

SGAP CAIRNS NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2017
NEWSLETTER 172

Society for Growing Australian Plants, Cairns Branch
www.sgapcairns.qld.gov.au

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SGAP Cairns (Rob, Trudi, Tony, Coralie) walking the streets of Cooktown. .

COOKTOWN BOTANIC GARDENS: PREPARING FOR THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF COOK'S VOYAGE

Stuart Worboys

For the last 20 years or so, Tablelands and Cairns branches of the Society for Growing Australian Plants have dedicated a dry season weekend to the Cooktown Botanic Gardens. Members have travelled to Cooktown from Atherton, Cairns and places further afield for a weekend of voluntary work in the historic gardens:

bed, and sharing expertise with the CBG curators. Unfortunately, it's been a couple of years since our last visit, and the CBG, although not entirely neglected, has suffered from changes in priority.

In 2016, a new curator (and old friend) commenced work: Tony Roberts. Tony and his crew of two have made a great start in cleaning up the CBG - overgrown beds have been cleaned out and mulched, sightlines have been recovered, and implementation of a master plan is underway. Key tasks in the revamp of the gardens are to prepare an inventory of existing plantings and plan for nature walks through the surrounding bushland of the Gardens Reserve. But in a shire one and a half times the size of Tasmania, with a population of just a few thousand, resources to undertake these tasks are limited.

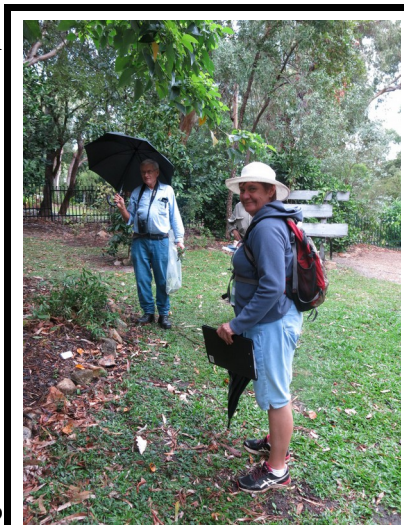
There is a clear timeline for bringing the CBG up to standard. Just three years from now the nation will celebrate the 250th anniversary of James Cook's first voyage of discovery. Cooktown will be a national focus of these celebrations, both as the site where *His Majesty's Bark the Endeavour* was beached for repairs for seven weeks, and as the site of the pioneering event in Australian science - the first comprehensive plant survey of any place on the continent by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander. The CBG is the obvious location to recognise and celebrate their botanical work.

For our crew of ten, Tony had laid out two jobs - gardens inventory, and identifying plants of significance along the Gardens Reserve trails. Saturday dawned overcast, and cool drizzly showers continued throughout the day. For the inventory, we broke into two groups, and wandered the gardens, methodically listing the species within each of the roughly 27 beds.

The CBG contains a mix of native and exotic plantings, as well as patches of native rainforest and managed native woodlands. The main lawn of the Gardens is dotted with shapely *Corymbia tessellaris*, and we were pleased to spot *Dockrillia rigida* in flowers on their trunks. Tony pointed out the state floral emblem, *Dendrobium bigibbum*, safely growing high in the trees, out of reach of thieving climbers. We identified numerous introduced species that added colour and exotic texture to the garden beds (but unfortunately often go weedy): *Heliconia psittacorum*, *Holmskioldia sanguinea*, *Syngonium podophyllum*, *Epipremnum pinnatum* cv *Aureum*, and *Mangifera indica*. Our botanist/historian, Rob Jago, was able to point out species collected by Banks and Solander: *Neofabricia myrtifolia*, *Wollastonia uniflora* and *Cyclophyllum rostellatum* (and correcting a few mislabels along the way); as well as common species that inexplicably don't appear amongst their collections: *Melaleuca leucadendra* for instance.

On Sunday, we met at the gardens at 8:30 sharp, prepared for some serious hiking. Tony led the way up Hope Street towards the lighthouse on Grassy Hill. Near the top, a small carpark and a sign marks the beginning of the planned nature trail, through the Gardens Reserved and down to Cherry Tree Bay.

The bouldery hill is covered by a low woodland of *Eucalyptus brassiana* (Cape York Red Gum), and in the warm sun a rank fragrance filled the air. Rob pointed out the source of this smell - an innocuous looking low shrub called *Mallotus ficifolius*, but commonly called Smell-of-



Rob and Bianca take stock of the Cooktown Botanic Gardens.

the-Bush, or more poetically, Possum Piss Bush. The understorey was full of common plants of the northern coastal woodlands - *Grevillea glauca*, with its massive brown follicles, *Dodonaea polyandra*, the peculiar Hookey Grass, *Ancistrachne uncinulata*, *Atractocarpus sessilis* and *Cycas media* subsp. *banksii*. The ubiquitous Wonga Vine, *Pandorea pandorana* was putting on a grand show, with flowers cascading from vines along the track. Climbing down the hill, we thankfully spotted and dodged a wasp nest the size of a football. Nearby, a small non-descript shrub was flowering modestly in the undergrowth - this turned out to be an undescribed species: *Samadera* sp. *Tozer Range*, which reaches its southernmost limit at Cooktown.

Near the beach, a large tree, some 70 cm diameter at breast height, had us puzzled for some time, until a lucky throw of a stick brought down a shower of leaves. These identified the tree as *Celtis paniculata*, the largest Rob had seen.

We joined the waiting speedsters on the beach, and continued along the track, up a steep hill and over to Finch Bay. Along the way we were distracted by spectacular views of the Coral Sea and the rocky granite coastline. More odd plants caught our attention - an odd furry vine that may or may not have been *Hypserpa decumbens*; *Drynaria quercifolia*, a massive lithophytic fern; and the blue green leaves of *Acacia crassicarpa*.

There was much more to see, but time was running short, and a long drive was awaiting me, so I said my farewells to the group and headed back to Cairns. I

In just two days at the gardens, we had compiled a list of over 200 species we had found in the gardens' 29 beds, and identified flora of interest along the Gardens Reserve Nature Trails. The species inventory data will be added to a database, and used to correctly label and manage plants into the future.

The next day, Tony sent through a message thanking SGAP for its contribution:

"Thank you for the incredible contributions that you made to our Gardens. Two days of work by... the team has advanced our progress toward being a 'proper' botanic gardens by months or more probably years."



Coralie taking inventory of the Rainforest gardens



Trudi stopping by the office/depot



*It's unusual to see a cycad (*Cycas media* subsp. *banksii*) with three branches*



Built right next to the track, this wasps nest was a trap for the unwary.



Acacia polystachya



Pandorea pandorana



*Thank-you letter from the Cook Shire Council
Chief Executive Officer*

Excursion Report No. 2

SGAP Cairns visit to Cooktown Botanic Gardens

Tony Roberts

At a general meeting of the Cairns Branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP), it was decided to recommence annual volunteer visits to Cooktown Botanic Gardens. Although I am currently the president of Cairns SGAP, it was not my idea however I fully supported it. (Several years ago the annual trips north were curtailed due to the advancing age of the members).

The work that I planned for the group was to:

1. Catalogue the plants growing within Cooktown Botanic Gardens
2. Note any plants that were incorrectly labelled
3. Identify any weed species so that we could remove them
4. Catalogue the plants along the Grassy Hill/Cherry Tree Bay/Finch Bay/Botanic Gardens trails.
5. Identify specimens of particular significance (e.g. Banks and Solander, Vera Scarth-Johnson and/or Guugu Yimithirr plants)
6. Collect voucher specimens of plants not recorded from the area for the Qld Herbarium.

The group included two very experienced botanists, Robert (Bob) Jago and Stuart (Stu) Worboys. Both of these gentlemen earn their living conducting plant surveys. The amount of work that they accomplished in three days would have taken my staff and me many months to do. The remainder of the group took notes and recorded the plant names.

Saturday was a particular challenging day with drizzle and showers for most of the day. Despite the unpleasant weather, they continued to work tirelessly.

By Monday morning, most of the CBG had been catalogued, and a very comprehensive list of plants for the Botanic Reserve trails was achieved.

Friday 14 July 2017

Most volunteers arrived in the early afternoon. They were given a basic induction to the site so that they could use the facilities in the Botanic Gardens Compound. Two couples set up camp adjacent Queens Oval, close to the practice nets, and the other two checked in to their respective accommodation.

Once the accommodation was organised, the group conducted an initial survey of the Botanic Gardens to Finch Bay walking track. It was getting dark by the time they returned to the Gardens so filtered away for dinner. The Curator and botanist Robert Jago held a meeting to discuss the methodology that would be employed over the following days to maximise the value of the visit.

Saturday 15 July 2017

The group met at Nature's Powerhouse at 8am and after a comprehensive induction, was divided into two teams. Team 1 was led by Rob (Robert Jago) and Team 2 by Stu (Stuart Worboys). The Botanic Gardens was divided into 26 numbered areas and Team 1 tackled the even numbered areas and Team 2 the odd. Despite constant drizzle and patchy rain throughout the day most areas were covered. Species were identified, listed and improvements suggested. As it became too dark to continue, the volunteers headed off to bathe and the Curator set up for a BBQ on the deck of Nature's Powerhouse. The BBQ wrapped up at about 8pm.

Sunday 16 July 2017

An 8:30 start. The entire group set off to Grassy Hill, some by car but most on foot, to the start of the Cherry Tree Bay walking track. The aim was for the two botanists to catalogue the plants along the track to facilitate (eventually) the signing of an interpretive trail.

The going was a bit slow for some members who took off at their own pace while the botanists carefully recorded every plant species that they came across. Any plant that was not immediately identifiable was collected for later analysis. The group recording the plants eventually caught up with the faster group at Cherry Tree Bay at around midday. Two members however had returned to their campsite as they had been stung by paper wasps and wanted to treat their wounds. They had not noticed a football sized nest, adjacent the trail at waist height.

Stu and Joe headed off at around 2 to get back to Cairns before dark; the majority of the remainder enjoyed lunch at Nature's Powerhouse then ventured up along the newly formed Quarry Track, to see if there were any new plants there. Of course there were several. On completion of that survey, some of the group dined at the Bowls Club while the Curator and Rob went over the notes and commenced correlating the data.

Notice from Barbara Collins

I have a few seedlings which have sprouted up under my trees. I am hoping someone may like to call and remove them for growing out for whatever purpose. There are some *Sterculia quadrifida*, *Melicope rubra*; *Sygyzium* spp. and *Ochrosia elliptica*. barbcollshell@hotmail.com

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

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. The outing is on the 13th August, to Taravale, which is west of the Paluma Range. Met at Paluma Village Green at 9.30am and proceed to the Taravale turn off on the Hidden Valley Road. Taravale is owned by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy who have given us permission to visit on condition that we provide them with rego's and numbers attending, so please let John Elliott (email: jw-elliott@aapt.net.au. Phone: 47287302) know who is going as soon as you can.

Cairns Branch

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

Sunday 20 August 2017. Harvey Creek. Meet at the picnic area on the creek at 12 noon. The closest public toilets are: 1. North, at Green Patch at Gordonvale which is grossly overused, and 2. South – a fairly new one opposite the Babinda cemetery. Pauline has been in touch with the property owner and he will leave a key for me so that we can drive a short way up through the paddock. He is insistent that we don't spook the cattle.

Directions: Head south from Cairns along the Bruce Highway. Pass through Fishery Falls, then Deeral. Not far south of Deeral you cross Harvey Creek. Turn left at Ellis Road, then left again at Bunda Street/Harvey Creek Road. Follow this down to the low bridge across Harvey Creek.

