

*Society for Growing Australian Plants
Cairns Branch Inc.*

Newsletter 229

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**Cairns Branch SGAP Annual General Meeting
2023**

by Don Lawie



Photo: Rob Jago

The last time that I visited Copperlode Dam, I had recently returned from a visit to Scotland to view the land of my ancestors. A place that I found particularly attractive was Loch Katrine, a little Highland Loch that had been deepened to provide a water supply for the city of Glasgow. And now, years later, I was at the dam that collected the waterflows to provide a water supply for the city of Cairns.

I cannot think of many similarities between Glasgow and Cairns; the ancient Scottish city is renowned for its shipbuilding yards; Cairns was established as a port for the produce of its hinterland.

Copperlode is overlooked by picturesque mountains and near the dam wall there are picnic and walking facilities and the air is so much cooler than Cairns. We had visited here a couple of times and on this occasion there were only a few hardy souls who braved the winding mountain road through lush rainforest to enjoy the mountain air with us.

President Patsy Penny handed over the gavel of office after a particularly successful SGAP year. With no mucking about, long term member and legendary Newsletter Editor, Stuart Worboys, was unanimously installed as our new President. Helen Lawie was rewarded for doing such an outstanding job as Hon. Sec. that she was re-elected, and Val Carnie received the same treatment for being such a diligent Treasurer. Pauline Lawie undertook to try on Stuart's big

Pauline Lawie undertook to try on Stuart's big boots as Newsletter Editor, Dr Rob Jago became Vice President and Tony Roberts continued as Webmaster, to provide a first class public face for Cairns SGAP.

All that nominating and clapping called for a bit of fresh air so we strolled across the dam wall and marvelled at the density of the rainforest surrounding the water. I kept a lookout for S.S. Caledonia, but alas she was back in Loch Katrine, still sailing in my memory.

Want More? We had a special bonus on the way down the mountain: Dr Bob took us for a short walk through the mud to admire a giant Penda tree, *Xanthostemon whitei*, which Bob said was probably mature when Captain Cook sailed by here 250 years ago.

Xanthostemon whitei

From information provided by Rob Jago



Photo: Rob Jago

Xanthostemon whitei is named in honour of the Queensland botanist Cyril Tenison White

It is commonly called Red Penda or Atherton Penda and has many Aboriginal names. This species was first described as *Xanthostemon pubescens* by the Queensland botanist Cyril Tenison White but that name had been used earlier in New Caledonia. This left the way open for the German botanist Karl Gugerli to name this species in honour of C T White.

A large tree to 40 metres tall with a stem to at least 170 cm diameter above the buttress roots, *X whitei* is found from Shipton's Flat south to the Tully River from near sea level to 1150 metres altitude. Large specimens can be found on Mount Whitfield and along the Lake Morris Road, on the steep slopes of Freshwater Creek below Copperlode Dam as well as in many other places such as Kuranda and on the Babinda Falls Track.

Red Penda was regarded as the best timber for the manufacture of swords by local Aboriginal people, for the manufacture of spear points and is suitable as a structural timber for house frames and flooring.
(For a full description see lucidcentral.org)

***Syzygium cormiflorum*, Bumpy Satinash**

Bumpy Satinash is a rainforest tree that is fairly easy to recognise. The term "bumpy" is a clue, the trunk and larger branches have bumps, and that is where the flowers and subsequently the fruit arise. Pollination is carried out by night-flying bats and the bunches of flowers look quite attractive. *S cormiflorum* fruit grow to about 10cm in length, pretty pink when young then becoming pearl-white. They can be borne on either the trunk (cauliflory) or the branches (ramiflory). The fruit has a thin layer of fairly tasteless matter over a large seed. They were a favourite cassowary food in my area (East Russell) but in recent years the big birds have ignored them. Tree size is just right for an urban park. *(contributed by Don)*



Photo: Jeni Bain, taken at Copperlode

Candid camera at Copperlode *Photos by Pauline Lawrie*



Beauty and the Beast

From Patsy Penny

Beauty being these beautiful mangroves and the beast being the reptilian creatures which lurk below !

These tall beauties hang out with lots of other flowering mangroves but their showy flowers and plump fruit make them stand out in the crowd.



The white flower and smaller fruit are from *Sonneratia alba*. These are found in the lower stretches of the Russell, closer to the mouth, and are daily tidal and of course must like the salt.



The red flowers come from *Sonneratia caseolaris* and these are flowering at the moment higher up the Russell but also tidal. The water here is mostly fresh with only occasional bursts of salt in the very dry months. The fruit of this tree is large and has a star shaped flat calyx while the smaller *alba* has a cup shaped calyx.

At the moment I am endeavouring to germinate some of these. Wish me luck !!!!!



No you aren't seeing double

It's no wonder SGAP trips down to Russell Heads are so popular.

The best newsletters are those where members contribute the best content.

I will email details for our excursion to the School of Field Studies on 30 April closer to that date. Ed.