

Report by John Knight

Blessed by a gorgeous autumn day, and the promise of an interesting program, a large gathering arrived at Anne and Michael's Durras property. The warm and dry conditions of recent weeks continue, and the expected display of Sunshine Wattle, *Acacia terminalis* did not eventuate, but the bushland around North Durras did present us with quite a diversity of plants to keep everyone interested.

During a relaxed morning tea, enjoyed on the deck in the sunshine, the meeting kicked off with a 'show and tell' session.

Phil and Catriona were once again to the fore, with a range of Banksias and Hakeas. A highlight was *Hakea bakeriana*, a medium sized shrub which is found in the heaths of the central coast. Foliage is a bright fresh green, and although it looks prickly, is quite benign. Brilliant pink to red flowers are borne on older wood, but still well presented.

Catriona put in a plug for the **Isopogon and Petrophile Study Group**, which she and Phil lead. And with flowers as shown on her *Isopogon cuneatus* specimen, it is little wonder members get enthusiastic about these plants. Then comes the revelation that for success, they are best grafted onto hardy eastern states rootstock. Phil continues to experiment with this process, and is having good success using a hybrid of *Isopogon mnoraifolius* from the northern tablelands.

*Banksia vincentia*, the most recently named Banksia, occurs in a swampy area near industrial development at Vincentia on the NSW South Coast. There are just a few plants remaining in the wild, and the population is seriously threatened by development and changed drainage patterns. The plant is easily propagated by cutting, but presents some difficulties in the potting on stage. Phil and Catriona are working with the local conservation group to establish more plants back into the natural location. As a garden plant, once the plant decides to grow it seems quite hardy. It is just a matter of getting over the first few months after transplanting. They suggest that drainage is critical, and also the plants are susceptible to fertilisers, so best not to add any when planting out. Catriona explained that, despite the similarities to the local *B. spinulosa*, *B. vincentia* is readily distinguished by its habit of growth, which is distinctively sideways branching.

The stunning yellow flowered form of *Banksia praemorsa* from southern Western Australia stopped the show. These large flower spikes are dazzling in their brightness, and at 30cm in length, quite a feature. The flowers are held terminally, so that their brilliance is well displayed. We all wish we could grow one, but again Phil says that the plants need to be grafted.

His is on *B. integrifolia*, is quite an old plant now, and still very vigorous. Members were reminded at this point that grafting is not a mysterious science, and Phil offered that he would demonstrate to those interested.



We welcomed APS East Hills Group member, and now also South-East member Jan Douglas, who spoke about some small shrubs which are rewarding to grow for their hardiness and long flowering period.

Firstly, a plant which most had not heard of, let alone grow. **Diplopeltis** is a small genus of 5 species in the Sapindaceae family. From W.A., each species is known by the common name

Pepperflower, referring to the similarity of the fruits to those of peppercorns.

**With a backdrop of rainforest foliage, Jan discusses the attributes of Pepperflower**



Jan brought along a specimen of *Diplopeltis huegelii*, which is a smallish shrub of about 1m., although Jan says she is unable to be sure just how big it might get as hers is much smaller, and growing in a container.

Plants are monoecious, that is having separate male and female flowers on the same plant. The white flowers are well displayed on terminal shoots, and are about 15mm across. Although mainly produced in spring and early summer, some are present most of the year. Propagation from cuttings is easy, says Jan, who got a piece from another APS member, in Sydney. Plants are adaptable to dry conditions, and might become more widely available as conditions change.

Her other treasure was *Philothea difformis* ssp. *smithianus*, (syn. *Eriostemon difformis*

*ssp smithianus*) which grows on the coastal range of south east Queensland. This reliable small shrub, to about 1m, produces small white flowers on terminal shoots through autumn and winter, making it an ideal filler for rockeries whilst we await the spring show.

Propagation by cuttings taken in late summer are usually successful, but patience is required as roots may be slow to form. This plant is also tolerant of dry conditions once established, and copes well with summer humidity.

Thanks Jan for adding 2 new plant choices to the growing list of dry tolerant plants for our future gardens.

Anne then invited members to wander around the garden, which despite its modest size, holds quite a range of Australian plants. A list of these, provided by Anne, is included at the end of this report.

The 20 year old red cedar, *Toona ciliata* and coachwood, *Ceratopetalum apetalum*, dwarfed by majestic Bangalay, *Eucalyptus botryoides*, and a neighbour's huge Cypress, demonstrate that these hardy rainforest plants can compete successfully, albeit slowly, in the dry sandy soil. In fact quite a few rainforest species are being grown, including a lovely compact shrub of the delightfully scented *Backhousia citriodora*, Lemon-scented Myrtle, and *Polyscias murrayi*, Pencil Cedar, which is normally found in well watered gullies, and by rights should not grow so well in these tough conditions.

Anne also has a couple of plants not seen before by members. *Vitex trifolia* 'Purpurea' is a largish shrub in the Lamiaceae family, which occurs through South-east Asia and into northern and eastern Australia as far south as Ballina, where it grows in coastal scrubs and adjacent littoral rainforests. The 3 leaflets are initially purple, maturing to a greyish colour, and are quite densely furry below. Through summer and into autumn, fragrant lavender flowers are borne within and above the foliage, attracting butterflies and bees. Anne grows this because it is hardy in dry sandy soils, and tolerates salt spray.



Anne, troops in tow, pass by the *Ceratopetalum apetalum*, restricted to shrubby form due to the tough competition for moisture and light

Another of Anne's treasures is *Gymnostoma australianum*, also called Daintree Pine. It is classified as a vulnerable species, and is restricted to the Thornton Range, inland from Daintree in Far North Queensland, usually found in situations where the rainforest canopy is broken, such as in rocky areas along waterways.

An unusual rainforest member of the **Casuarinaceae** family, **Gymnostoma** has the typical tiny Casuarina leaves at each twig joint. However the flowers, borne at the end of each branchlet are quite distinctive. Female flower clusters are bright pink, and the male flower clusters are more bronze. One might say that the plants are more pine-like than Casuarina-like.



Photos by B. Gray, from [www.keys.trin.org.au](http://www.keys.trin.org.au)



In Queensland, the plants are sold as Christmas trees. Although in the wild plants are quite stout trees up to 6m or more, they grow quite happily in a pot for many years, and maintain a nice compact conical shape perfect for Christmas decorations. Anne wondered if hers would ever develop sufficiently to perform that role, given the tough conditions in which it is growing. Maybe with some extra water, who knows?

**While the group looks on, Anne and Michael discuss pruning options. I don't think we were much help, maybe best not to take sides.**

On completion of the garden tour, Anne and Michael were thanked for their hospitality, after which we embarked on the journey to our lunch spot beside Durras Lake. Such was the mood of the group that lunch was postponed until after we enjoyed the delightful walk through majestic forests of *Corymbia maculata*, Spotted Gum, and *Eucalyptus saligna*, Sydney Blue Gum.

Meandering quietly along a gentle broad track, with Anne pointing to features such as the large clumps of *Cymbidium suave* growing high in trees adjacent, but far enough away to prevent pillaging, we soon reached the promised magical grove of cabbage tree palms (*Livistona australis*).

This is one of Anne's favourite sanctuaries in the National Park, and so easily reached we wondered why no other visitors took the opportunity to enjoy the serenity. The day was calm, with barely a zephyr, and the twitter of many small birds was a constant companion.

From the palms, the group split into two groups, with some preferring to continue through the forest to return to the lunch spot by a longer, circuitous route.

Others followed Anne's suggestion and headed towards Durras Lake to find the *Scaevola* and *Selliera* carpets beneath Casuarinas by the waters edge.

Anne had previously spied some **Dendrobium** orchids on the trunks of the Casuarina, and was able to show these to the group.

Many orchids have, after exhaustive research, been renamed in recent years, and this one was no different, now known as *Dockrillia teretifolia*, the Rats Tail Orchid, so named for the long thin leaves, or the preferable common name of Bridal Veil Orchid which is apparent when the plants produce cascades of large white flowers following good seasons.

Those who took the longer route were blessed with broad vistas of white trunks and dense green understorey, nature at her finest.

This track is part of the Durras Discovery Trail, which was constructed by Forests NSW before the area was transferred to the Murrumarang National Park.



Contemplating beneath the cathedral like canopy of *Livistona australis*, we could have been transported to the Jurassic period, such was the grace and age of these huge palms.

The trail still has a few remnants of past use as a working forest, particularly of the earlier years when the massive ironbark trees (*Eucalyptus paniculata*) were felled for railway sleepers. Not only did these sleepers head to Sydney for the construction of a quickly

spreading rail network, but they also sailed the seas as far as America, such was their reputation for rail work. It's a pity that most of the Ironbarks were felled, as we did not come across any ancient specimens. There are good examples though of Spotted Gum and Sydney Blue Gum.



Some members climbed the rickety timber structure above an ancient ironbark stump.

Here Forests NSW had a sign detailing the work of bringing down these giant trees, with timber workers perched precariously on spring boards some metres above the ground. These springboards, about 150mm wide, were set into downward sloping notches cut by axe, and the weight of the faller would stabilise the board whilst the tree was cut down. We marvelled at the ruggedness of the workers, and the lack of safety measures as they went about their task.

Relics of this past activity still remain for visitors to inspect, although the bush is slowly burying the evidence.



As is sometimes the case, lunch was a little late! It was however enjoyed in a clearing near to our cars, where some convenient log tables had been placed.

A most enjoyable location, which allowed time and space for discussion, before it was time to head back to Anne's to collect those cars left there.

Leonie Kestel, who lives not far from Anne, suggested that we might visit her garden on the way back, an offer we gladly accepted.

On a tight, north facing block across from the sea, gardening has proved a challenge. Humid north east winds restrict the range of plants which can be grown, but as in Anne's case, Leonie has managed to coax a few unusual plants to perform admirably.

As a volunteer at the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Garden, Leonie has an affinity with local plants, and has reintroduced to her garden many which would have comprised the natural flora of the area. And like Anne, she likes rainforest species, and has found space in the more protected rear garden to grow some of these.

Questions were asked as to the name of a particularly interesting foliated plant. Answers failed. We should of course have crushed a leaf, which would have given us the answer.

The unmistakable spicy cinnamon scent belongs to Sassafras, *Doryphora sassafras*, but we were tricked by the shape of the juvenile leaves.

Conservation of the natural environment drives Leonie and her partner Peter, a talented artist who some time back reproduced a poster of a gorgeous trunk of *Eucalyptus saligna*,

Revenue from the sale of these posters supported the establishment of the greater Murramarang National Park.

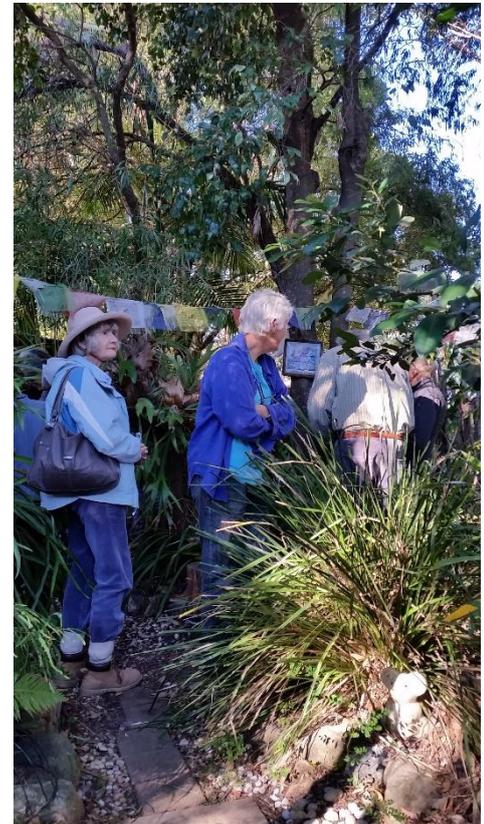
Currently Leonie is growing local plants to revegetate the foreshore at Depot Beach. She invited members to have a look at the work currently underway.

"Replanting of the degraded areas is challenging, but the progress is rewarding", says Leonie.

We all agree that this volunteer effort goes a long way to ensuring the future health our natural coastline.

So ended a most enjoyable day out, with lovely sunshine and great camaraderie among the members keen to discover more about the wonderful plants that comprise our local flora. Garden visits are always of great interest for members, to see who grows what, and more importantly, how different plants perform in the varying conditions, given the geographic range in which our members garden.

Learning also how to recognise plants in their natural habitat adds to the pleasure of bush rambles. However, we need to spend more time in the bush to help us remember the names of



**It was a tight squeeze to get around the garden, with its winding paths and eclectic collection of artifacts**

all the plants we discover. One among us is getting a little forgetful.

A list of the plants found around Durras Lake and the surrounding bush was provided by Anne to help with recognising what grows there.

Originally compiled by members of APS Canberra in 1999, the list was updated in 2003 and again on this walk by our members.

Di Clark helped Anne in cross checking the list as we walked, and the result of their diligence is provided as a record of what we saw.

Might help jog a memory on future visits to this wonderful reserve.

Space limitations have meant that the excel spreadsheet produced by Dianne cannot be included in this newsletter. If any member wishes to receive it, please send an email to me, and I will send it to you.