



Society for Growing Australian Plants

Cairns Branch Inc.

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By riverboat to Russell Heads - September excursion

Helen Lawie

Thick jungle grew from the river's edge up to the mountain ridge. It looked impenetrable but recognizable shapes and colours formed themselves into familiar looking trees draped with vines. To our left mangroves stretched along the bank, blue hills behind them contrasting with the stark white of the clouds. Our boats slowed at the pier and we disembarked at the slice of heaven known as Russell Heads. Morning tea in the Penny's beach front garden was enjoyed under the shade of a *Calophyllum inophyllum*. Known for being cyclone resistant, SGAP members can testify to their stoic survival after Cyclone Yasi devastated Cardwell's foreshore trees along with much of the township.

Our walk took us along the track to Freshwater, then angled into the scrub and towards the base of the Graham Range. The long-term local knowledge of our hosts the Penny family, was invaluable as they described the action of ocean water and flood water in the landscape and we

saw the evidence in the plants around us.



Exploring the Freshwater Track, near the foot of the Graham Range.

Of interest were Swamp Lilies, *Crinum pedunculatum*, lining the sandy path on a raised bank. The lilies marked the high reaches of king tides on one side and the wet season swamp on the other. Their large multiple blooms invited a study in flower morphology, Pauline pointing out the dorsifixed (versatile) attachment of the anther. These anthers are attached to the filament at their midpoint and swing back and forth as if on a hinge, easily able to brush pollen onto unsuspecting flower visitors. Branched comb ferns (*Schizaea dichotoma*) were innocuous in the loose undergrowth, until Stuart noticed they were crowned with dusty brown spores. Numerous young Cassowary plums *Cerbera floribunda* formed a grove, showing they are indeed as comfortable in hot sandy sea level conditions as they are tucked in next to rainforest streams.



Once into the rainforest it was very easy to move around over the thick layer of *Terminalia* leaves. No impassable thickets of waitawhile, but plenty of evidence of feral pig diggings. The gentle slope rose away from the dry swamp bed and larger well spaced trees were interspersed with plenty of interesting lower story items. The granite boulders at the base of the hill marked our terminus and we spread out admiring all around us. Native Crotons (*Codiaeum variegatum*) were abundant, their flowers tiny perfect starbursts. Returning by the same path we were grateful for Patsy's preparation picking out path markers provided along the way. A splash in the ocean (one eye out for crocs) was one way to cool off before lunch.

A visit to neighbour's garden was a bonus following lunch. Built on sand and subject to constant sea breeze, it was a wonder to encounter. Mulched coconut husks were barricaded into raised garden beds. A tropical bounty of fruit from granadilla to feijoa and

pineapple, and so much more. Flowers on a delicate frangipani and a lush eucalypt were among the ornamental highlights.

All too soon we were walking back to the pier past a property for sale. Back in boats our hosts had timed it well, balancing the tide height against the accumulation of Goldsborough topsoil clogging the access channel known as 'The Anabranche'. As the river air cooled us, we felt complete confidence in the navigation of our pilots and musings on river life began. Surely, I was not alone in taking a headcount and making the rough calculations for a syndicate to purchase a property for sale.

A comprehensive plant list is available on the Cairns Branch website and has been added to on successive visits, see <http://www.sgapcairns.org.au/Plants.html> We used a previous one to assist us with plant ID's. Perhaps some swotting up would be in order for our October trip to the mangroves? See Mangrove Boardwalk list.

Tree planting at Almaden in memory of Nellie Ryan

On Wednesday, 28 September, a gathering of Almaden locals, relatives of Nellie Ryan and well-wishers applauded Mareeba's Mayor Angela Toppin as she planted a young native baubinia (*Lysiphyllum hookeri*) at Almaden Cemetery.

The tree commemorates Nellie Ryan, who died of tuberculosis in Almaden in 1904. Nellie was a stranger to the town, but the people's sympathy was expressed by the entire population attending her funeral. At that time, Nellie's family commissioned an impressive headstone made with a verse which concluded:

"you never forgotten will be, while your grave marks the spot by that white blossomed tree".

Now 118 years since Nellie died, the original, white-blossomed tree is long gone. The tree planted this week by Mayor Toppin has revived Nellie's memory and re-tied the link between the outback town of Almaden and Nellie's family.



Don Lawie (3rd from right) and Mareeba Shire Mayor Angela Toppin, with relatives of Nellie Ryan at Almaden Cemetery.

Father and daughter duo Donald and Marion Lawie coordinated the tree planting at the cemetery three other locations in Almaden. These plantings signify that the welcome to strangers is still strong in this resilient outback town and celebrate the

community links to be found across the Savannah country.

A commemorative plaque, funded by local state MP Shane Knuth, was placed at the cemetery with the Mayor's tree.

Helen Lawie

That was the story published in The Express newspaper and online via ABC. But behind the scenes complications played out that those familiar with growing plants in the tropics would relate to. Firstly, the seeds collected from an impressive *Lysiphyllum hookeri* in the main street of Mount Surprise were germinated and cared for, only to mysteriously die. Was it too wet? So, Donald requested new seed and NPQ Seed Bank Curator Bethlea Bell posted them up.

Once germinated they survived and were potted up several times over the following year. They were put out to sun harden (not easy in East Russell) when goats attacked! Luckily the neighbour's escaped goats preferred Pauline's flowers to natives, but back into the protective greenhouse the *Lysiphyllum*'s went.



Lysiphyllum hookeri

Then came a site visit to Almaden by Marion and Donald, permission from Council, local's requesting additional trees, and of course the Council inspection and decision on where to dig a hole at the cemetery*. SGAP connections came in handy to find a local manufacturer for the plaque on a planting spike, which come in a confounding variety of styles and prices. The Queens Memorial Day public holiday, which many Cairns residents turned into a four-day long weekend, added some last minute drama to the deadline.

Almaden caravan park manager Karen, who has brought colour and interest into the gardens there, advised chicken wire as the best way to protect young plants from rabbits and bettongs. The rabbits graze rapaciously but tend to avoid some natives, while bettongs target anything left with trademark ringbarking. There are few mature *Lysiphyllums* around Almaden: pastoralists saw they inhibited grass growth and removed them. Ironically in times of drought when grass turns to dust the native bauhinia branches could be used as fodder. Karen and the Almaden railway station keeper will be care takers for the trees. This is a key component for the tree's longevity.

In addition to Donald being a Cairns SGAP Life Member, he is also Vice President of the Mulgrave Shire Historical Society. Connections here led to family history experts and locating family members who attended on the day. Small potted *Lysiphyllums* were given away on the day to 'Nellie Rellies'. Finally it should be noted that Pauline Lawie is Don's Ginger Rogers, who is with him at every point in the journey, keeping step backwards and in heels.

Recent plantings at Tamarind Gardens van park Almaden include: Smouldering Red *Corymbia ptychocarpa x ficifolia*, Hairpin Banksia *Banksia spinulosa*, Roaring Meg Ebony *Diospyros rheophila*, Weeping Lily Pilly *Syzygium floribundum*.

* No actual digging included. Thanks for 4x holes Mark Olsen!

What's Happening?

Cairns

16 October 2022. Explore the newly opened Jack Barnes Boardwalk. Meet 12 noon at the Cairns Fun Ship Playground at the far northern end of the Esplanade. There are shaded seats and toilets here. After lunch and a meeting, we'll drive to the recently opened Jack Barnes Boardwalk to explore this short, but fascinating wander through the diverse mangrove communities of the Barron Delta. Bring sandfly repellent, sunscreen and big hats!

20 November 2022. Davies Creek - start of the Kahlpahlmin Rock Track

Early December (date to be confirmed). Home of Helen Lawie and Mark Olsen. Christmas breakup.

Townsville

NPQ Townsville normally meets at 7 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month, February to November. The meeting venue is the Oonoonba Community Hall, Shannon Street, Oonoonba.

Tablelands

SGAP Tablelands Branch holds its meetings on the fourth Wednesday of the month at the C.W.A. Hall, Tolga, commencing 7.30. Excursions occur on the following Sunday. Contact: Peter Radke pandaradke@gmail.com

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