



THE
FERN SOCIETY

OF
VICTORIA
INC.

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NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENTS REPORT.

Our meetings this year have continued to be of high standard due to the enthusiasm and effort put in by our speakers. Our Fern Show again a tribute to the excellent work of our hard working show committee and our Tasmanian excursion a very memorable experience for all who participated. Our May meeting again on a Tuesday the 12th at the Herbarium will combine a slide presentation of our Tassie trip and our show with some practical work dividing a large elk donated to our society by Dot Miniken of Avenel.

We hope many country members will endeavour to be present so if your photos are available please bring them along for display mounted on some cardboard if possible.

I was very pleased with the quality of the slides given to me by members so this augurs well for a very enjoyable evening. I am hoping to see a full hall and every effort will be made to ensure supper will conclude the evening.

Fern Study Group A committee has been formed to study the feasibility of this important aspect of our society. I'm sure all members of our excursion would agree that one day in the field is worth more than many classroom lectures.

Special Effort Winners.

A magnificent mobile watermate pot donated by our Speaker Karen Read of Decor Corporation was our first prize and won by our Librarian David Radford other winners were

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 2. Terry Turney | 6. Debra Cadd |
| 3. Elaine Crellin | 7. Terry Fuhrmeister |
| 4. Sandra Miles | 8. Otto Binder |
| 5. Joe Cannon | 9. Sandra Miles |

Congratulations all.

A thankyou letter published in the newsletter is from Sue Yamins who travelled from Chicago to be with us for the Tassie excursion.

Ferns of the Old Kelly Basin Railway was written by Michael Garrett as we could not travel to this area during our excursion Michael gave us the article to publish so members could read the history of the early days in this area and the way the many species of ferns have survived and are now thriving.

Kind Regards,

Keith Hutchinson.

TUESDAY

≈ MAY 12 ≈

the herbarium

BIRDWOOD AVENUE, SOUTH YARRA.

MAY MEETING - 8.00 P.M. - SLIDE PRESENTATION- TASMANIAN
EXCURSION AND OUR FERN SHOW.

PLUS

PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION - DIVIDING AN ELK FERN.

A LETTER FROM THE U.S.A.

532 Gordon Avenue,
Calumet City, IL 60409. U.S.A.

30th March, 1987

Dear Keith,

I just wanted to thank you and all our other fellow Tasmanian travelers for the wonderful time we had in Australia. Everyone was so helpful and friendly and we felt most welcome during our entire visit. I will never forget the huge forest trees, tree ferns, and filmies at Milkshakes Hills. Or petting the wallabies at Lake St. Clair and Lake Dove (see enclosed photos)! The Fern Society of Victoria is lucky indeed to have such an extraordinary island to visit so close to home -- even if it does mean spending a few nights in the Detention River Centre!

During our day and a half in Melbourne Marie and I managed to see the Goudy's nursery, have dinner with the Duncans, and visit Ripponlea. The nursery is amazing; I don't know how Lorraine and Chris keep track of everything. After the trip to Ripponlea I finally had an understanding of what is meant by a fernery. There are no such fern growing structures in the U.S.

From Melbourne we headed to Fiji for a few days. We rented a car and drove around the southern part of Viti Levu, stopping and looking at ferns along the roadsides. We did get to Colo-i-Suva, a forest park north of Suva, and saw the largest Marattias I've ever seen and also "ant plants" (Hynophytums) in natural habitat. Finally, at the end of the week, we boarded a plane for the long flight back to the States. It has taken me a full week at home to get back on a normal time schedule here!

Please say hello for me to all the other Fern Society travelers when you see them next. Visiting Tasmania with such a knowledgeable group was a unique opportunity for us. And our community accommodations provided us with many laughs and friendships. 'Til we meet again, either in the States or down under!

With fond memories,
Sue Yamins

SPEAKER REPORT - GENERAL MEETING, 14th April, 1987.

GUEST SPEAKER: MRS. KAREN READ. TITLE - DECOR PRODUCTS.

The Decor Corporation was started in 1958 by Mr. Brian Davis and traded under the name of Brian Davis and Company.

The range grew from several very successful Houseware products to the current range of over five hundred lines. This includes Kitchenware, gardenware, wine related products, coolers, picnicware, pet and office products.

Two years ago the company name was changed to the Decor Corporation, the success of which is attributed to high quality, creative design and innovative products. This formula has resulted in a fine record of design awards for the company.

Decor has a total employment growth of over 20% during the last five years. It exports 8% of it's total sales to many countries throughout the world and has set up a subsidiary company in the United States. At present this subsidiary has sales representation in thirty of the fifty American States and by the end of this year it is expected that all states will have representation.

Decor's gardenware range has played a big part in the success of the Company. An extensive collection of various receptacles was displayed and their functions demonstrated. Of importance to fern growers was the watermatic. Karen said that these were formerly known as the Water Wells and that the name had to be changed to avoid duplication with another product on the American market. The window well, the clear waterwell and the mobile watermatic were all demonstrated.

The mobile watermatic is fitted with castors which make it easy to wheel from place to place; no lifting is necessary. Capillary action is provided by means of a tape wick which operates in the same way as an old kerosene lamp wick.

Karen demonstrated the potting method recommended for the watermatic. She chose a shallow rooting nephrolepis species and used a commercially prepared potting mix. She explained that the system works on capillary attraction and that any normal good quality potting mix is all that is needed. The mix was packed first of all tightly around the tube. Karen said that best results are obtained by watering from the top for the first four days. After that it is a lazy person's culture.

Research with Decor products has been undertaken by Mr. John Patrick a senior lecturer at the Horticultural College. He ran tests over ten weeks and reported on the growth rates of plants using different fertilizers in watermatic pots. He concluded that fertilizers with a higher nitrogen content than Potassium and Phosphorous facilitated a more rapid vegetative growth.

Mr. Patrick also reported that different soil mediums can be deceiving e.g. Clay soils offer the capillary lift of water to the plant but does not allow oxygen penetration to the roots. On the other hand sandy soils permit oxygen penetration but have no capillary lift. The large pores allow water to flow out; drawn by gravity.

The best results come from a balance between the two and a peat based compost is recommended. There were four further points:

1. Moisture may not reach the surface of the soil. Normally this would not prohibit plant growth unless the plant is small with shallow roots. Larger plants with deeper roots will obviously penetrate into moist soil.
2. Waterlogging will occur if the plant is continuously watered from the top. Water should be added through the tube into the saucer.
3. Fertilizer can be introduced by placing osmocote granules in the

tube to slow release into the saucer as liquid fertilizer.

4. Should a layer of soluble salts form on top of the soil, this can be washed through with water.

Users of Decor products should achieve up to 120% growth in their plants by the second year of installing them in a watermatic container.

Vote of Thanks: Society Treasurer, Albert Ward thanked Karen for her talk and for the trouble she had taken in bringing such a large and interesting range of pots and watermatics to the meeting. He also expressed appreciation of Karen's donation of a large mobile watermatic and several watermatic pots for competition in the Special Effort segment.

Members supported Albert by their applause.

Doug Thomas.

1987 ANNUAL FERN SHOW.

Our arrival at the Nunawading Horticultural Centre to set up for our seventh Annual Fern Show found the grounds, bush houses and glass houses again in immaculate condition. The staff there really do try hard and we are grateful for their efforts to fit in with our needs.

Our display this year included many more hanging specimens (some very unusual, all beautiful) suspended from a tall structure nearly 10 metres long against one wall of the hall. Tucked into a darker corner beside this was a delightful terrarium with its own lighting system. The opposite corner was filled by a large display of Aspleniums (topped by a huge birdsnest) which showed the enormous range of form of this genus.

After a good deal of trouble with recalcitrant adhesives, the wall behind the Adiantum bench was lined with mirrors and the "lift" given to the display made all the effort worthwhile. The centre of the hall was devoted to a massed display, mainly at low level, and several bench and hanging displays occupied the rest of the wall space.

Oliver Frost from Ripponlea provided a display of photographs showing the great fernery there in its earlier days and its recent rehabilitation. Hopefully, some of the visitors to our Show will have been encouraged to go and see its delights in real life.

The fern sales area was the usual hive of activity, the spore bank had many interested visitors, the demonstrations drew large audiences and the refreshment service was much appreciated in the warm conditions.

A new booklet "What to do about Ferns" written by Doug Thomas went on sale for the first time at this year's show and proved very popular (over 250 copies sold). This was written specifically to meet the frequent requests at past shows for a simple and low cost publication on the practical basics for fern growing. We thank and congratulate Doug for filling the requirement so well.

Attendance at the Show was good at just over 1,700 visitors, though considerably lower than last year. It is ironic to consider that much of the fall in attendance could have resulted from getting the good weather we had been hoping for - but it was very warm and coming after a succession of poor weekends probably encouraged people to concentrate on outdoor activities! Among the long-distance visitors to the Show were Natalia and Robby Jayanata from Indonesia (second year in succession for Natalia), Ethel Hasted of the Sunshine Coast Fern Society and Therese Moon from Wagga Wagga.

Although the smaller number of visitors naturally resulted in lower door takings, the income from fern sales was slightly higher than last year. Preliminary calculations indicate that the profit from the weekend should be around \$4,500.

Bob Lee.
Chairman Fern Show Committee

What is known locally as the Kelly Basin track is the last 10 to 12km of a once important railway line in the high rainfall area of Western Tasmania. The first half of this section is easily accessible by 4WD, while the second half to Kelly Basin is reduced to a foot track only. Presumably the Crotty Road from Linda to the beginning of this track follows other sections of the same line.

To the fern enthusiast, this track is breath-taking. Being a railway line, the route has been made level with numerous cuttings through the undulating countryside. The result is kilometre after kilometre of steep rock faces through rainforest - ideal growing conditions for a large number of ferns. The majority of ferns listed later are at some stage found on or at the base of these cuttings, but the commoner inhabitants of the walls are Asplenium bulbiferum, Blechnum chambersii, B. vulcanicum, Hymenophyllum australe, Lastreopsis hispida and Polystichum proliferum.

All these ferns can be seen at arms length on both sides of the narrow road by driving at near stalling speed to take it all in; or better still on foot. For those walking, it is not the usual 'up hill and down dale' walk we are used to in mountainous Tasmania. Perhaps the only discomfort is the mud, due to the heavy rainfall of the area. It could easily be described as a walk-in fernery going on and on for about 10 kilometres.

Not to mention the numerous side gullies and creeks that would take weeks and weeks to fully explore. Remember that ferns from these areas initially supplied the spore material to clothe the cuttings. Off the track the going is very easy, with a very dense overstorey and very little in the way of undershrubs and a thick carpet of leaf mould.

The track follows the Nora River then Bird River and offers magnificent 'wild river' views on a small scale. The rivers are lined with rainforest trees such as Myrtle, Sassafras, Celery Top Pine, Leatherwood and Huon Pine. Having rafted down the Franklin River a couple of years ago, I can honestly say that in one day on the Kelly Basin track, I saw more beauty and variety of ferns (and didn't get anywhere near as wet) than 14 days on the Franklin.

The railway line was commissioned by the North Lyell Copper Co. to carry ore from its mines near Gormanston to the wharves at Kelly Basin. This ore was smelted predominately for its copper, but also contained amounts of gold and silver.

In March of 1897 survey work commenced with 5 survey parties working at 6 mile intervals along the proposed route. The line would be approximately 30 miles long, with the first three miles from Kelly Basin being relatively flat, then a long gradient for the next 7 mile to the 900' above sea level mark. The originally planned 2'6" gauge plans were shelved in favour of the relatively expensive 3'6" line after several new rich mineral finds were made in the area.

In 1898 newspapers advertised for 300 axemen to clear the route for the railway. In August of that year the steamship 'Orowaiti' arrived at Kelly Basin with the first shipload of rails and fishplates.

Baxter and Saddler were contracted by the North Lyell Copper Co. to complete the railway within 12 months. They employed 1200 men for its construction, who started at both ends of the line. Problems and hardships were not so bad as on other lines built on the West Coast, but there were still several outbreaks of typhoid and dysentery. The Company's Inspector of Works was one of those who died from typhoid while working on the line. Numerous cuttings had to be made through the undulating country following the Bird and Nora Rivers, with one 156' tunnel planned for 3 miles from Kelly Basin. This was eventually avoided by making a steep cutting through the side of the hill, this section also being later detoured due to numerous land slips. Landslides, as well as the construction of trestle bridges, slowed down progress on other sections of the line.

The line was finished 9 months overdue in June 1900 at a cost of 316,638 which was three times the original estimate. In the previous year the steamship 'North Lyell' had arrived at Kelly Basin with the first load of locomotives and wagons. The line was equipped with superb rolling stock, including two mobile cranes, 100 trucks and some luxurious Pullman passenger carriages originally intended for an Argentine railway.

Unfortunately at Kelly Basin the crossings and switches were so defective that the trains were forever running off the rails, and farther inland, the line was often blocked for days from landslides in the cuttings.

The cove known as Kelly Basin was named after James Kelly who discovered Macquarie Harbour (of which Kelly Basin is part) in 1815. The township built around the railway and wharves at Kelly Basin was to be known as Macquarie, but was changed to Pillinger after the former Minister for Lands and Works died in 1899. Lots of land were sold at Pillinger to help finance the construction of the railway and these fetched some of the highest prices yet paid for land on the West Coast.

Apart from the massive railway terminal set up at Pillinger, other major constructions were stores, catholic church, library, sawmill, a large brickworks and four hotels. A railway pier and wharf, each 400' long, and the brickworks jetty at 900' long were also constructed. Some 4½ miles inland from Pillinger on the Nora River, a dam was constructed to generate power for the brickworks and street lighting, and to act as a town water supply. Pillinger was one of the best equipped of the smaller Australian ports. Its population in 1901 was 637.

The hustle and bustle of Pillinger was only short lived as in 1903 the railway line was closed down for the cartage of copper ore due to an amalgamation with the Mt. Lyell Copper Co. Hereafter the line was used only intermittently of timber for mine construction, fuel and the very occasional loads of coal or copper concentrate.

On 13/1/1925 the last train steamed out of Kelly Basin and the line was torn up. For some years after motor trucks crawled along the old railway formation, but traffic soon ceased with the ever present landslides, fallen trees and destruction of bridges by fire. At present it appears to be only used by bushwalkers, while the first 6km only is used by 4WD enthusiasts and beekeepers.

All that is left of Pillinger now, are a few carriages, remains of the wharves, railway tracks and scattered bricks and bottles poking up through the leaf mould. Forest has completely taken over the once cleared and built-on land, with the predominant ferns being Blechnum nudum, B. wattsi, Ctenopteris heterophylla, Dicksonia antarctica, Gleichenia microphylla, Histiopteris incisa, Hypolepis rugosula, Microsorium diversifolium, Polystichum proliferum, Pteridium esculentum, Rumohra adiantiformis, Sticherus tener and Todea barbara.

Of the 37 fern and fern allies sited on the Kelly Basin track, one is rare in Tasmania (Lindsaea trichomanoides), while Asplenium flaccidum, Diplazium australe, Lastreopsis hispida, Pteris comans and perhaps Lastreopsis acuminata would be considered uncommon. While all observations and recordings were made on only one day on the track, it would be most surprising if at least some of the following ferns do not occur there:

Asplenium flabellifolium - on rock in drier areas.

A. trichomanes ssp quadri-valens - limestone outcrops are reported as common in the area.

Blechnum minus - sure to be growing on the river banks.

Cyathea australis - a doubtful one for midway down the coast of cold Western Tasmania, but surprisingly it is recorded from Sarah Island 8km away from Kelly Basin. This island was a penal settlement and by the time all convicts were removed in 1832, it was entirely denuded of all its indigenous vegetation.

Hymenophyllum marginatum - easily overlooked and likely to be present.

Lindsaea linearis and Selaginella uliginosa - possibly in badly drained sunny areas around Kelly Basin.

The following ferns and fern allies were sited on or beside the Kelly Basin track:

Asplenium bulbiferum - very common, especially on cuttings, but also from rock in side creeks and on the trunks of trees and Dicksonia. There appears to be 3 forms growing here, 2 of which are quite common in Tasmania, but there appears to be a third very fine form which is very close to the type that grows in the Otway Ranges in Victoria. This is the first time I have seen this form in Tasmania. Specimens of all forms have been sent to Dr. Brownsey in New Zealand.

A. flaccidum - not uncommon on the trunks of Dicksonia or high up in the trunks or branches of larger trees, especially Myrtle. It seems to have a preference for trees growing in flats rather than on sloping ground. It is particularly common in the swampy forests a couple of kilometres before Kelly Basin. A. bulbiferum is absent from this area, but A. terrestre is occasional high up in the trees alongside A. flaccidum.

A. terrestre - Common in the same situations as A. bulbiferum and quite often growing in company with that fern, but capable of extending to drier situations.

Blechnum chambersii - is abundant in most wet rocky sites. It is perfectly at home on the railway cuttings, and where there is dripping water, it completely clothes the rock faces in a carpet of fronds.

B. fluviatile - not as common as B. chambersii, but often found growing with that fern or in other rock areas with less slope. It also grows on the banks of the rivers. The fronds of some plants appear quite stretched - it is probable that some areas are too dark for this fern.

B. nudum - frequently found growing in flat areas beside the track, sections of side creeks subject to flooding and from rocky platforms on the rivers. About half a kilometre from Kelly Basin, it covers acres and acres of ground to the exclusion of all other plants except for the occasional large Blackwood.

B. wattsi - abundant from all areas, whether in good light or in dense shade.

B. vulcanicum - common from wet rock formations, especially on cuttings, which it clothes in a similar fashion to Blechnum chambersii.

Ctenopteris heterophylla - not abundant, but probably more common in drier areas away from the track and rivers. Grows on trees, logs and rock and like Grammitis magellanica, seems to have a preference for clean wood. It is very common on trees around Kelly Basin.

Dicksonia antarctica - abundant most of the track, especially in the side gullies and between the track and the rivers.

Diplazium australe - common in damp areas alongside the track, mostly as individuals but occasionally forming small colonies. It quite often grows in wet soaks alongside Pteris comans.

Gleichenia microphylla - common from areas of high light and abundant moisture, usually on the top side of the track. It is especially abundant in wet and swampy areas in good light around Kelly Basin.

G. dicarpa - occasional from wet cuttings beside the track, but more frequent on drier, sunny roadside cuttings immediately outside the area.

Grammitis billardieri - very common on living and dead trees, logs and mossy rocks.

G. magellanica ssp nothofagetii - frequently found on mostly living or standing trees and usually with little competition from mosses.

Histiopteris incisa - abundant, forming extensive patches in areas of high light, as in where trees have fallen. Also occurs as scattered individuals in darker forest.

Hypolepis rugosula - common, and found under similar conditions to Histiopteris incisa.

Hymenophyllum australe - abundant everywhere, especially on rock in side creeks and cuttings.

H. cuppressiforme - quite common growing on logs and trees, particularly in drier areas, such as on rocks and roots of trees on the shore banks of Kelly Basin.

H. flabellatum - occasional from areas beside the track, on the trunks of Dicksonia, mossy logs, around the base of old trees and rare on rock.

H. rarum - abundant on logs, trees and rock. This fern relishes in very dark wet conditions.

Lastreopsis acuminata - not found till a couple of kilometres west of the Bird River bridge, but from there on common in gravelly soil, cuttings and on wet rock.

L. hispida - this beautiful fern is thankfully abundant in some of the side creeks and especially on cuttings. It grows on rock, in gravelly soil and occasionally attempts to climb the trunk of Dicksonia. This is the first occasion I have seen both Tasmanian species of Lastreopsis growing side by side.

Lindsaea trichomanoides - only one colony of this attractive rare fern was found. They were growing in soil on a rock ledge about 2m up one of the cuttings. Looking at them from a distance at that angle in the low light, they could easily be mistaken for large Hymenophyllum australe. This fern also grows just outside the area in a very dark corner of the Nora River.

Lycopodium deuterodensum - found at the very beginning of the track, growing from a more exposed cutting. Exciting to see the exposed primitive rhizome creeping down over the rock face. It is much more common around Kelly Basin.

L. fastigiatum - growing in the same area as L. deuterodensum but under slightly darker conditions. At 200m above sea level, this spot at the beginning is the highest on the track.

L. varium - individual plants are occasionally found throughout the whole area, usually on cuttings. At one site near the river, there is a small colony with seemingly fine leaves growing from the trunks of a couple of Dicksonias - but this is possibly only due to the dark conditions. It is more common around the shores of Kelly Basin, growing on Leptospermum.

Microsorium diversifolium - common on rock, trees and Dicksonia, usually growing its best high up in the trees where there is more light.

Polyphlebium venosum - not uncommon on the trunks of Dicksonia. Also growing uncharacteristically on rock, either on cuttings or other formations away from the track, but in every case with no competition from mosses or liverworts.

Polystichum proliferum - abundant in all areas, whether good light or dense shade, dry or wet, but not from boggy sites.

Pteridium esculentum - commonly found in drier areas with good light away from the track.

Pteris comans - not uncommon in very wet boggy sites, either on, or just to the side of the track. Often grows in company with Diplazium australe.

Rumohra adiantiformis - very common on rock (but not often seen on cuttings), logs, trees and the trunks of Dicksonia. It likes the same conditions as Microsorium diversifolium and is often found growing with that fern.

Schizaea fistulosa - at the very beginning of the track only, growing in a shallow layer of soil in a semi-exposed cutting in company with Lycopodium dueterodensum. At this one site it is very common, as it is on similar cuttings alongside the road outside the area.

Sticherus tener - common from wet areas on cuttings, growing equally well in shade or good light. Some huge plants completely cover some slopes around Kelly Basin.

Tmesipteris billardieri - very robust, long specimens occasionally found on the trunks of Dicksonia.

Todea barbara - on the track in, only two plants were noticed (1 juvenile - 1 mature), both growing from the same cutting. However very large plants are common around the shores of Kelly Basin.

The Kelly Basin track is quite remarkable and unique for its history, beauty, ease of walking and the diversity of fern species found there. Walks in other areas of Tasmania may contain fern species numbers approaching somewhere near the figure produced here, but usually only because they include lowland as well as sub-alpine or alpine species. On the Kelly Basin track, just about all species that are possible to be found in cold rainforest in lowland Western Tasmania are found. The only exceptions are Asplenium flabellifolium, Blechnum minus, Hymenophyllum marginatum, Lindsaea linearis and Selaginella uliginosa, and I have no doubt that these will turn up.

This is my first experience with the handiwork of man actually leading to the unintentional increase of non-weedy type fern species. While I doubt that the railway construction effected any long term decrease in any fern species, it is probably quite the opposite with all cutting inhabitants, in particular Asplenium bulbiferum, Blechnum chambersii, B. vulvanicum and Lastreopsis hispida. Unfortunately blackberries are also present in some of the sunnier spots, and no doubt while there are vehicles, boots and birds around, they will always be present. But the few present populations are probably small enough to hand pulled to stop vegetative spread.

Except for the low light conditions, the track is a fern photographers dream. All ferns are nicely displayed on a vertical wall with a good level base for the tripod. If the ferns were too high up on the cutting, I quite often set the tripod up on the roof-rack on top of the 4WD.

D I A R Y D A T E S .

VENUE: HERBARIUM - Birdwood Avenue, Sth Yarra.

JUNE MEETING: THURSDAY 18th - Chris Goudey.

NOTE. In the event of a power strike on the evening of any meeting, we regret that the meeting must be cancelled.

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