A.F.P.S.G.

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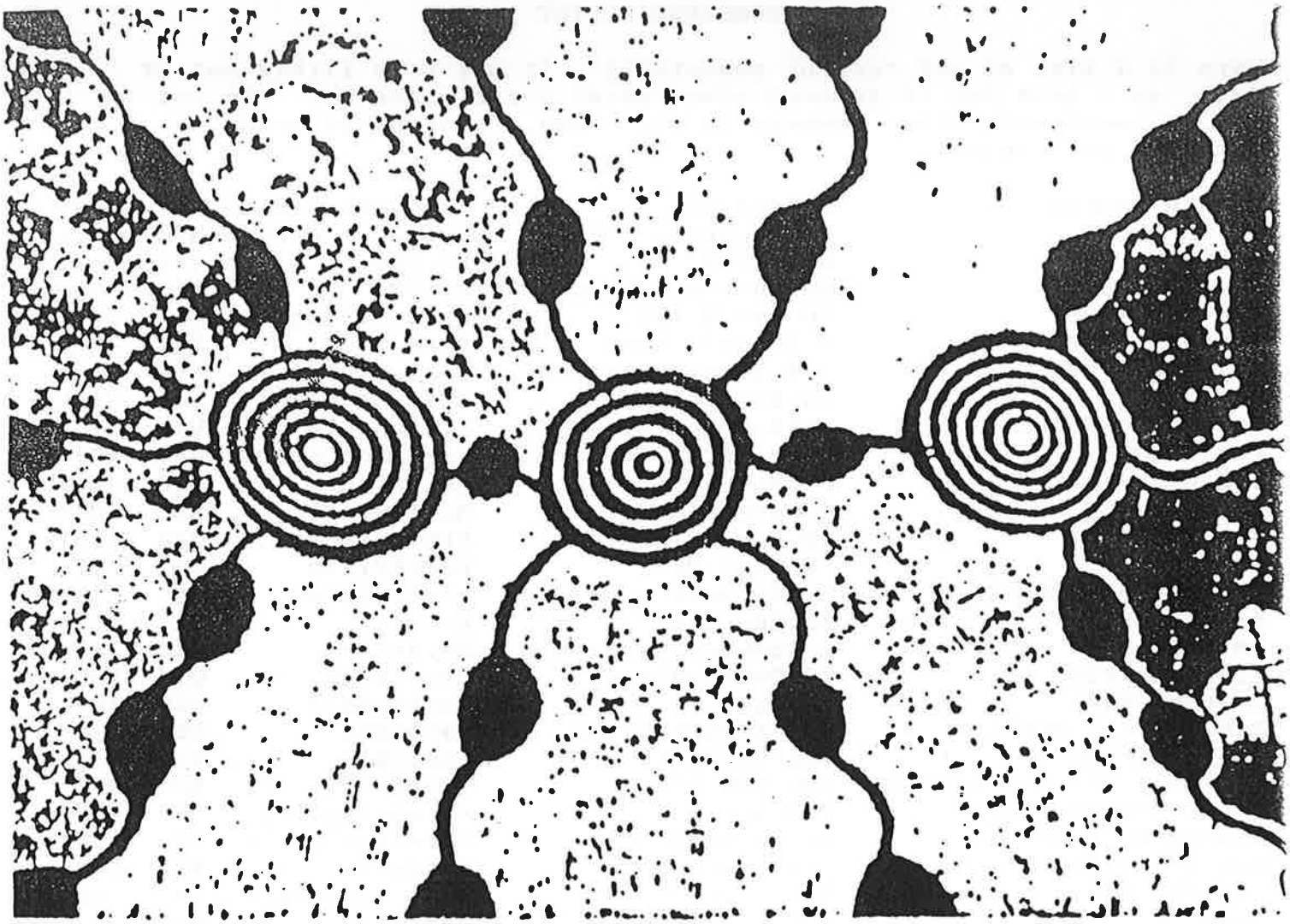
Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants

AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANT STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER 7 April 1989



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AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP Newsletter # 7 April-ish 1989

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The cover illustration is based on **Bush Potato Country 1979** by Turkey Tolsen Tjupurrula and David Corby Tjapaltjarri, from THE ART OF THE DESERT - a very handsome series of Australian stamps. (There are no articles on bush potatoes, though - I just liked the picture)

Thanks to June and Leanne and our many contributors. A special thanks for everyone's patience. The next newsletter is planned around the theme (?) of a checklist of edible natives, and should be out in only a couple of months time (shock, horror !).

Contributors to Newsletter # 9 should try to have something in by September-ish.

MEMBERSHIP LIST

Here is a list of our current membership. It may be a little out of date, as I have yet to process some recent correspondence. Why not get in touch with other members in your area, to exchange seeds, cuttings and ideas ?

Rodney BARKER	PO Box 62	Kangaroo Ground	Vic	3097
FC BELL	73 Hawkesbury Esp	Sylvania Waters	NSW	2224
R BENDER	RMB 2220	Horsham	Vic	3401
Peter BINDON	WA Museum, Francis St	Perth	WA	6000
Vic CHERIKOFF	PO Box B 103	Boronia Park	NSW	2111
Barbara DALY	8 Bussell Cres	Cook	ACT	2614
Eustace E DIETSCH	378 Rocky Point Rd	Sans Souci	NSW	2219
Pat DOWN	13 Brynor Cr	Glen Waverley	Vic	3150
Charlotte ELDER	6/16 Royal Ave	Glenhuntly	Vic	3163
Ross HENRY	Gongflers Dve	Kangaroo Ground	Vic	3097
Jim HILL	PO Box 65	Edmonton	Qld	4869
Robert HOST	9 Ravensthorpe Ave	Millswood	SA	5034
Frank JORDAN	PO Box 39	Sth Brisbane	Qld	4101
Hugh KING	"Bounty Hill"	Perthville	NSW	2795
Gerald KUERSCHNER	Black Rock	via Orroroo	SA	5431
Karen LANE	31 Gum Gve	Belair	SA	5052
IM LASZLO	2 Spowers Circuit	Holder	ACT	2611
Glenn LEIPER	30 Tweedvale St	Beenleigh	Qld	4207
Heather MEEK	"Wonga"	Rocky Hall	NSW	2550
A MOORE & J BLATCH	83 Fitzgerald St	Katoomba	NSW	2780
Stephen MURPHY	Learmonth St	Teesdale	Vic	3328
National Botanic Gardens	GPO Box 158	Canberra	ACT	2601
Carol NEWTON-SMITH	32 Garema St	Indooroopilly	Qld	4068
Andrew N PAGET	14 Seascape Close	Ferntree Gully	Vic	3156
Robyn PARKER	261 Avoca St	Randwick	NSW	2031
Gil ROBERTSON	PO Box 51	Port Lincoln	SA	5606
John SEAL	5 Cassells Rd	Research	Vic	3095
Peter STEEL	69 Janda St	Robertson	Qld	4109
Geoff A WATSON	9 Blanche St	Gawler	SA	5118

The following SGAP Groups also receive copies of the newsletter: Canberra Region, East Hills Group, Foothills Group, Geelong, Keilor Plains, Lillydale & District, Maroondah Group, Pine Rivers, Rockhampton, SA Region, Tasmania Region, Victoria Region.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE SOON FOR 1989/1990 Fiscal Year. Only $3.00 pa. Send a cheque or money order to the Editor at the above address.

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE !

Culpeper recommends boiling the roots in oil for an ointment for treating wounds, or using ground powdered roots to treat ulcers. He suggests consumption of leaves as a purgative, and a drink of mead or honeyed water in which the roots had been boiled to dispel worms. He also warns (or is it informs ?) of its abortifacient properties.

Maoris burnt the fronds and mixed them with water to make a paste for burns. They also ate the fiddleheads as a cure for diarrhoea, and starch from the roots as a treatment for sea-sickness.

Tea made from dried bracken leaves has been claimed to act as an antidote to tick bites of dogs.

(3) BRACKEN POTASH: This was made by cutting the leaves in early summer, drying them until brittle, then burning them for their alkaline ash.

This ash was used for soap-making, glass-making, leather dressing and as fertilizer.

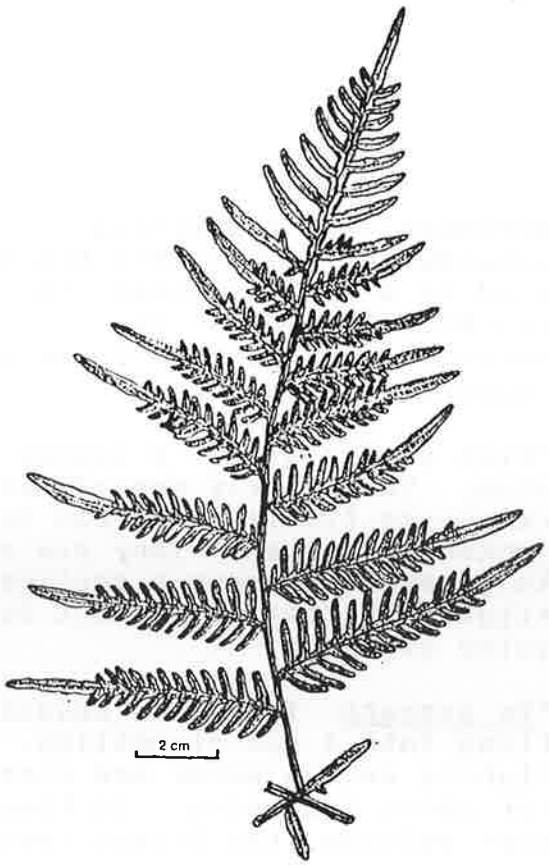
(4) OTHER USES: Dried leaves have been used as bedding, stable litter, case packing, thatching and for composting.

Bracken root flour can be mixed with the juice of unripe persimmons to make a waterproof glue, and Lust gives the following details of the dyeing properties of bracken:

- Roots give wool a yellow colour with chrome as the mordant.

- Young shoots give wool and silk a yellowish-green colour with alum and chrome as the mordants, or grey for silk with copperas (?) as mordant.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS: Bracken was so important to the Maoris that it had its own god, Haumia Tike



COMMON BRACKEN: *Pteridium esculentum.*

Tike. Expansive areas of bracken were made sacred.

Culpeper placed bracken under the dominion of Mercury and said that it expelled chloric and waterish humours that troubled the stomach.

Many cultures accord significance to fiddleheads, regarding them as symbols of hope, prosperity or honesty. They were used as the emblem of the Samurai of Japan.

In touching on ways in which bracken has been used, it is interesting to note the similarities in uses across a range of cultures and environments, which suggests to me that there may be some truth in some of these uses. I also wonder if bracken is an especially useful plant, or just one that, because of its wide distribution, has had many of its uses documented.

One final "use" derives from the minuteness of its spores. This gives them the magical property of making people invisible ! If only ...

R. BARKER

APPENDIX: For historical interest on how bracken has been used as a food overseas (but see the **WARNING** above), here is an extract from Arabella Boxer's "Garden Cookbook":

"Pick shoots at 2 - 3 inches high. The tightly curled heads (known as fiddleheads) can be cooked and eaten. They are rich in potash, and have a curious, slightly bitter taste that is quite pleasant.

"To prepare: The heads should be flung into a pan of boiling, lightly salted water and cooked for about 7 minutes. If they are kept waiting, the bitter taste becomes more pronounced and they lose their texture."

REFERENCES: Arabella Boxer GARDEN COOKBOOK Weidenfield & Nicolson (London) 1974

Nicolas Culpeper CULPEPER'S COMPLETE HERBAL W. Foulsham & Co. (London) undated

Selwyn L Everist POISONOUS PLANTS OF AUSTRALIA Angus & Robertson (Sydney) 1974

D Holmgren & B Mollison PERMACULTURE ONE Corgi (Melbourne) 1978

EV Lassak & T McCarthy AUSTRALIAN MEDICINAL PLANTS Methuen (Sydney) 1983

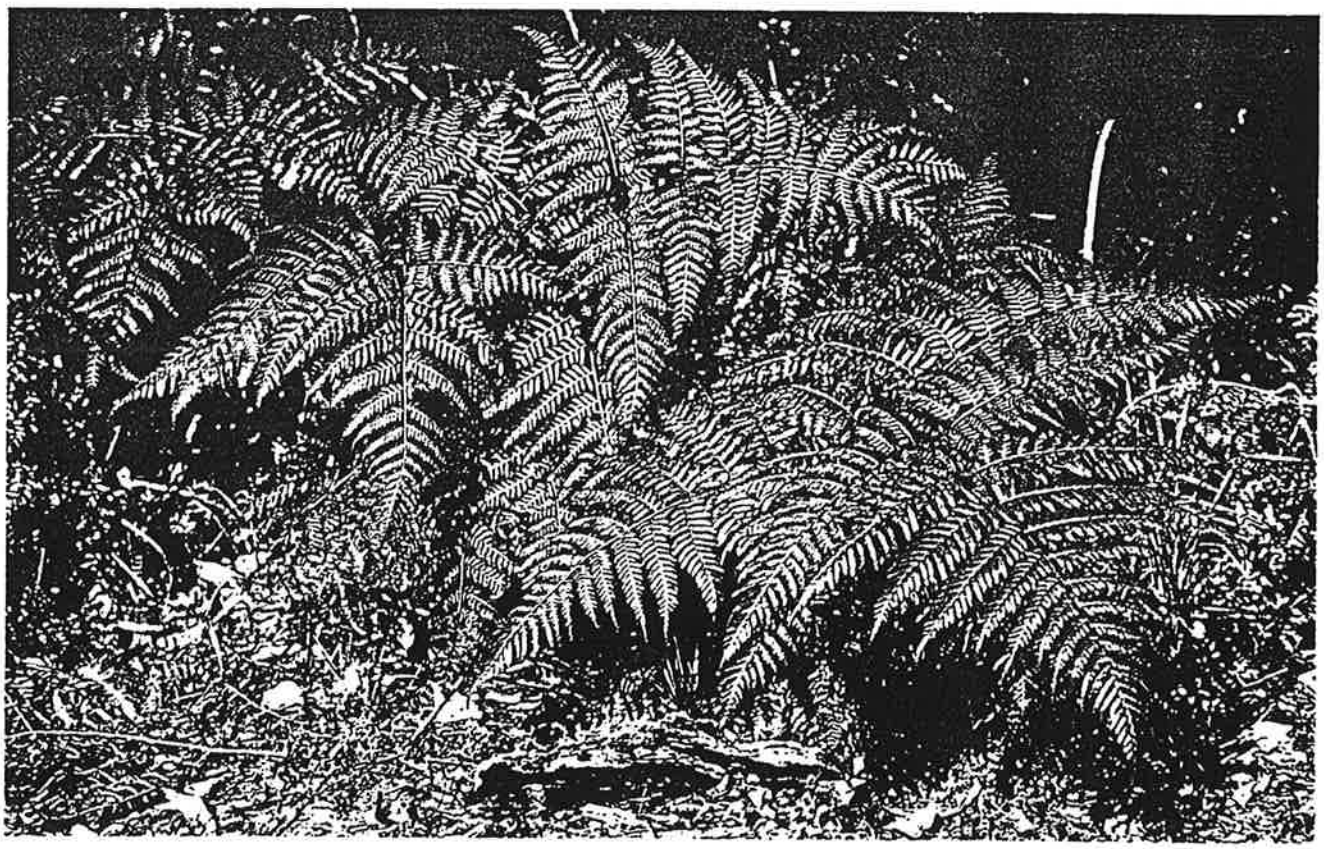
WJ Laurenson MAORI NATIVE MEDICINE Nature and Health 7:4 (Summer 1986) 85-87

Glenn Leiper MUTOOROO Assembly Press (Qld) 1983

Tim Low WILD HERBS OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND Angus & Robertson (NSW) 1985

John Lust THE HERB BOOK Bantam (London) 1985

Gai Stern AUSTRALIAN WEEDS Harper & Row (Sydney) 1986



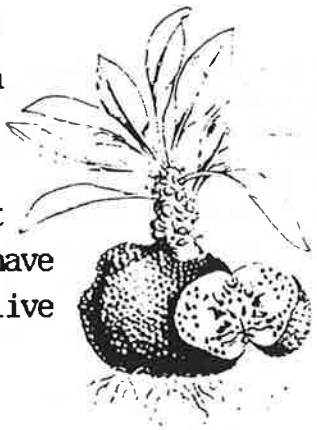
NEW FOODS

With so much known about Australia's edible plants, it is surprising just how much remains to be discovered. I recently spent two months working as a naturalist at the Cape York Wilderness Lodge and had ample opportunity to seek out wild foods in one of Australia's remoter regions. Several of the wild plants I tasted have never before been recorded as edible.

The fringed lily (Thysanotus banksii) was one of these. Many of the southern Australian Thysanotus have sweet edible tubers and at least three have been recorded as Aboriginal foods. I found that T. banksii has tubers very similar to those of the common fringed lily (T. tuberosus) although they are very irritant raw, and need to be baked thoroughly before eating.

The local blue grass lily (Caesia setifera) also bears tubers, which are sweet and edible raw. These lilies grow in sandy soil and may have been useful Aboriginal foods, although there is no surviving record of this.

The vine Ipomoea mauritiana has very large tubers, up to a kilogram or more in weight, and these proved edible after baking, although the larger tubers were tasteless and very fibrous. Small tubers tasted like bland sweet potatoes, to which they are closely related. I. mauritiana, which grows worldwide in the tropics, has been recorded as a traditional food in South-East Asia but not Australia.



The oddest wild food plants I came across were the ant plants (Myrmecodia species). These epithytic plants have swollen stem bases filled with tunnels in which ants live as part of a symbiotic relationship. Ant plants have small sticky-sweet fruits which taste like those of mistletoes, and which are undoubtedly distributed by birds.

Tim Low

HOW TO EAT A GUM TREE

In telling people of my interest in edible natives, I have occassionally received the observation "But you can't eat a gum tree !". True enough - of the several thousand native plants with edible parts, there are very few references to use being made of Eucalyptus species. Possums and koalas process gum leaves efficiently, and well-cooked, they could make a unique contribution to the Australian cuisine, except for their general cuteness and the existence of Wildlife Protection laws.

However, nature has developed a way to harvest gum trees which is tasty, legal and applicable to most species and climates. It may even have commercial potential (but I'm not holding my breath). The method is to convert the gum tree - via a parasitic plant - into food. Suitable parasitic plants include Mistletoes & Dodder Laurel. I do not have much to say about Mistletoes, other than noting that on my property, they do not have many berries and seem to invariably grow quite high in trees.

Dodder Laurel, also known as Devil's Guts, is the one that seems to have some potential. Plants resemble green spaghetti growing over the canopy of small trees and shrubs. I have gathered kilograms of berries from smallish Dodder Laurels on small Eucalypts. The berries are not particularly tasty raw, but are suitable for making jam (which resembles almost set glue). Plants have to be cut back frequently, otherwise they will kill the host tree. It should be possible to vegetatively propagate plants by using a portable host e.g. a gum tree in a pot.

Dodder Laurels have many uses recorded (mostly overseas), and would be worth experimenting with, especially in light of their high yields. With some selective breeding, they could be a useful crop.

I am still researching their uses, so will probably have a follow-up article in a future newsletter. Has anyone cultivated Dodder Laurels, eaten their fruit, or know of any other uses for the plants ? If so, I would be very grateful if you could drop me a line.

WOOLMI.

The woolmi (*Antidesma dallachryanum*, fam. *Euphorbiaceae*) is native to North Queensland. It is a small tree which seldom grows more than 25 ft. high. Under natural conditions, it occurs on the fringes of rain forests, or close to the banks of creeks and lagoons in coastal North Queensland. The leaves are deep-green on the upper surface, bright-green on the lower surface and rather thick and leathery.

The flowers are small, greenish in colour and borne in racemes. The fruit is sometimes solitary but more frequently in clusters of four or more. The individual fruits are about ½–1 in. in diameter, and the colour varies from cream with a rose-red cheek to a dark purple-red when ripe.

The trees are in bloom from December to February and the fruit appears during the late autumn and winter. A secondary crop is also produced from a small flowering in September.

The fruit may be eaten fresh, but it is more frequently used in preserves.

The seed germinates readily and the seedlings may be transplanted without difficulty. Growth is fairly vigorous and the young tree commences to bear when it is about six years of age and some 8 ft. high.

from E.T. Hockings (Editor) **The Queensland Agricultural and Pastoral Handbook Vol. II, 2nd Ed.** Govt Printer (Brisbane) 1961

(Incidentally, it's good to see that a native plant could be recognized as having commercial potential way back in 1961, even if nothing much seems to have come of it. The only other edible natives in the book are New Zealand Spinach & Macadamia).

The great Oz truffle mystery

STAND by for a truffle-led export recovery. OK, scoff if you like, but someone recently sent **Hermann Schneider**, the noted Melbourne restaurateur and chef, a truffle that was found in Tasmania. Yessir, that's what we said: *found* in Tasmania. Now this was remarkable for two reasons. The first was that not too many people send other people truffles to try, for the very good reason that truffles are only a shade less expensive on a gram-for-gram basis than the Koh-i-Nor diamond. The second reason was that, as every gourmet knows, truffles grow only in certain oak, beech and birch forests in southern Europe, from which it follows that up to now they have been about as common in Tasmania as elephants in pink pyjamas.

Naturally, Mr Schneider was aware of all this and, although his mysterious fungus looked and smelled and sliced like a fresh European truffle, he sent it off to be examined by experts at the Department of Agriculture's Plant Research Institute at Burnley. His caution was entirely understandable. But that, for the moment at least, is where the great Tassie truffle mystery ends. You see, **Ian Pascoe**, the institute's resident fungus expert, was on leave for a fortnight and the truffle perished before he got back.

In time, Ian Pascoe's holiday might come to be ranked as the greatest temporary setback for Australian culture since the theft of 'Weeping Woman'. When we phoned him, he seemed to be taking it calmly. Indeed, he turned out to be the proverbial mine of information on truffles and related vegetables. Superficially, he explained, lots of native fungi resembled truffles because they were all members of the hypogean, or below ground, branch of the fungus family.

Real black truffles came mostly from central Italy, southern France and the Pyrenees, and real white truffles from Italy's Piedmont region. Truffles were a specialised form of the *ascomycetes* class of fungi, which had adapted over several zillion years to dispersing their spores via burrowing animals. In evolutionary terms, it was only yesterday that man had cottoned on to this and trained pigs and dogs to find truffles for him.

But here's the rub. Although many types of local fungi (especially of the puffball variety) resembled truffles, several real truffle varieties were known to exist in Australia. At least, they had been described in scientific literature, although Ian Pascoe — despite being Victoria's ranking fungi taxonomist — has never actually seen them. They are all, he believes, to be found among the roots of certain mallee eucalypts and their spores, just like the real truffles, would be dispersed by burrowing animals. In fact, analysis of bandicoot and potoroo droppings in Gippsland had shown significant hypogean fungi spore counts. What this all amounts to, we think, is that you shouldn't write Oz off as a source of truffles yet.

Political footnote: Shortly after the Schneider truffle evaporated, Tasmanian Premier **Robin Gray** flew into Melbourne to open a Tasmanian cheese shop. After the speeches, he fell into conversation with a group of Melbourne food and wine buffs, who told him about the mystery truffle and the dazzling possibility it raised that Tasmanian trees were sitting on a goldmine. But the Premier was baffled. What, he wanted to know, was a truffle, how and where were they found and what did you do with them? Enthusiastically, the locals began to explain that the truffle was a fungus, found under trees and detected only by pigs who signalled a truffle discovery by assuming the mating position. The further they got, the more the Premier seemed to believe they were pulling his leg. Very shortly, he excused himself, politely explaining that he had to make an urgent phone call.

NEWS DIARY

The AGE 27 October 1986

Cuttings

Lepiota rhacodes: red-ink mushroom.

A delicacy at the front gate

This morning I found a mushroom beside my front gate, a beautiful mushroom, white, with concentric rings of brown flakes from the centre to the edge.

The gills were pure white but I knew they would be stained with red if bruised. That is why I call it the red-ink mushroom. Its real name is *Lepiota rhacodes*, and it has a more delicate flavor than field mushrooms.

Fried in butter and on crisp toast it will make a delicacy for my tea. It has a relative, *L. gracilenta*, equally good to eat. This is taller with a somewhat peaked centre, like an umbrella, while *L. rhacodes* is short and dumpy, almost hemispherical.

But if you find either of them, compare them against a description and be very sure they are one of the edible lepiotas before you taste them.

— JEAN GALBRAITH

THE AGE, Tuesday 7 April 1987

UPDATE: I rang Ian PASCOE about this article. He found it amusing, but said it contained a fair bit of journalistic licence. He had not received any specimen.

The only subterranean puffballs ('truffles') he was familiar with were those of the Victorian mallee. He doubted that truffles were likely to be found in the wet sclerophyll forests of Tasmania.

Gordon BEATON (an amateur Victorian mycologist) has spent considerable time looking for truffles.

Ian thinks there is a paper about subterranean puffballs in one issue of either Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria or The Victorian Naturalist, in the 1930s or 40s.

Mycologists at Monash University are interested in the larger fungi.

- R. BARKER

(Perhaps some of our members might be interested in trying to chase up the references above, to provide a report on the presence & edibility of truffles in Australia ?)

CLEMATIS GLYCINOIDES

by Carol Newton Smith

It is difficult to find many herbs which are climbers or which grow in the shade, so *Clematis glycinoides*, an Australian medicinal herb, has a lot to offer the herb gardener as well as those interested in the medicinal side of things.

DESCRIPTION

The genus Clematis, although having about 250 species world-wide, has only five representatives indigenous to Australia. The Australian Clematis are all stem twiners with masses of creamy white flowers in spring. The male and female flowers are borne on different plants. Flowers have four 'petals', male flowers have numerous long stamens while the females have a number of ovaries followed by clusters of whitish feathery fruits.

The creamy-white flowers are about 5 cm in diameter and occur in September and October. The feathery fruits are prominent on the plant in November and December.

The leaves of Clematis glycinoides are about 2.5 cm to 6 cm on long stalks and are divided into three lanceolate leaflets. The leaflets are shiny and usually entire, or with a single tooth near the base.

NB: Closely related is *Clematis aristata*. The leaflets of C. aristata are usually broader and toothed and are duller in colour.

There is a good illustration in *A Field Guide to Australian Wildflowers* by M. Hodgson and R. Paine (p.215, 217). A close-up photograph of the flower appears in *Field Guide to the Flowers and Plants of Victoria* by J. Willis (p.253).

USE

The common name of 'headache vine' gives an indication of the use found for this plant. Crush the leaves of Clematis glycinoides in the palms of your hand, hold there for a few minutes to warm them, and then inhale the fumes deeply; this is recommended by various people as a cure for some sorts of headaches (Cribb 1981 p.67). Your eyes may water, your nose smart and your head feels as though it has been blown off, but your migraine may disappear.

In New Guinea, the crushed leaves are inhaled for colds and the juice of the green leaves is used by native people to bring on abortion (Webb 1960 p.107). It is *not* suggested that you try that. As a cure for headaches, Everist (1974 p.598) suggested that the best leaves to try are those where there is vigorous sappy growth. He too testifies to its effectiveness as an analgesic.

CONSTITUENTS

Preliminary chemical tests have indicated that it probably contains proto-anemonol, a volatile compound which may be changed into anemonin (Anonymous 1953 p.58).

DISTRIBUTION

It is a forest climber and is common around rainforest margins. ACT, QLD, NSW, Vic., SA, WA, and Tas.

PROPAGATION

Propagation is easy from cuttings.

CULTIVATION

Clematis glycinoides is hardy and will thrive in a semi-shaded or shady position. It is ideal for covering fences or unsightly sheds.

References

Cribb, A.B. and J.W., *Wild Medicine in Australia*, Collins, Sydney, 1981.

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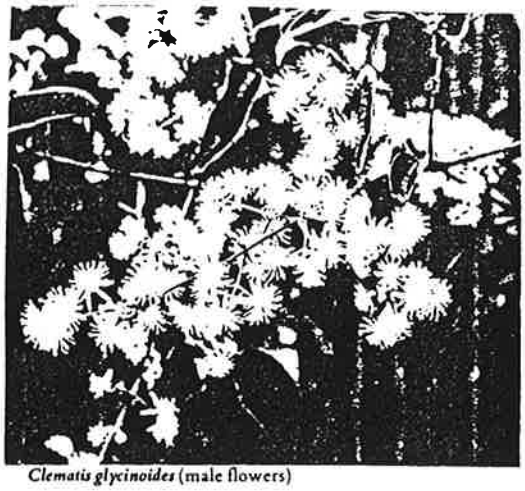
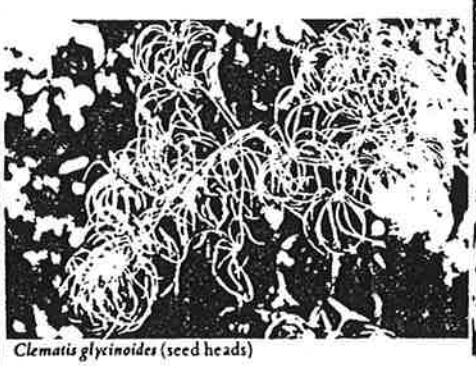
This article first appeared in *Nature's Doctor, No. 3, Nov. 82-Jan. 83, and is reprinted with permission.*



Clematis glycinoides (male flowers)



Clematis glycinoides (seed heads)

Clematis glycinoides (female flowers)

FOREST CLEMATIS

Qld, NSW, Vic (east) Sept-Nov

Rainforests and sheltered gullies are the favoured environs of this tall slender, glabrous climber. Its leaflets are shiny and lack the toothed margins of those of *C. aristata*. The starry, white flowers, borne in abundance, are similar to those of *C. aristata* but the anthers bear a short blunt appendage (this is pointed in *C. aristata*). The seed heads of the two species are similar. In Queensland this plant is known as headache vine, since the leaves when crushed and inhaled are purported to relieve headaches. Ranunculaceae

D.L. Jones & B. Gray AUSTRALIAN CLIMBING PLANTS
AH & AW Reed (Sydney) 1977

GLENN LEIPER IS INTERVIEWED !

Mangrove (and nearby) species that he has tried include:

Tetragonia tetragonioides - (New Zealand Spinach) - grown on the edge of mangroves, in the sand. Leaves edible raw - crisp but salty. Can be cooked.

Avicennia marina - (Grey Mangrove) could not eliminate the bitterness, even with extensive boiling and water changes of the fruits.

Bruguiera - (Orange Mangrove) preparation involved rinsing, shredding and cooking of fruits. Too much trouble.

Suaeda australis - Jelly Bean Plant. Juicy and salty leaves which could be used for pickles.

Enchylaena tomentosa - Saltbush. Also found in deserts. Was being carried by the "Save the Trees" nursery in Brisbane. Juicy, salty leaves similar in taste to Suaeda.

Carpobrotus glaucescens - Pigface) A common ground cover of coastal sandy areas. Small red fruit watery to taste but salty. Similar in texture and taste to Prickly Pear (Opuntia sp.) fruit but not prickly (thank God!).

Sesuvium portacastrum - Sea purslane. Cook's party "pigged-out" on this vegetable on the Endeavour River. Leaves very salty, but crisp and juicy.

Hibiscus tiliaceus - Cottonwood. Very common at the edge between sand and mud. New leaves, roots, fruits and flowers were eaten by the Aborigines, who also used the fibre from the plants for making twine to construct nets, rope, etc.

Alectryon coriaceus (Red Jacket) This is found in sheltered sandy areas above the mangroves, especially on North and South Stradbroke Islands. The red aril surrounding the small hard black seed is sweet and juicy to eat.

NON-PLANTS

Pippies (or Eugaries) are bivalve molluscs found commonly along sandy stretches of beach on the ocean side of the islands of Moreton Bay, but also on non-polluted and non-populated stretches of beach along the mainland's coastline.

They are found in the zone on the beach where the waves are washing over. Quite often a good indication of their presence is a pair of Pied Oyster Catchers (birds) which relish them. To catch the pippies you need towade into the water no deeper than up to your knees and hum a Chubby Checker song. This is no time causes your feet to start "twisting" which is the necessary action required to dig into the sand down to a depth of about 10 - 15 cm to locate by touch these shellfish. The sight of 35 18-year olds twisting away on the beach last year was a sight never to be forgotten by him. In 20 minutes they had over a bucket full.

Pippies can be eaten alove (horrors!) or brought to the boil in water and simmered until the two shells just open, then removed. The animal can be eaten then or marinated overnight in a mix of vinegar, chopped onion and lemon juice (recipe courtesy of Bill Kessell resident connoiseur of anything fishy at Jacobs Well F.S.C.).

(Glenn is the author of MUTOOROO and KEY TO FOREST TREES OF S. E. QUEENSLAND - R.B.)

GLENN LEIPER INTERVIEW

They are full of sand so should be left to sit in a buck et of salt water overnight during which they discard the sand ready for sudden death next day. Another quick and easy method of cooking is in a frying pan with a little butter. Heat the pippies until they just open (any longer and they are very tough). They taste like mussels to the uninitiated.

Aboriginal people of the Moreton Bay area also ate other shellfish, e.g. mud whelks and the remnant mounds of these broken shells can be still found today. They're called middens.

Other meaty foods of this area include:

- Mud crabs;
- Sand crabs (Blue Swimmers);
- Prawns;
- Fish - mainly Flathead, Jew, Bream, Black Bream, Whiting, Tailor to name a few; &
- Oysters.

Thanks to Glenn for all of this information, and for revealing the secrets of shell-fishing. Perhaps we could have a regular feature on members & their food plant usage. Any volunteers ?

FURTHER USES OF NETTLES

Thornton's 19th Century Family Herbal suggests oil of nettle seeds to cure male impotence. This belief in the aphrodisiac properties of nettles goes back to at least the 16th Century, when Andrew Boyd recommended "...the powder of the sedes of nettles [to result in] erection of the yerde to synne". A remedy for this affliction was to "leape into a vessell of colde water or to put nettles in the cod pece around the yerde and stones" !

-Adapted from Pamela Allardice THE HERBS OF ROMANCE Nature and Health 7:4 (Summer 1986) 9-11.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[I asked Jan Sked about sources of seeds, in response to another member's enquiry. Here are some extracts from her reply that may be of general interest]

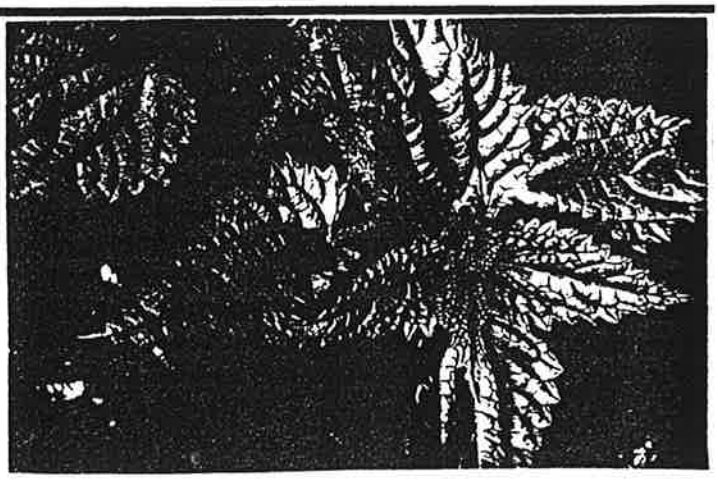
Just a quick note. The Bunya Pines are not fruiting very well this year. It must be the prolonged drought. Some are holding their cones until next year.

Smilax glyciphylla occurs in S. E. Qld., also Leptomeria acida. I have seen them growing in the same locality at "Diana's Bath", west of here, but that is a difficult spot to get to. S. glyciphylla also can be found at the Glasshouse Mountains. If I can find any seed of either plant I shall send you some. I germinated one seed of Smilax last year, but lost the plant when I put it in the garden. I have plenty of Smilax australis plants.

The Syzygium leuhmannii fuited abundantly this summer and I made up a number of jars of jam and several bottles of cordial.

I have a plant of Salacia chinensis in a pot, which I am shortly going to plant in the garden. It is growing quite vigorously at present. Fruits are lovely to eat. Hope it doesn't take too long to get to fruiting stage. The seed was brought back to me from Cape Tribulation by a friend.

Regards,
Jan Sked,
Lawnton, Qld.



JOTTINGS FROM ROCKHAMPTON

Nauclea orientalis

Among the specimens brought by members to the February meeting of the Rockhampton Branch of SGAP were a couple of fruits of the Leichhardt Tree (Nauclea orientalis). These were rough skinned, yellow brown globules that resembled nothing as much as decaying golf balls. The yellow flesh was soft, squashy, and quite palatable. Comments included "like a sour guava", "monstera with a bitter overtone", "typical tropical fruit taste, smell and texture", and "eerk!". The fruits were one of the seasonal staples of the local Aborigines.

The large, handsome tree is conspicuous along the banks of the Fitzroy and its tributaries, where it has often been spared when the rest of the vegetation was cleared for grazing. It has a horizontal branching habit and large, broad leaves, which turn red or orange before falling, as it is semi-deciduous. The flowers are densely packed on globular heads, most unusual in appearance close-up, but generally inconspicuous on the tree though occurring in profusion. The Leichhardt Tree is a magnificent shady ornamental for tropical and sub-tropical regions, providing there is ample water available.

Dianella revoluta

Today (Feb. 27th) I harvested another halp cup of Dianella berries from the clump of what is probably Dianella revoluta growing on the rocky bank in the backyard. The brilliant purple/blue berries have joined those already in a plastic bag in the freezer, waiting for a big enough batch to make jam production worthwhile.

The actual identity of various species of Dianella is apparently under review, and there are certainly more distinct varieties than the 3 which the genus us currently divided into (D. caerula, D. revoluta & D. glauca) on the mainland. Flowers range in colour from pure white through gray & blue, to almost purple; the berries likewise. Leaves vary from soft, smooth blueish green to long, coarse, saw edged, dull green clumps. The small round berries, soft when ripe, enclose a single seed. there is no distinct taste beyong a general sweetness. They make an excellent and unusually coloured jam, and would probably make a good fruit pie too, but I haven't tried that yet.

The common name of Dianella spp. is Blue Flax Lilly, and they make interesting rockery plants. They are easily propagated from divisions of the original clump, and require well drained soil and either full or partial sun. They are common in the grass of open Eucalypt stands, and on stony hillsides, and are extremely hardy.

Cordia sp. ?

At the March meeting, an unidentified orange fruit was tabled. It grows on a tree found with stands of Cordia sp. along the river bank, and is possibly a Cordia of some sort itself. A specimen has been sent to the Herbarium for identification. The fruit is marble sized, bright orange, soft and aromatic when ripe, with the distinctive "stickiness" of the Cordias. It was palatable, and resembled a persimmon in flavour and appearance. This one is certainly a puzzle!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A member asked for information regarding Leea indica, at present fruiting in her garden. This is a handsome, spreading shrub with heavily veined pinnate leaves, belonging to the family Vitaceae. The flowers are small, white, and insignificant, followed by bunches of dark red, succulent fruits about 1 cm in diameter. It is a very attractive garden and indoor plant for tropical and sub-tropical regions, but we can find no reference anywhere to the edibility or otherwise of the fruit. our member experienced cautiously over some days, and reported the fruit to be quite pleasant to eat, both in taste and texture. However, further experimentation with larger quantities revealed some irritant - whether chemicals or prickles couldn't be ascertained - which puts it on the "no-no" list.

VARIOUS

The SGAP excursion on 5th April saw us scrub bashing in the Berserker Mountains, which form the Eastern boundary of the northern part of the city. We climbed up a gully which crosses the Mt Archer road, scrambling over scree through a dry vine forest, then crosses the watershed between Frenchman's and Thozet Creeks, and followed Thozet Creek down to the suburbs. We passed through four distinct vegetation zones, each with its typical plants, including food plants. Amongst the vines were three species of wild grape - Cissus oblonga, Tetrastigma nitens, and Cayratia acris, and the yam Dioscorea transversa. (Cayratia is also reported to have edible tubers). There were also the wild passion-fruits - Passiflora foetida, P. suberosa and P. subpeltata.

The "look-alikes", Wombat Berry (Eustrephus latifolius) and Scrambling Lily (Geitonoplesium cymosum) were much in evidence with their green wiry stems. The roots of Wombat Berry are edible, as is the white coconut like flesh between the seeds of the berries; but it is the new shoot of the Scrambling Lily which may be cooked like asparagus. Among the trees in the vine forest were Burdekin Plum (Pleiogynium timorense) and a number of figs (Ficus opposita, F. platypoda, F. coronata, F. virens & F. ovata).

The understory included the Current Bush (Carissa ovata), the Wallaby Apple or Native Orange (Citriobatus spinescens), 2 types of Capparis (C. arborea and another, unknown), Black Plum (Diospyros australis) and Scaly Ebony (Diospyros ferrea var. geminata), Palm Lilies (Cordyline sp.) with edible roots, as has the Bat-Wing Coral Tree (Erythrina vespertilio); Wild Cherry (Exocarpus latifolius), Native Mulberry (Pipturus argenteus), Wild Plum (Planchonella pohlmaniana), Cocky Apple (Planchonia careya), and the Peanut Tree (Sterculia quadrifida). Unfortunately, only the Wombat Berry and a couple of the figs carried any ripe fruit!

As we left the vine forest for the dry, stony hillsides, eucalypts, grasstrees, and cycads became dominant. Both Cycas media and Zamia Palm (Macrozamia miquellii) occur here, and the seeds were eaten by the Aborigines after extensive preparation. Some of the grass trees were in flower, and full of the nectar that can be sucked like a lollipop.

Among the smaller plants were the edible Wandering Jew (Commelina cyanea) and Purple Emily (Emilia sonchifolia), Winter Apple (Myoporum debile), Wild Gooseberry (Physalis minima), Blackberry Nightshade (Solanum nigrum), Bluebells (Wahlenbergia sp.), and the Flax Lilies (Dianella caerula).

Along the creek many of the edible plants also found previously were seen, as well as the Creek Lillypilly (Syzygium australe) and Cabbage Palm (Livistonia decipiens).

This by no means exhausts the variety of plants which may, in some way, provide food, and which may be found in the Berserkers, but these were seen during the space of approximately 3 hours on a Saturday afternoon walk, which gives some idea of the diversity of vegetation on our doorstep.

ROCKHAMPTON BOTANIC GARDENS

Tom Wyatt, Curator of the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens, addressed our May meeting, and reported on progress at the new Australian Flora Gardens. The big problem is funds, but work is proceeding, and the contributions of Service Clubs, other organizations, and individuals is proving invaluable. Our economic plants area will be ready for planting in about a fortnight, and on 7th June we will be joining with Bundaberg SGAP for conducted tours "behind the scenes" of the propagation and nursery areas, and both the "Old" and "New" Gardens.

The latest "obvious" project has been the planting of an artificial rocky ridge with cycads (saved from poisoning on a cattle property) and grass trees, which are, of course, edible plants as well. It looks as though our study sheets, walkin trail, etc. will have to take in other parts of the gardens, besides our specific area of useful plants. The mangroves for example, are down at the mouth of the creek, and the swamp loving plants will be in the wetlands.

Now that the Rockhampton City Council has taken over control of the city airport, it is also responsible for huge areas of lagoons and swamps which were part of the airport land. These areas adjoin the "Old" Botanic Gardens, and may well be gradually incorporated into the complex. It has been suggested that the Steam Tram which is currently being restored, should run through/beside these wetlands, thus allowing people to observe the prolific bird life there.

Now that the research side of things is over, and the practical planting and landscaping is almost on us, enthusiasm is rising, and we look forward to what the next couple of months will achieve.

Lenore Lindsay
for Rockhampton Branch, SGAP.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bush Tucker Supply Co.

To keep you up to date with my activities let me tell you that I have now left the Human Nutrition Unit at the University of Sydney and am earning my way as a Bushfood Consultant. As such I run courses on bushfoods and medicines, both as lecture series and practical weekends away. I also have been supplying four restaurants and a catering firm with bushfoods. Together we are developing an Australian cuisine which is certainly 200 years too late. Other members of the A.F.P.S.G. may wish to supply foods to my distribution company (Bush Tucker Supply). I pay for quantities of foods on the basis of collection effort. Could anyone wanting more details as to suitable species and logistics note my telephone number (02) 816 3381 and postal address - P.O. Box B 103 Boronia Park N.S.W. 2111.

A highlight in the development of native foods has been the production of a native seed beverage which can also be used as a flour additive. The seeds used (a company secret) have been harvested and part-processed by Aborigines - which makes this a first in Eurpoean history. The seeds are roasted and milled resulting in a product similar to finely ground coffee. However, unlike coffee, Australia's Own (that's its trade name) can be infused to make a beverage and then the spent grounds added to damper or breads or used to make desserts such as ice-cream or biscuits. An unusual characteristic of A.O. (from a European food and not an Aboriginal food viewpoint) is that the carbohydrates in the product are only slowly absorbed. Any products incorporating the milled seeds are more filling (no 'carbohydrate high') and the food exhibits a lowered glycaemic index. What this jargon means is that anyone with an impaired insulin-response (some diabetics and hypoglycaemics as well as Aborigines, who as a race are pre-disposed to this phenomenon, may well benefit from these foods. I say 'may well' because the work is not yet conclusive but the evidence is strong. All this is fine but most importantly, Australia's Own TASTES GREAT and makes an ice-cream that is soon to be available commercially. Be warned though, hand harvesting and freight in this country make the product a treat rather than a staple. The price will fall with time.

This sounds like an advertisement but its been one hundred years since our first native plant product was developed and Australia's Own is the first to be initiated in Australia and involve Aborigines as well.

I am looking forward to some response from Society members offering foods for sale and have included an article from Mode magazine to put the bushfood scene into perspective.

All the Best

Vic

Vic Cherikoff

Sounds like a great opportunity ! I'm holding the articles over for the next newsletter. Please note that Vic has a regular feature on the Melbourne radio station, 3LO. He talks about Australian foods every second Thursday morning from 11:30 to 12:00. -Ed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My favourite bush food is nice plump DROOPING MISTLETOE (Amyema pendulum) fruits which are unbelievably sweet (pick the plumpest, yellower fruits & remove the leathery shell & eat the blob of sticky goo!).

COMMON APPLE-BERRY (Billardiera scandens) fruits are excellent - tasting like apricots (tangy, nutty taste). It's best to wait till they drop off the parent plant and are translucent khaki. The greener fruits on the plant burn your throat! I think these fruits would make a great marmalade.

PRICKLY CURRANT-BUSH (Coprosma quadrifida) and NATIVE RASPBERRY (Rubus parvifolius) are similar in taste - watery raspberry.

AUSTRAL BEAR'S EARS (Cymbonotus preissianus) foliage is edible though sometimes a little too peppery for peoples' tastes. CHOCOLATE LILY (Dichpogon strictus)tubers are in the same boat - edible but often too peppery to be enjoyable.

NATIVE CHERRY (Exocarpus cupressiformis) are nice, but small & not usually borne in quantity.

I've yet to find KANGAROO APPLE (Solanum aviculare & S. laciniatum) fruits which are palatable - even those on the ground below plants (all very tart).

Tubers of WATER RIBBONS (Triglochin procera) are **excellent** - like water chestnuts. Newly emerging shoots of BULRUSHES (Typha spp.) are refreshing - tasting like mild asparagus, but are very fibrous so must be chewed on & spat out. Also these plants are known to concentrate heavy metals so should not be eaten from polluted waters.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Paget

P.S. Members may like to try some of the edible spp. our nursery grows - stocklist available from 14 Seascape Close, Ferntree Gully, 3156

In 1977, Alison Oates wrote an M. Sc. Prelim. thesis entitled "Plant Food Utilization by Victorian Aborigines". This is probably the most detailed account of edible Victorian plants available (unfortunately, it has not been published to date).

I recently wrote to Alison to seek her permission to use information from her thesis. Her reply included the following :

"I am currently employed by the Golden Mile Museum in Kalgoorlie, and am preparing an ethnobotanical garden to surround the new building to be completed this year. I have a list of around 100 plant species used by Aborigines of the Goldfields and Western Desert areas. I am also collecting information on ethnobotany from the Coonara Aboriginal community, 150 km east of Kalgoorlie."

LOOKING AT AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS by Kathleen McArthur
Kangaroo Press (NSW) 1986

Another handsomely illustrated book in the authors chatty (but well-informed) style.

The paintings, anecdotes & evocations argue a simple case for preservation of our at-risk environments, by revealing the unique attributes of their flora.

A dozen or so of the wildflowers presented are edible, and the text throughout is entertaining and informative.

The layout of the book is perhaps a little disappointing - it is not up to the standard of her previous book THE BUSH IN BLOOM.

Worth a look.

Exocarpos cupressiformis

When I reported on ethnobotanical projects a couple of issues ago, I said I would supply more examples. Here is one page supplied by Beth Gott of Monash University from her database of Plant Use by the Victorian Aborigines:

NAMES-
. BOTANICAL : Exocarpos cupressiformis Labill.
. SYNONYMS-new:
. -old:
. COMMON : Cherry Ballart,Native Cherry
. ABORIGINAL : POLLI (?Ngurelban at Murchison,Dredge); BALLEE (Yarra,Intercolo. Exhib.); BALLOT (L.Condah,Smyth); POO-LYTE (Yarra,Smyth); PUL-LOITCH (Jajowerong,Smyth); PALATT - seed of native cherry-tree (Gunditjmara,Dawson); but WINING (Wergaia,Hercus)*

FAMILY : Santalaceae

PLANT HABIT : tree,shrub

USE-
. PART USED : fruit (succulent stalk,orange to red,seed on top),wood,sap
. USED FOR : food,implement(spearthrower,bullroarer),sap for medicine
. HOW USED : medicine for snakebite

. RECORDED : VIC.: Intercolon.Exhib.1866 (wood for spearthrower); Smyth 1878 (fruit,sap(2:160);Fison & Howitt 1880 (wood for bullroarer, Kurnai)

NUTRITION : seed is oily,not known whether it was eaten with the fruit. Whole fruit 0.32g,seed 17%,succulent part 83% of whole fruit. Dry wt:seed 75%,succulent part 25% of fresh wt.

OCCURRENCE-
. SPEC.HABITAT:
. Vic.LCC AREA: WI MV NC SW CO BA ME NE AL GL SG EG.

. Ex-Vic. : TAS,SA,NSW,QLD,

ABUNDANCE : frequently locally abundant

SEASON : ?all year

ARCHAEOL.PRES.:

COLLECTIONS : drawn,photo,seed

NOTES : The common name 'Ballart' is obviously taken from the Aboriginal name. In the early documents,there are frequent references to the native cherry which bears its stone outside the fruit.

* WINING could be a misidentification of E.aphyllus,q.v.

REFERENCES : Dredge,J. 1839 MS diary,Vic.State Library :63;
Intercolonial Exhibition,Melbourne, 1866 :225;
Smyth,R.B. 1878 Aborigines of Vic.1:210,213, 2:126,160,174;
Fison,L.& Howitt,A.W. 1880 Kamilaroi & Kurnai:267;
Maiden,J.H. 1889 Useful native plants:30;
Hercus,L. 1969 Vic.Languages:318;
Cribb,A.B.& J.W. 1975 Wild food:33-4;
Dawson,J. 1881 Aust.Aborigines:xxxiv.

BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher J Goudey MAIDENHAIR FERNS IN CULTIVATION Lothian (Melbourne) 1985.

This book could have been entitled "More than you ever wanted to know about Maidenhair ferns".

Introductory chapters deal with botanical nomenclature, propagation (including hybridization) and cultivation details for members of the Adiantum genus, and would be of value to all fern fanciers.

Then comes nearly 300 pages of illustrations, cultivation details and descriptions for the majority of species, and for many of the cultivated varieties.

An appendix lists all recognized species and their distribution.

For such a comprehensive book, the absence of a key to the species is a surprise. Also no mention is made of the uses of any species (Adiantum aethiopicum & A. capillus-veneris have been used by herbalists for treating coughs and other respiratory complaints), and for a non-enthusiast, the illustrations tend towards monotony.

Worth a look at your local library, if you are keen on growing ferns.

Christopher J Goudey A HANDBOOK OF FERNS for Australia and New Zealand Lothian (Melbourne) 1988.

This book is a guide to the cultivation of over 400 species of ferns (both native & exotic) in over 100 genera. Chapters include : Identification (to level of genus, using a simple guide to leaf shape and soral arrangement), Propagation, Pests and Diseases, Cultivation requirements, Places to see Ferns growing, and lists of suitable ferns for various requirements.

There are a lot of black & white illustrations with several colour pages. Only one reference is made to uses of ferns (outside gardening) - Nardoo (Marsilea spp.) is noted as having capsules which were once eaten by Aborigines. No reference is made to Bracken (Pteridium spp.) at all. However, I recognize many names of edible and useful species (such as Acrostichum, Adiantum, Blechnum, Cyathea, Dicksonia, etc.), so it would assist an intending fern-gourmet in growing suitable species.

212 pages, about $20, paperback.

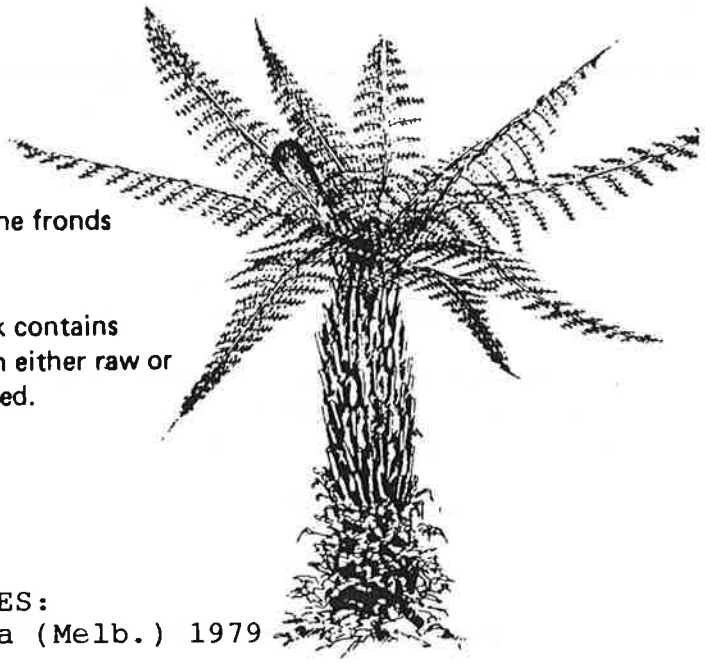
R. Barker

A useful publication I've only just discovered is A.P.A.I.S. - the **Australian Public Affairs Information Service**, published by the National Library of Australia 11 times each year. Worth flicking through at your State Library for the latest news on Australian Food Plants. Try looking under Food, Australian Aborigines, Anthropology, Ethnobotany, etc.

Sighted: **Traditional Bush Medicines: An Aboriginal Pharmacoepia** by the Aboriginal Communities of the Northern Territory of Australia Compiled and Researched by Andy Barr et al. Greenhouse (Vic.) 1988

Anyone care to review this very impressive looking book ?

SOFT TREE-FERN *Dicksonia antarctica*



HABITAT: Sheltered and moist gullies.

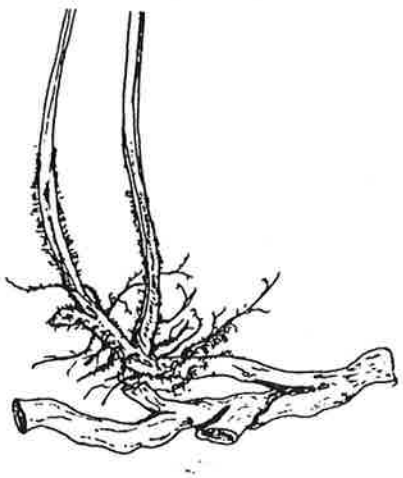
PLANT: The massive trunk is up to 5 metres tall with the fronds reaching to 3 metres in length.

PART EATEN: The soft, pithy tissue near the top of the trunk contains considerable quantities of starch and was eaten either raw or cooked. Similar types of tree-fern were also used.

A. Oates & A. Seeman VICTORIAN ABORIGINES:
Plant Foods National Museum of Victoria (Melb.) 1979

IF UNDELIVERABLE, PLEASE RETURN TO:
PO Box 62, Kangaroo Ground VIC 3097

BRACKEN (Pteridium esculentum)



CHERRY BALLART
(Exocarpos cupressiformi

Articles on both these species are featured within.