, white flowers, of which the extreme edges of the corolla lobes are very densely crisped. Slender trees of *Brackenridgea australiana*, with ascending branches covered with the striking fruit, consisting of largish blue-black seeds borne on



red enlarged calyx-leaves; *Garcinia Gibbsiae*, with green flowers turning brown later, and the white-flowered *Symplocos Thwaitesii* were the dominant understory species in flower under the slender forest trees.

On this long ridge *Alsophila Rebecca* persisted, but the smaller *Bacularia Palmeriana* [*Linospadix palmerianus*] from this point

replaces *B. minor*, which it resembles in appearance, the leaves being less pinnate and more approaching the youth form. The comparatively level surface of the plateau ridge was covered with broken granite over which small mosses and epiphytic ferns spread luxuriantly, the handsome *Hymenophyllum Baileyanum* being general. Interspersed amongst the stones *Marattia fraxinea* [*Ptisana oreades*] with *Blechnum Whelani* were the commonest terrestrial ferns, the latter of rosette habit, the fertile fronds, with much narrower pinnae, rising above the larger sterile ones. The predominance of the few species present, combined with the absence of much epiphytic growth on the trunks of the trees, gives a non-tropical character to this undergrowth, of which the general facies is more suggestive of that of Devon or Cornwall woodlands.

Proceeding along the ridge, as the altitude increases the stones become larger and more piled one on top of the other, though still sheltering terrestrial ferns, with clumps of the sedge *Exocarya scleroides*; the spreading *Hymenophyllum Baileyanum* with the *Vittaria pusilla* var. *wooroonooran* [*Scleroglossum wooroonooran*], the widely distributed *Polypodium Billardieri* [*Microsorium pustulatum* subsp. *pustulatum*], and the endemic *P. simplicissimum* [*Crypsinus simplicissimus*], only known from N. Queensland, were abundant on the rocks, occasionally associated with *Liparis reflexa*, a small orchid with cream flowers. At about 3000' the undergrowth became denser and the trees smaller; *Alyxia ilicifolia*, with white flowers, was general, with *A. ruscifolia*—of denser habit and much smaller leaves and orange berries—which persisted to the top,

as did *Symplocos Thwaitesii* and the ubiquitous *Machinlaya*, *Bacularia* and *Alsophila Rebecca*.

After some climbing we emerged on to another shoulder of the mountain at 4000', on the ultimate spur of which the camping ground was reached, where the natives, after putting up the tent, expeditiously erected for themselves one of their neat "gunyas" or shelters, which look like inverted bowls. In this case the ribs were made of "lawyer canes," *Calamus australis* (Mart.) Becc.—which are about 3-4 cm. thick—arranged lattice-wise, tied with creepers, and then interwoven with palm leaves. Condemned to perpetual roving by the prevailing sterility of a country which in its whole length and breadth does not produce a single plant-food capable of cultivation, these natives, owing to the necessities of the nomadic habit, have never evolved a more stable form of dwelling... Even in these hills the native Australian tribes were not helped by the heavy rainfall, as the slopes are too barren to admit of any cultivation, even had the ubiquitous sweet potato of other tropical countries been available.

Near the camp a group of a very fine Palm, *Arania appendiculata* [*Oraniopsis appeniculata*], up to 5 metres in height—the leaves 3-4 m. long, with silver undersides to the pinnae, showed some specimens just coming into flower, but I could only find male plants, though Dr. Beccari informs me the female alone had been previously collected.

The next morning we started early for the summit, leaving one of the boys behind to keep camp, as cassowaries, wallaby, and even megapodes, or "brush turkeys"... The final cone consists of a mass of rock, overgrown with vegetation quite different in type from that of the lower levels, though many of the prevailing species are identical... It forms a wind-swept

scrub very like the plant-covering of Lord Howe's Island, some of the species indeed, like *Alyxia ilicifolia*, being common to both formations, while the generic relationship is very close.

The small trees grow too closely together to allow of much undergrowth... The dwarfed and scrubby trees were still largely composed of the two *Alyxias* already mentioned; *Eugenia erythrodora* [*Syzygium erythrodorum*], from 4500' to the top, had largish flowers of a charming rose-pink colour; *Mackinlaya macrosiadea* and many examples of the small *Bacularia* about 1 m. high, still fruiting, but only showing the youth form of leaf. The palms, *Orania appendiculata* and *Calyptrocalyx australasica* [*Laccospadix australasicus*] ran up almost to the top; *Alsophila rebecca* was still abundant, while the handsome *Alsophila robertsiana* [*Cyathea robertsiana*], 2 m. high, was seen in one example.

At 5000' the famous *Dracophyllum sayeri*, peculiar to this mountain, the only representative in Queensland of a genus widely distributed throughout New Zealand, with many stout much branched stems, formed a large part of the dense shrubbery marking the last 500'; the fine cream flower-heads, with pink bracts and the red fruit recalled *D. latifolium* A. Cunn. of the mixed forest regions of New Zealand. This genus will probably yet be found in New Guinea [it has not been recorded from the island].

Drimys oblonga [*Hypsophila halleyana*] with red flowers was characteristic of the extreme summit with *Alyxia ruscifolia* and a *Psychotria* sp. not properly in flower. The stems of the small trees composing this dense scrub growth were clothed in small mosses and hepatics, associated with the abundant little white *Dendrobium Taylora* [*Cadetia*

taylora] and the minute *Bulbophyllum Lilianae* with white petals and yellow labellum, growing tightly round the smallest branches. On the summit a small space had been cleared exposing the granite, where a large clump of *Gahnia psittacorum* [*Gahnia sieberiana*], so common in the Arfak Mts. of N.W. New Guinea, grew by the rock.

It was about 9 a.m. when we arrived, but there was only a restricted view, which soon clouded over, down the Mulgrave valley to the sea, and up it in the Mt. Bartle Frere direction. In the inevitable bottle our names, with those of the three boys who accompanied us, were written on the back of Mjöberg's record of his ascent, this indefatigable investigator having been the last to visit the mountain. The mentality of the Australian natives is supposed to be one of the lowest in the human scale, yet these men asked me to put down the name of the boy left at the camp, as it was not his fault he was not there as well. Among the records of previous ascents I was interested to see Domin's card, but, being heavily glazed, it was already turning black, and had half perished. Dr. Mjöberg had made interesting notes on the temperature and atmospheric conditions prevailing at the time of his ascent.

Threatening clouds closing round did not allow much time to hunt for *Rhododendron lochae*, the only representative of this typical Malayan and Papuan genus in Australia; however, I heard later ... that it is limited to the summit of one of the two other peaks of this range. We hurried down to the tent and had only just struck camp when rain fell in torrents, and persisted for the rest of the day, incidentally mobilising battalions of leeches. We returned to Harvey's Creek at about 1 p.m., when the plants obtained were arranged and packed, and I left the next morning for Kuranda.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Cairns Branch

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

SUNDAY 21 JUNE 2015

This month we're looking at the weed control and rehabilitation done by the rangers of Jaragun on the lower Russell River. Jaragun is lead by Dennis Ah Kee and Liz Owen, and we'll be visiting both the nursery and the rehab site **We have TWO possible meeting points:**

10 am – Meet at 45 Jamieson Close Gordonvale to inspect the Jaragun Nursery. To get there, head to Gordonvale along the Bruce Highway, then turn on to the Gillies Highway and head to Atherton. At the roundabout, turn right, then left onto Dempsey St, then first right onto Jamieson Close.

12 noon – For those that like the more usual meeting time, meet at Rotary Park at Babinda Creek at 12pm. Heading south from Cairns, when you reach Babinda, turn right and cross the railway tracks just past the station. Turn right at the T intersection, then head down Howard Kennedy Drive to the Babinda Creek bridge. Rotary Park is just before the bridge, on the left. Meet at the shelter next to the playground.

Tablelands Branch

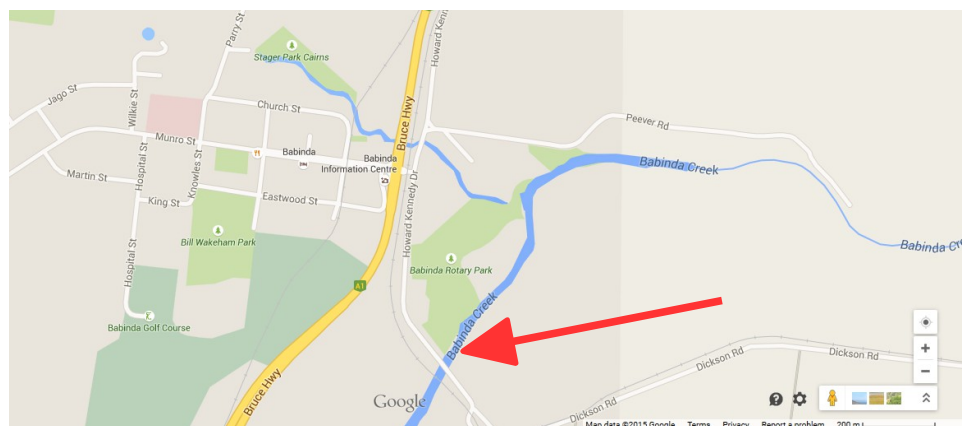
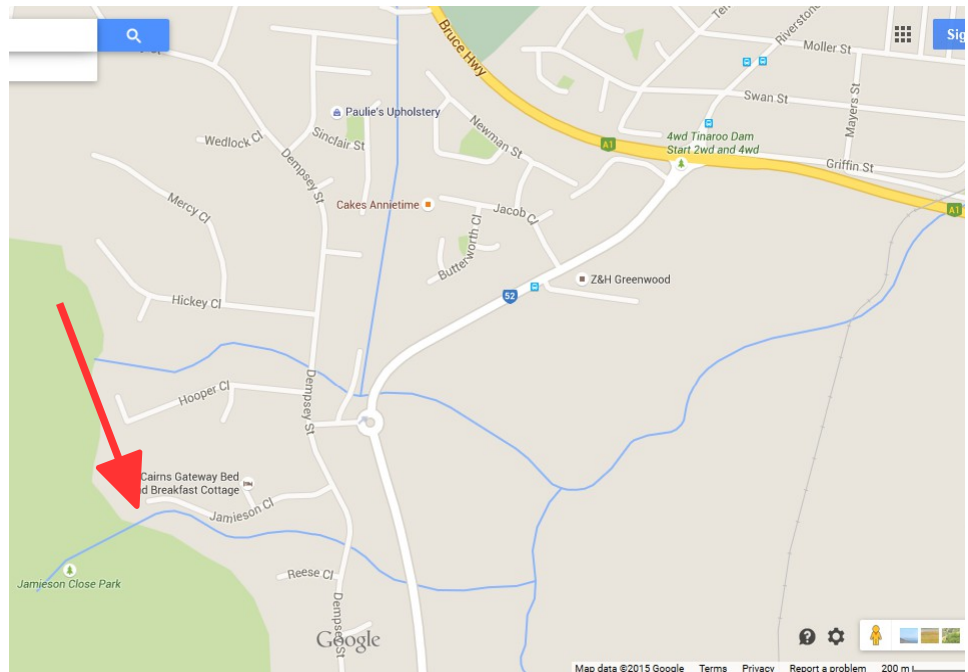
Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of the month.

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

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.



SGAP CAIRNS 2015 COMMITTEE

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