

20 YEARS OF PLANT COLLECTING IN THE KIMBERLEY

On 5 September 2001, Kevin Kenneally and I (Daphne Edinger) spoke to Kimberley Society about our botanical work in the Kimberley. The saga begins at the Walcott Inlet in May 1983. I had recently retired from teaching biology (in December 1982) and already belonged to ANZSES (Australia & New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society) who were organising this trip to the Kimberley. I had never been to the Kimberley before and it was the beginning of a long association, visiting every year but one for 18 years.

Kevin Kenneally, a specialist researching the Kimberley flora, arrived at Walcott Inlet as the botanical adviser. We met and felt an instant rapport and I became his assistant helping him to collect, press and describe the hundreds of specimens from a new area.

Kevin and I shared the telling of this story as we showed slides of the first five years of this fruitful association, botanically speaking, of course! Some of these early expeditions involved the Naturalists' Club and many of the audience were able to identify themselves and friends in the historical photographs.

The Walcott Inlet expedition in 1983 involved a four-week stay at a base camp on Neville Creek, a tributary of the Calder River, which is one of the three rivers emptying into this vast tidal inlet. We took many trips in dinghies to cover as much of the area as possible and climbed Mt Darglish in the Harding Range, stumbling back to camp in the dark. The results of this expedition were written up in the journal of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in 1993.

1984 was a busy year when we spent nine weeks in the Kimberley, combining three different trips. First was a boat trip with the Naturalists' Club from Broome around the coast north-eastwards, following the route of HMC 'Mermaid' in 1820 of Phillip Parker King and botanist Alan Cunningham, ending up in the Hunter River. This involved a camp on the beach at Naturalist Island in Prince Frederick Harbour. It was here that we had a visit from Dick Smith who spotted us and landed his helicopter to see what we were doing on such an isolated beach. We called in to Careening Bay where King had careened and repaired his deteriorating cutter, and the carpenter had inscribed the famous graffiti "HMC Mermaid 1820" on the huge boab behind the beach. Then up to King Cascade where King's crew had refilled their barecas with fresh water and very thankful to get it. We found the fresh water spring at the confluence of fresh and salt water in Hunter River described in Cunningham's diary, which I had transcribed especially for this trip and read excerpts to the members each night.

Back to Broome to start an expedition by vehicle to the Dampier Peninsula, ending up as far south as the Edgar Ranges. A new mulla-mulla collected from here was described by a German botanist as *Ptilotus kenneallyanus* – irreverently referred to as “Kevin’s bum plant” – and of a beautiful black-headed python, a road kill, which our feral companions threw on the fire and proceeded to eat. I was offered a piece and found it delicious.

The last leg of this trip was to Kununurra and the Bungle Bungles to join the large party discussing with the local Aboriginals how the area was to be managed as a national park, now called Purnululu. This involved a whole day collecting deep in Piccaninny Creek and on top of the vast dissected plateau by helicopter. This also resulted in a scientific report taking up an issue of the Naturalists journal in 1986.

Our 1985 trip was concentrated solely on the Dampier Peninsula when we found a new marshwort near Beagle Bay, subsequently named *Nymphoides beaglensis*. This trip involved a flight in a light plane from Broome up the coast to Cape Leveque and back, checking out the coastal vine thickets occupying the lee side of the vast white beach sand dunes.

1986 was a boat trip from Broome to the Sale River and back. Many of the rivers have no road access so the only way in is by sea.

1987 was also a boat trip to Camden Sound, again with the W A Naturalists’ Club. This was an area settled in 1865 by sheep farmers but was a disaster, ending in the death of the sheep and some of the colonists before they withdrew, defeated by heat, lack of water, suitable grasses for the animals, flies, mosquitos and disease.

1987 continued with the first of the Rainforest Surveys. We again assembled in Broome and travelled to a huge base camp on the King Edward River, including a helicopter pad. The groups of scientists were ferried in and out of their rainforest patches every three or four days. I remained behind doing all the chores in camp, such as assisting the entomologists with their collecting and attending to the plant presses and even washing people’s “smalls” when they were in a waterless site! This resulted, after three years work, in a book called “Kimberley Rainforests”.

After at least 10 years’ work on the Dampier Peninsula, Kevin, Tim Willing (from CALM Broome) and myself wrote the book *Broome and Beyond* for which we were awarded, in 1996, the CSIRO Medal for outstanding scientific research achievement. A fitting reward, but still the research and our association continues stronger than ever for who knows how many more happy years.

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