



THE
FERN SOCIETY

OF
VICTORIA

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NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 4 MAY, 1985

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGEThe April Meeting:

Our night for beginners on 11th April, 1985 was truly one of great enjoyment and interest. The large audience, by its very presence gave support and encouragement to our three Guest Speakers. The speakers were all well worthy of that support.

Albert Jenkins led the way with a splendid demonstration titled "Growing Ferns Inside" then a description of the use of solar heat in fern house construction. He also spoke on the need to provide the right type of light for ferns. "Light Intensity".

Then Mrs Betty Allgood provided us with an absorbing demonstration titled "Ways with Elks". Betty showed us at least half a dozen different treatments in the mounting of elks, every one of which provided a thing of beauty.

Our third speaker was Barry White who dispensed a humorous description of the "fern craze" and what it had done to every available corner of his back yard at Essendon. He even went so far as to say that the nature strip outside his front fence was in grave danger of being "taken over". Barry used colour slides to illustrate his enterprise. It was obvious that his management, building and landscaping were first class and that the ferns loved it.

Gadgets:

The supply of gadgets was well down on previous years but nevertheless some very useful equipment was brought in. These also stimulated interest among Members.

Thank you Speakers, Gadget Makers and all of those other people who contributed so well to the success of the meeting. It was a most enjoyable night.

Special Effort:

Our "Special Effort Competition" was something of a marathon too. Eight prizes were available for competition. We had three lovely potted ferns, three packs of "jiffy pots" and two bottles of Maxicrop. The winners were:-

1. Rod McConchie
2. Neville Clarke (2 prizes)
3. John Heath
4. Jean Trudgeon
5. Derek Griffiths
6. Bill Taylor
7. Emmanuel Pickard

Congratulations Winners !

Next Month:

Phillip Hicks, a lecturer at the Burnley Horticultural College is our Guest Speaker for the May meeting. Phillip will speak on "Insect Pests".

Date: Thursday, May 9th.
Venue: Burnley Horticultural College Hall.
Time: 8.00 p.m.

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AT OUR MAY MEETING, WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE
MR. PHILIP HICKS, LECTURER AT BURNLEY HORTICULTURAL COLLEGE,
AS OUR GUEST SPEAKER.

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HE WILL BE SPEAKING ON "INSECT PESTS" - A SUBJECT OF GREAT
INTEREST TO US ALL.

LET'S HAVE A GOOD ATTENDANCE ON THURSDAY 9TH MAY, 8 P.M.
TO WELCOME PHILIP.

Spore Bank Assistant:

Joel Mackard has responded to our appeal for an officer to assist Bill Bright with spore bank sales and mailing. Thank you Joel, your voluntary involvement is very welcome.

The Fern Show - 1985:

The big audience at the APRIL meeting showed its appreciation of the work done by organisers, designers, diplomats and workers at the Society's Fern Show in March. The appreciation was shown by the spontaneous acclamation of Members. It was well deserved. The whole show exercise was a mighty effort and a success.

Members lent ferns for the display which totalled at least fifty genera with as many as twenty-seven species in some of these. The boost to Society funds was timely and rewarding.

Show Sub-Committee leaders Bob Lee, Bill Taylor and Barry Stagoll together with the helpers, stewards, door attendants, sales people and spore bank vendors deserve our most sincere thanks for a job so well done.

The Annual Fern Show has now become a great example of what a united, energetic and loyal Membership can do when put to the test.

Although absent from the meeting, Keith Hutchinson sent along a selection of colour slide photographs which he had taken at the Show. It was good to see these on the screen. Thank you Keith.

Lord Howe Island Excursion:

Chris reported at the April meeting that arrangements for the May excursion to Lord Howe Island are nearing completion.

We who are staying at home wish the contingent a pleasant, harmonious and enjoyable trip and a safe return.

The Cash Flow: Cash Flow is a term that we have had to live with for quite a time. To most of us it simply means that our money flows swiftly out of our hands and "down the drain".

In a recent episode of the T.V. series "Minder" one Arthur Daly explained his interpretation of cash flow to his employee in this way. "Terry", he said, "Cash flow simply means that if I get paid, you get paid."

And so it is with the Society's finances. If the subscriptions are paid promptly, then our Executive knows its financial limitations and can budget accordingly.

Subscriptions are due to renewal on the 1st July, 1985 and Members are urged to make a big effort to renew before the end of July.

Expenditure this financial year has rocketed alarmingly and in order to curb the heavy outflow of funds the Committee has implemented several economic restraints directed at areas of greatest spending. Others are under consideration.

To apply the Arthur Daly philosophy; the Committee can continue to provide services to Members only if it gets paid - promptly. The situation is serious; will you help?

With kindest regards,
DOUG THOMAS

REPORT OF SPEAKERS' COMMENTS - GENERAL MEETING, 11TH APRIL, 1985

TALK 1: Albert Jenkins - "Growing Ferns Inside"

It is fairly common practice for many people to buy lovely ferns to place in their homes simply to decorate and beautify rooms. It is a tragic fact that not many of these ferns survive.

Albert assured Members that the loss of a fern in these circumstances need never happen. The reason for the losses is that during Winter the use of heaters in the home dries out humidity from the air. When this occurs the plastic pots: in which most ferns are now potted; become too warm. The tender tips of the feeder roots are burned off and the fern is starved of nourishment.

Albert then demonstrated a method by which this burning off of feeder roots can be prevented. He said that it is preferable to have the fern potted into a terra cotta pot because of the porous nature of the terra cotta. Next Albert selected a second pot which was about 50mm (2") larger in diameter than the first; not necessarily terra cotta. He added charcoal to the bottom of the larger pot so that when the smaller pot was inserted inside the larger one, then respective heights were the same. Then he pressed sphagnum moss into the void between the two pots. Albert explained that in this double potting method the outside pot gets hot and the moisture evaporates from the sphagnum. It creates a draught through the sphagnum which provides the humidity needed for growing ferns indoors.

The ferns should be placed in a position affording good light, and watering should include a wetting of the sphagnum.

Other methods employed by Albert include the use of fern baskets made from moulded tree fern fibre. These are stood in saucers of Maxicrop water. The water soaks up into the fibre and provides all of the fertilizer that the plant needs. Albert showed us a Sleeping Beauty maiden hair which had not been repotted for six years. Like all the other ferns which he brought to the meeting, this one was magnificent.

Albert went on then to discuss the effect of light on growing ferns and gave us examples of the reaction of ferns to light. He has made a personal study of "Light Intensity" and has applied this to the construction of a solar glasshouse. Albert said that the basic concept is to receive and conserve day time warmth and to insulate against loss of that warmth during the night. He places drums of water on the floor of the solar house. The water warms up during the day and in turn provides humidity and warmth overnight.

Windows are double glazed as an insulation and at the same time allow a full amount of available light. Day temperatures in very hot weather were 11°C cooler in the solar house than the official maximum.

A first class talk - thank you Albert.

TALK 2: Betty Allgood - "Ways with Elks"

Betty brought an excellent collection of well grown elks to demonstrate some rather unusual "ways" of mounting them. She explained the natural environment and habitat areas of these ferns with particular emphasis on *Platycterium Veitchii* and *P. Bifurcatum*.

Betty showed us how to simulate nature in her varied treatments. We saw *P. Veitchii* mounted on a slab of tree fern fibre, growing very nicely indeed and preferring to be kept a little on the dry side.

One *Bifurcatum* was simply growing in a terra cotta pot, whilst two other treatments involved the use of artistically shaped tree branches. In the former method Betty said that by producing pups the fern would eventually surround the pot completely.

In another exhibit, bird's nest ferns were introduced into an arrangement wherein the elks had formed their own basket. Betty said that in nature the two are often found growing together as epiphytes.

Finally we saw a *Bifurcatum* set up in a wire fern basket. This preparation was very attractive and made so by the production of encircling pups.

Thank you Betty - yours was a well prepared and demonstrated presentation.

TALK 3: Barry White - "Approach to Developing a Fern Area"

Barry explained that his fern area is situated in a Melbourne suburb often described as "Windy Hill". Essendon to be precise. He said that conditions are really windy there and his fern area faces to the north. It is from the north that hot drying winds attack Barry's fern plot.

Barry screened colour slides of his enterprise which described the construction of timber framework, the position of protective gum trees, the electrical fittings and arrangement of lighting. He had used a nice rich red-brown paint on all of the wood work and had set down attractive pavings which Besser paving slabs. Logs and rocks had been used to define pathways and to landscape the planting areas. Covering overhead is shade cloth in most areas but Barry's propagating house is plastic covered.

The ferns in Barry's collection looked beautiful and healthy. Some species which his photographs described were: Common Spleenwort, Caterpillar fern, Hart's Tongue, Button fern, Elks on growing tree ferns, Felt fern and *Dictynia Brownii*.

Barry also showed us his automatic watering system and said that it has been made effective by the installation of a Kambrook timer. This device provides watering four times a day.

This was yet another delightful and interesting talk. Barry had prepared well and delivered his repartee with a nice touch of humour. It was very much appreciated by Members. Thank you Barry.

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Gadgets: It was good to see that some Members had taken the trouble to bring in items of equipment that they had either made or converted from packaging materials.

In a couple of instances we had wire rings with wire uprights attached that kept the wayward fronds of maiden hairs from lolling over the edges of their pots. These rings, made from wire coathangers, had the effect of consolidating the fronds in a supportive and lovely arrangement.

We saw polystyrene articles retained from supermarket packaging which had been converted to use as spore growing containers, sporeling tray and saucers.

Three timber home made sieves were also shown. These provided meshes of 3mm (1/8"), 6mm (1/4") and 12mm (1/2").

Thank you gadget makers. You contributed well to the Beginners' night theme.

THE "RIPPONLEA" PROJECT

Among many enjoyable moments at the Fern Show was one which warmed the hearts of officers who are pressing for this Society's involvement in the planting of the reconstructed Fern House at "Ripponlea".

One of our Members from Mount Gambier, South Australia, Mrs. Nita Frost, handed in two large cartons of ferns which she hoped would be used in the replanting.

This was an exemplary gesture, the very first for the project, and brought all the way from Mount Gambier.

Thank you very much indeed, Nita Frost.

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1985 ANNUAL FERN SHOW

The layout of the display at our Fifth Annual Show differed considerably in concept from that of its predecessors. Previously we had tended to use large massed displays of fern in more or less random order arranged to give maximum visual impact. This time an effort was made to provide a more open display based around the concept of arranging most of the ferns in related groups, as mentioned in previous Newsletters. The majority of the display was set low so as to provide a more natural angle of view on to the ferns. A new pergola set on the stage was used to display hanging specimens. The corner adjoining the pergola was filled by a tiered display leading down to a small pool and the opposite corner of the hall was set out as a fern gully. The display received favourable comment from many of the visitors, who also appreciated the extra room available to circulate around the hall and view the ferns at leisure.

We tried to make a comprehensive list of the ferns on display. It is too long to publish in the newsletter, but copies will be available at the May general meeting for anyone wishing to peruse the list (and perhaps add in any ferns we missed!). The list covers over 50 genera and a multitude of species and cultivars. Amongst the ferns in the planned family grouping, Asplenium led the field with 24 separate species, followed by Adiantum with 19, Pteris with 18 and Blechnum with 16, but Adiantum won easily on total count aided by at least 19 cultivars of A.raddianum.

A total of 1,560 people (plus children) visited the Show over the weekend and purchased just over 2,000 ferns. The income from door takings and sales of ferns, spore and posters yielded a profit of approximately \$3,050 for the weekend. Some 50 new members joined the Society.

The Show Sub-Committee is grateful to all the people who contributed to the preparation and running of the Show by providing ferns and joining in the many areas of activity; there were some truly great efforts. Thanks also go to the Who Company for providing the igloos in which the sale ferns were housed.

Planning for our next Show has begun and we are anxious to have your comments and suggestions on ways to improve the event. It is important that we get fresh ideas or the Show may tend to become stereotyped and lose its appeal to the public.

BOB LEE
CHAIRMAN

Fern Show Sub-Committee

We have a few back copies of our newsletter of 1981, '82, '83 and '84 available at \$1.00 each. As not all issues are available I would pick out those with outstanding articles if required. Please add \$1.00 postage and write to 17 Grandview Grove, Rosanna 3084.

KEITH HUTCHINSON

THE FERN COMMUNITY AT MOUNT DROMEDARY, SOUTH COAST, NEW SOUTH WALES

by Barry Stagoll

Whilst staying on the South Coast in May, Gay and I took the opportunity to climb Mount Dromedary, a more-or-less solitary peak of a little over 2,500 feet inland from the small township of Central Tilba (you may know it for its national Trust classification as an historic town, or for the fact that you pass through it around mid-point on probably the worst remaining section of the highway as it winds through sharply undulating country).

The mount is within a N.S.W. Department of Forests preserve, being part of the Bodalla State Forest. You can approach it from several directions. We used the most-usual entry from the north along Dromedary Creek, off the unsealed road which connects Tilba with the "scenic drive" around the inland foreshores of Wahgonga Inlet. However, we wasted a little time finding the correct turn-off. In contrast to the "commercial" attractions in the vicinity those run by public authorities are not always well signposted.

In reasonably dry weather, from this direction you can drive down a track virtually to the start of the slope. The track beyond this point continues wide enough to accommodate vehicles, but the gradients and surface conditions demand four-wheel drive. Not being so equipped, we climbed on foot. In any case, it is fairly difficult to pick out small plants from a bucking seat! not to mention the advantage of enjoying the exercise, including jumping out of the way of the many "hikers" who were doing the mount on wheels.

The walk up and back from our set-off point is put at four hours. We dawdled a bit over our discoveries, and took a little over five.

The first ferns to be encountered on the mount proper, apart from the ubiquitous bracken (*Pteridium*), were a small *Pyrrosia* (I think *rupestris*) and necklace fern (*Asplenium flabellifolium*), growing on the lower trunk of a large deciduous tree, one of a variety growing together in what was obviously once a fairly isolated farm on the lower slope. Both ferns are quite common elsewhere in the region, in some places close to the coast.

Keeping a keen eye peeled on the lower slopes one also comes across patches of common maidenhair (*Adiantum aethiopicum*), and both *Dicksonia antarctica* and *Cyathea australis* tree-ferns are abundant.

Other types of ferns are not much in evidence on the track up the north side until the ridge is reached. The track then follows a reasonably flat course under a medium tree cover for around a sixth of a mile, at a height perhaps a bit less than two-thirds that of the summit. Along this section, apart from plentiful bracken again, good stands of lacy-ground fern (*Dennstaedtia davalliodes*), rainbow fern (*Culcita dubia*), common rasp fern (*Doodia aspera*), and sickle fern (*Pallaea falcata*) occur.

As the track begins to rise sharply again into a rocky, comparatively dry section of the terrain, we came across two varieties of *Lindsaea* on the embankment, neither of which we could name with certainty. Both small and frail, as usual with this species, but managing in a harsh, thin soil layer on partially-exposed rocks.

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The track then ascends fairly sharply to a small parking area for vehicles, and from this a circular walking trail leads to the summit. Those wishing only to visit the latter as quickly as possible take the "short" leg, those who are interested in the surroundings the "rain forest" leg. This works its way around the mount, mainly on the southern and southwesterly aspects until quite close to the summit.

Hard water fern (*Blechnum wattsii*) and more *Doodia* and *Pellaea* are soon encountered. Then an interesting natural grotto, under a rock ledge about 8 feet high and 20 feet or so off the trail, which is heavily populated with strap water fern (*Blechnum patersonii*), fishbone water fern (*Blechnum nudum*), kangaroo and fragrant fern (*Microsorium diversifolium* and *scandens* respectively). It was at this stage that we began to regret the fact that we had not loaded the camera with a fast slide film and brought flash gear along, as this presented an interesting picture subject but the natural light level was very low even at mid-afternoon on a bright day.

A few feet further on was a luxuriant growth of scrambling coral fern (*Gleichenia microphylla*), and a patch of oak-leaf fern (*Histiopteris incisa*), growing as usual in a fairly well-lit area, quite close to one of the more important "finds" - a well-developed specimen of king fern (*Todea barbara*). Numbers of shiny shield ferns (*Lastreopsis shepherdii*) began to appear in this vicinity, and we also came across what seemed to be (as far as we could see) a solitary specimen of a quite different *Lastreopsis*, which we could not name (and felt too diffident to take a frond specimen of in the circumstances).

There follows a fascinating area, quite large in extent, of fairly gently-sloping ground, with a good depth of soil and well populated with mature trees. This enjoys sufficient shade to assist ferns and other shade-tolerant plants to exist at the expense of other flora, and in this area fragrant fern grows in profusion, both on trees/treeferns and rooted in the soil, together with some kangaroo fern, finger fern (*Grammitis billardieri*), shield hare's foot (*Rumohra adiantiformis*), and various filmy ferns.

It took a while to tear ourselves away from this area, but striking out then through the thinning tree cover to the summit there was plenty of rainbow fern and *doodia* again in open patches in that stretch.

The final fern encountered turned out to be a largish colony of silky fan fern (*Sticherus tener*) occupying an open situation virtually at the summit.

All in all we counted over 25 varieties, and of interest was the fact that we found some growing in situations we had not previously associated them with. Other members may well find it worth a few hours of their time to look in at Mount Dromedary if they are in its vicinity in agreeable weather. Perhaps they might go equipped to take the photographs we missed.

LAMENT FOR A LOST MAIDEN

by Fran Cleland

(This delightful poem first appeared in "Stock and Land" and was sent to us by Mrs. R. Jennings.)

My garden looks so lovely; the plants there thrive and grow,
The greenhouse is a blaze of blooms, but my heart is full of woe.
The roses grow, the pansies beam, but I'm plunged in deep despair
Because one plant just will not thrive ...
That blasted Maidenhair.

I well remember the first time I spied its lovely greenness,
Its gentle softness won my heart, I took it home with keenness.
I found for it the perfect place ... a sunlit ledge inside
But lo! within a day or two, it pined away and died.

Not daunted I dashed to the shop and quickly bought another
It barely got inside the door before it joined its brother.
Tele ads keep us anxious about falling hair
And in fear of B.O. and bad breath,
But ... there's nothing to spray or massage that will fix
My Maidenhair Fern Kiss of Death.

I've tried everything to entice them to grow
I've fed them and blessed them and starved them,
I've drowned them with rain water, piled them with snow
And I once grabbed a big axe and halved them.

I consulted all the experts, apply what they say
(and bods like Kev. Heinz don't talk drivell)
I pot, and I fertilise, love care and pray ...
But spore stalk and leaf they still shrivel.

Some claim I would save them by facing them south
And by tealeaves and bark round them piling,
I once even added a slosh of white rum ...
At least that was one that died smiling.

A friend has one verdant, and georgeous and lush
So alive it makes me feel like snarling,
It lives on her back porch, the object of awe,
She dotes on it ... calls it "My Darling"!!!

"I'm going to Queensland to visit my Mum",
She cooed, "And I do need to park it",
"Don't leave it with me" I shouted in fear,
"Or by Friday at latest, t'will cark it!!!"

Another friend has magic hands, her house is full of ferns,
And Maidenairs peep out of pans, and pots and tubes and urns.
I asked her how she does it and she told me what to do,
I did it and another fern resembled spinach stew.

I just give up, I'll stick to flowers, it's left me all unnerved.
The only fern I'll ever buy is one that's marked, "Preserved".

I'm sad and so unhappy, and it's really most unfair ...
It's my birthday and they've given me ... another maidenhair.

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DIARY DATES

Thursday Phillip Hicks
May 9th "Plant Pests"

Thursday Rod Hill
June 13th

Burnley Horticultural School Hall, Burnley, 8 p.m.

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

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Singles: \$12.00
Family: \$15.00
Pensioner Single: \$ 8.00
Pensioner Married: \$10.00

