

SGAP CAIRNS NEWSLETTER

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Society for Growing Australian Plants, Cairns Branch

www.sgapcairns.qld.gov.au

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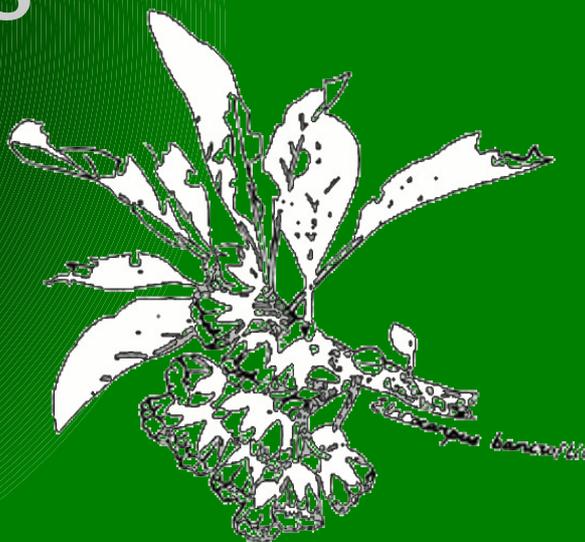
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October 2017 Excursion - A River Cruise to Russell Heads

By Don Lawie

Our October excursion was a trip with a difference. Its destination was Russell Heads, about 40 km southeast of Cairns. But there is no road to Russell Heads; the beachside settlement can be only accessed from the sea or from the Mulgrave or Russell Rivers. The rivers flow together about 1 ½ km from the sea then proceed majestically along a wide, shallow estuary to enter the Coral Sea across a dangerous bar, passing The



Cairns SGAP at Russell Heads - standing on the sand-filled groynes that protect the settlement from erosion

Heads which occupy a finger of sand on the south bank.

Our members Patsy and Peter have a family holiday home at The Heads and had offered to host us for the day. We assembled at Bellenden Ker landing and were met by a flotilla of boats skippered by Patsy, Peter, their son Jack and nephew Peter A. The tide was right, we were allotted vessels and set off for the 6 km trip down river.

Patsy, being an accomplished teacher, had devised a quiz *en route* to test our alertness and botanical knowledge. We had to spot 10 separate plants and

mark them on the map she supplied to each of us. This seems easy but we were faced with a wall of vegetation on each side, bristling with palms, vines, orchids, mangroves, giant trees, giant ferns – in fact just about every type of lowland Wet Tropic plant one could imagine. Myriads of Golden Orchids (*Dendrobium discolor*) in late flower were just one feature and our boat captains had to force to slow, stop, turn about and pause so that all could gaze their fill at nature's profligate display.

We enjoyed a convivial morning tea beachside of the house, sitting at a long table in comfy chairs under the shade of a Beach Almond, *Terminalia catappa*, whilst enjoying the sea view and the indolent ambience of a beach holiday. Peter and Patsy were perfect hosts and we instantly felt at home and welcome. Plans for the day were formulated: first a walk to the spit at the River's Head, then lunch and a stroll through the coastal forest to make notes of vegetation types and identify a number of trees which Patsy was keen to name.

We walked north along the beach, noting the usual frontal dune vegetation of fat leaved Sea Lettuce *Scaevola taccada* with their pretty, hand-like white flowers, flowering River Lilies *Crinum pedunculatum*, struggling clumps of *Dianella* sp., a few coconut trees *Cocos nucifera* and a ground-holding screen of Beach She-Oak *Casuarina equisetifolia*. More sand binding was effected by vines – *Vigna maritima* and *Ipomoea pes-caprae* abetted by the swift subsurface stolon advance of Pineapple Sedge *Cyperus pedunculatus*. The entire spit was eroded by wave action some years ago and residents fought back with giant sand filled groynes which look like stranded whales.

Back to base for lunch and chats followed by an exploration of the track which follows the water

supply line (another community effort) for 1 ½ km to a freshwater creek. The track runs behind the tree clothed hind dunes and a swampy inlet of the Anabranch which runs behind the houses. Sandy loam ground and a high rainfall produce a healthy coastal forest system. Low areas are indicated by *Pandanus*, *Crinum* and *Melaleuca* stands with drier stretches supporting a wide variety of trees and shrubs. Plants noted included *Cycas media*, *Acacia flavescens*, *Terminalia arenicola*, *Corymbia tessellaris*, and many others. Some unusual trees: Tar Tree *Semecarpus australiensis* – related to Mango but with a caustic sap in the leaves; Canary Beech *Huberantha nitidissima* (formerly *Polyalthia nitidissima*) which stood out from the drab plants with its bright green foliage; *Cupaniopsis foveolata* with unusual pinnate leaves and leaflets with serrated edges. Further along, Stuart and Patsy found a stand of the noted New Guinea timber tree *Kwila*, *Intsia bijuga* and the standout plant for the day *Ximenia americana* was bearing delicious fruit – but Stuart counselled caution since the leaves had an odour of benzaldehyde/cyanide [*Editor's note: Various websites report the fruit is quite edible, but don't chew the seed*]. Burning these leaves is reputed to be effective as an insecticide.

I had by that time turned back to camp to join the Grandpas' Discussion Group but the others persevered until deterred by rising tide – a reminder that our tide-influenced day was drawing to an end. The travellers straggled back for afternoon tea, more chats then a reluctant departure in our small-ship flotilla. A day to long remember, filled with good company, good scenery and good botanising.

And Patsy's plant identification quiz? None of us got them all!

Species List

Compiled by Stuart Worboys. "R" indicates species seen along the Russell River, "T" indicates species seen around Russell Heads township and along the beach, "P" indicates species seen along the pipeline track to Freshwater. * is used to mark exotic species.

FERNS AND FERN ALLIES

ASPLENIACEAE

Asplenium nidus^P

POLYPODIACEAE

Drynaria rigidula^P (basket fern)
Platyserium hillii^{R,T}

SCHIZAEACEAE

Schizaea dichotoma^P

CONIFERS AND CYCADS

CYCADACEAE

Cycas media^P

PODOCARPACEAE

Podocarpus grayae^{R,P}

BASAL ANGIOSPERMS

ANNONACEAE

Huberantha nitidissima^P (canary beech)
Melodorum leichhardtii^P

LAURACEAE

Cryptocarya cunninghamii^P (coconut laurel)
Cryptocarya hypospodia^P (northern laurel)
Cryptocarya triplinervis var. *riparia*^P
Cryptocarya ?vulgaris^P

PIPERACEAE

Piper sp.^P

MONOCOTS

AMARYLLIDACEAE

Crinum pedunculatum^{T,P}

ARACEAE

Epipremnum pinnatum^P

ARECACEAE

Ptychosperma macarthurii^R
(Macarthur palm)

* *Cocos nucifera*^T (coconut_

CYPERACEAE

Cyperus pedunculatus^T

FLAGELLARIACEAE

Flagellaria indica^{R,P}

HEMEROCALLIDACEAE

Dianella caerulea^{T,P}

ORCHIDACEAE

Dendrobium discolor^T (golden orchid)

PANDANACEAE

Pandanus sp. Russell River^R

POACEAE

* *Melinis repens*^T

SMILACACEAE

Smilax australis^P
Smilax calophylla^P

EUDICOTS

ANACARDIACEAE

Buchanania arborescens^P
Euroschinus falcatus var. *falcatus*^P
* *Mangifera indica*^R
Semecarpus australiensis^P (tar tree)

APOCYNACEAE

Alstonia muelleriana (hard milkwood)
Alyxia spicata^P
Cerbera floribunda^{R,P} (cassowary plum)
Melodinus australis^P
Parsonsia velutina^P
* *Plumeria 'Cultivar'*^T (frangipani)
Tabernaemontana pandacaqui^{T,P}

ARALIACEAE

Polyscias australianum^P
Schefflera actinophylla^{R,T,P} (umbrella tree)

ASTERACEAE

* *Ageratum conyzoides*^P
Coronidium rupicola^P
* *Emilia sonchifolia*^T
* *Sphagneticola trilobata*^P
* *Tridax procumbens*^R
Wollastonia biflora

BURSERACEAE

Canarium australianum var. *australianum*^P

CASUARINACEAE

Casuarina equisetifolia^T

COMBRETACEAE

Terminalia cattappa^T
Terminalia microcarpa^P

CONVOLVULACEAE

Ipomoea pes-caprae subsp. *brasiliensis*^T

DILLENIACEAE

Dillenia alata^R
Tetracera nordtiana

CLUSIACEAE

Calophyllum sil^R
Calophyllum inophyllum^T

FABACEAE

Acacia crassicarpa^P
Acacia flavescens^P
Acacia polystachya^P
Austrosteenisia stipularis^R
(northern blood vine)
Derris trifoliata^P
Intsia bijuga^P (kwila)
Millettia sp. *McIlwraith Range*^{R,P}
Millettia pinnata^T
Vigna maritima^T

GOODENIACEAE

Scaevola taccada^T

LAMIACEAE

Clerodendrum inerme^R
Premna serratifolia^T

LECYTHIDIACEAE

Planchonia careya^P (cocky apple)

LYTHRACEAE

Sonneratia ?alba^R

MALVACEAE

Hibiscus tiliaceus^R (cottonwood)
Thespesia populnea^{T,P}

MENISPERMACEAE

Hypserpa laurina^P

MORACEAE

Ficus microcarpa^P
Ficus opposita^P

MYRTACEAE

Corymbia tessellaris^{T,P} (Moreton Bay ash)
Lithomyrtus obtusa^P
Melaleuca leucadendra^P
Syzygium cormiflorum^P (bumpy satinash)
Syzygium hemilamprum subsp. *hemilamprum*^R

OLACACEAE

Ximения americana ^P

OLEACEAE

Chionanthus ramiflora ^P (northern olive)

Jasminum didymum ^P

Jasminum simplicium subsp. *australiense* ^P (native jasmine)

PITTOSPORACEAE

Pittosporum venulosum ^P

PHYLLANTHACEAE

Breynia stipitata ^P

PROTEACEAE

Cardwellia sublimis ^R (northern silky oak)

Darlingia darlingiana ^P

Persoonia falcata ^P (tropical geebung)

RHAMNACEAE

Alphitonia excelsa ^P

RHIZOPHORACEAE

Bruguiera gymnorhiza ^P (orange mangrove)

Carallia brachiata ^P

RUBIACEAE

Aidia racemosa ^P (Archer cherry)

Atractocarpus fitzalanii subsp. *fitzalanii* ^{R,P}

Morinda citrifolia ^P

Psychodra odorata var. *foveolata* ^P

SAPINDACEAE

Cupaniopsis foveolata ^P

Guioa acutifolia ^P (glossy tamarind)

SAPOTACEAE

* *Manilkara kauki* ^T (wongai plum)

Planchonella obovata ^P



Coronidium rupicola, growing on the back dunes behind Russell Heads beach. A remarkably adaptable plant, it also grows not far from the peak of Bartle Frere.



In my humble opinion, one of our most beautiful native orchids, *Dendrobium discolor*. Encouraged by the locals, it grows in profusion, and to a great size, at Russell Heads.



More *Dendrobium discolor*



The fruit of *Ximения americana* are reported to be edible.



This large *Pandanus*, common along the lower Russell River, may be an unnamed species.



The disturbingly hairy, but sweetly scented flowers of *Ximения americana*.

A Banks and Solander mystery resolved

Some years ago, Rob Jago pointed out a strange anomaly amongst the Cooktown collections of Banks and Solander. The out-of-place species was *Chionanthus axillaris*, a small evergreen tree in the olive family, Oleaceae. Banks and Solander collected the type specimen from the Endeavour River, but the majority of specimens of tagged with that name were later collected in mountain forests: places like Paluma and the Carbine Tableland. So how do we reconcile Banks and Solander's coastal specimen with the predominance of the species at high altitude? Was their specimen an outlier of the mountain species, perhaps seeking a little coastal sun and salt air?

A resolution to this problem has come quite recently from the Queensland Herbarium. It turns out the mountain species was recognised by Baron von Mueller as a distinct entity over 140 years ago. He described a hairless, evergreen tree collected by Dallachy from Rockingham Bay, and called it *Chionanthus acuminiger*. When you look at the the coastal Banks and Solander specimen, the leaves seem larger, and the flowering stems are quite hairy compared to the almost hairless peduncles of the specimens from the mountains. The Queensland Herbarium has provided a neat key to distinguish between the two species:

- Petioles 2-3 mm long, leaf blades with 5-8 pairs of lateral veins; inflorescences and calyces glabrous or with sparse hairs. NE Qld (Wet Tropics) - *Chionanthus acuminiger*.
- Petioles 3.5-6 mm long; leaf blades with 9-11 pairs of lateral veins; inflorescences and calyces pubescent. E Cape York (Cooktown northwards) - *Chionanthus axillaris*.



A magnified image of a tiny fruit on the Banks and Solander type specimen of Chionanthus axillaris, held in the British Museum. The stem of this fruit is hairy, unlike that of Chionanthus acuminiger.

Flowering in November



The beautiful bird-pollinated flowers of native cardamon, Hornstedtia scottiana



Strange inflorescences of Epipremnum pinnatum, rarely seen high in the canopy, but easily visible at Ma:Mu canopy walk



Black bean, Castanospermum australe

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.

Wednesday 8 November 2017. Greg Calvert will speak on sub-Antarctic plants, followed by Keith Townsend with a "Tech Spot" Part 5 of Reproduction Strategies.

Sunday 12 November 2017. Taking a look at the Cape York section (the cooler area) of Anderson Park / Anderson Botanic Gardens. Meet at 9am under the rain tree at the back of Mundingburra Primary School.

Cairns Branch

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

Sunday 19 October 2017. Final meeting for the year at David and Mary Gandini's, 3 Moowooga Street, Earlville (right at the top of Balaclava Road - see map below. Meet 12 noon. **Bring a plate to share and a plant to raffle.**

