

WANDERING, OBSERVING AND RECORDING

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This paper details a follow-up trip to that described in *The Orchadian*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (September, 1993).

In early winter 1992, I had the opportunity to inspect an area on the south-western edge of the Darling Downs, in south-eastern Queensland. A lady had given me an orchid flower from this area for identification and it turned out to be an undescribed taxon. Further investigation was warranted.

Upon arrival, she was able to show me several locations and further searching revealed many similar rosettes over a wide area on state forest and private property. The original flower was one of the "rufa" group of *Pterostylis* and it was flowering in spring. It quickly became obvious that a comprehensive survey would be essential.

In a rocky gorge, many rosettes of a kind similar to *P. parviflora* were seen growing over a wide area in rocky crevices, often with maiden hair fern. I deduced it was an autumn flowering species due to the presence of numerous recently chewed-off inflorescences.

On a different day, whilst searching further afield, a single flowering plant of the undescribed *Pterostylis* was found, growing under bushes locally known as "turkey bush", a shrub which grows to about three metres tall. As I pushed into this large clump of bushes looking for further flowers, my concentration was broken by a loud grunting noise. I looked up and saw a wild pig, not more than five metres in front of me. As these bushes are not strong enough to support the weight of a person and yet too thick to stand upright in, we just looked each other in the eye. This situation seemed to go on for an eternity, but in fact it was only seconds before the pig turned and moved away. Returning the next day I was able to find several more flowers in this area. They resemble *P. longicurva* and are at present under further investigation.

With this information and the knowledge I had gathered on that earlier trip, I planned a return visit in the spring of 1992. I left home in mid-September and was away for a month, covering approximately 4,000km. It was a trip I will always remember.

Returning to the original area, I located *Caladenia fuscata* and *Pterostylis bicolor* occurring among Cyprus pines in a number of locations on the outwards journey. Upon arrival at the property it started to rain, as it had done on my earlier visit, but by next morning the weather was clear. A short walk of some 50m from the house revealed many *Pterostylis* flowers of the "rufa" group. This species was identified as *P. aff. boormanii* and it has been seen and recorded in a number of locations in this district.

I returned to the state forest where I had encountered the wild pig (feral goats are also common here, especially in rocky country) and found a number of *Pterostylis* species. That day, in an area of perhaps two square kilometres, I saw *P. mutica*, *P. aff. boormanii*, a form of *P. hamata*, *P. aff. mitchellii*, a species first collected north and south-east of Roma in the spring of 1991, a different form of *P. hamata* and a collection which contained *P. mutica* and *P. cycnocephala* growing together. A pale green flowered form of *P. aff. boormanii* was also seen, which differed from the normal red-brown colour. *Caladenia fuscata* was also present. These species were not unduly affected where cattle were grazing, but crossing a fence into a paddock which contained sheep, I notice they just disappeared, although the vegetation type did not differ.

I was joined next day by a botanist from the Queensland Herbarium who wanted to look at some interesting *Macrozamia* plants I had seen.

He wanted to show me some country a further 150km to the west, which he thought would interest me. Leaving the property before sunrise, we made a hazardous journey, due more to goats than kangaroos. It was an unusual area, consisting of five or six hectares which rose about 15m above the surrounding sandy cyprus plains. A four-wheel drive vehicle was necessary due to sand bogs and the very steep track leading up to the flat table-top. Approximately half the area was covered by dwarf heath no more than 25cm tall. Around the outer edges amongst the rocky outcrops occurred cyprus pine and stunted eucalypts. The dwarf heath grew in very shallow sandy soil on a solid sandstone base.

Investigation of the timbered margin around the edge revealed terrestrial orchids. I saw old seed pods of *Caladenia caerulea* and *Pterostylis parviflora*. This latter species is quite red in colour compared to the green form from the Glasshouse Mountains district. A *Calochilus* which may have been *C. robertsonii* did not travel well, so positive identification will have to wait until further flowers can be obtained. Nearby I located a number of flower buds of a species with a fine single leaf which I did not recognise. As we were looking at one of them, the flower opened to reveal its identity, a *Caleana*, or flying duck orchid. This species appears to be an unidentified taxon, with a flower similar in size to *C. minor*, but light green and white in colour.

In the first week of January, 1993, I had the opportunity to return to this location with the botanist, fully aware that at this time of the year it would be hot and dry. In the heath patch I located an old, dry flower of *Orthoceras strictum*, something I would not have expected to see in a region which receives only about 750mm (30 inches) of rain annually.

Proceeding from here on the original trip, we visited a number of heath type locations, which varied only from the original because they were not raised above the surrounding countryside. In one of these *Pterostylis bicolor* was widespread, *Caladenia fuscata* was seen occasionally and *Diuris tricolor* was scattered in

occurrence. Throughout this district *Cymbidium canaliculatum* was seen growing in tree hollows, in the forks of cyprus pines with the roots penetrating the bark, or in old cyprus logs on the ground, with the orchid roots piercing the old cracked bark and entering the rotting timber.

From here I moved on to the Chinchilla area where I had found some *Pterostylis* the previous year, then known as *P. aff. rufa*, but now referred to as *P. aff. lingua*. A search of the area showed that this species is not common, although a few were seen some 500m further along the track. About 3km away I found a number of other *Pterostylis* growing in a small area, which turned out to be *P. aff. mitchellii* (the previously mentioned species from near Roma) and *P. aff. boormanii*. In a hard, flat clay-pan, two plants of *Diuris tricolor* were seen, along with a single rosette of a *Pterostylis*. I believe this area may produce other interesting finds during a year of normal rainfall.

Another day I came across an old sleeper mill site, with a sawdust pile some 8m high by 30m across. As I walked around it, it became obvious that this pile had been started near an eroded creek bank and that the sawdust had overflowed into the creek, making the pile over 11m high on that side. It was surrounded by a hectare or more of neatly stacked ironbark flitches, up to 1.8m deep and upon these flitches grew in excess of 1,000 plants of *Cymbidium canaliculatum*, from seedlings to mature plants up to 450cm across, heavily in spike. These were the most healthy plants I have ever seen and the easiest for collection. Their large roots travelled amongst the flitches and under the bark still attached. I was able to remove one plant with its 2.4m long root system undamaged. I suppose one day a bushfire will catch up with this colony and one can only guess for how long it will burn with this fuel supply. It may turn out to be a good source of charcoal. I had hoped to return to this site on my way home a week or so later, to see what I believe would have been a marvellous display and a chance to compare *Cymbidium* flowers, but this was not to be. Moving on to

the Roma district, where I based myself at a friend's home, I re-visited a state forest to the north of the town where I first saw *Pterostylis* aff. *mitchellii* the previous year. Here I located many more flowering plants than the few I had seen before. Later, to the south-east, I again saw this species in greater numbers and over a much wider area. Also seen over a wide area was *P. aff. lingua*.

I made contact with a local woman who is interested in wild flowers. She told me she knew the whereabouts of some greenhoods, bearded and flying duck orchids and she was prepared to show me these locations. We arranged to meet her at The Gums at 12.30 p.m. and I could only guess at what was in store, as the country we were to visit averages only 500mm (20 inches) of rain a year.

We met at the arranged time and she suggested we follow her to the *Pterostylis* habitat. After an hour's drive down the highway and a short journey along a dirt track, through country where, if lucky, you saw a couple of trees every kilometre, she pulled up. My friend looked at me and I at him, thinking what a joke it was to travel this far and then stop at a group of five or six trees just inside the fence. We were informed that it had been 10 years since she had seen these orchids, but we had the permission of the property owner to go in. My friend said he would have a quick look so as not to disappoint her and upon reaching the trees he beckoned me over. We saw a single flowering plant of *P. aff. mitchellii* under a small prickly shrub and we could not believe our eyes. The surprise on our faces must have been noticed, as she commented that we looked doubtful about this spot when we pulled up.

A further couple of kilometres up the road we came upon a few acres of natural scrub. We spent a while looking around and came to the conclusion that this species must have been well distributed before clearing took place.

Time would not permit her to show us any other areas that day. She suggested that rather than spend the night in the bush, we should put our sleeping bags on the verandah at her place.

On the way back we stopped at a spot she had not looked at before, but which she thought might be of interest. Here we saw many dried seed pods of *Caladenia caerulea* and also many flowering plants of *Pterostylis* aff. *mitchellii*. Both species were growing in very hard ground which, during wet weather, would be a wet and boggy watercourse.

On arrival at the house, we found it to be a 50-year-old mud-brick house with external walls 350mm thick, in which the Spotted Pardalotes had been trying to build their nests. In most cases they had not stopped tunnelling in time and had ended up breaking through to the inside; the walls showed signs where the holes had been plugged.

After a meal and a long talk, we settled down for a little sleep, not realising that lights out only meant the beginning of fun and games. A sizable family of possums delighted in racing over and sliding down the tin roof.

The following morning we left about 9.00 a.m. and travelled to a place our host called "spinifex corner" to look for flying duck orchids. An unlikely spot, the vegetation consisted of an unusual stunted ironbark gum about 3m tall, with scattered *Leptospermum* type shrubs growing in pure sand. In the open areas large clumps of spinifex grass grew, spreading to nearly a metre across. Here in the middle of these clumps was a species of *Caleana* (flying duck orchid), with its tubers growing amongst the roots of the spinifex. A quick look soon showed this species differed from those with which I am familiar and I believe it is new to science. It appears to be quite unusual, in that when the seed is ripe, the capsule does not split open, but the seeds germinate within the capsule, to be released later as small plantlets. One would guess this is nature's way of giving the young a flying start to life in this arid environment. It is possible this species has affinities with *C. minor*.

We moved on to another area, just as desolate and here our luck ran out. Our host said she thought she had seen some caladenias here years ago, but the more she talked the more they sounded like glossodias.

Unfortunately, we saw neither. By now the sun had moved well past the halfway mark and the location for the *Calochilus* orchids was in the opposite direction. We had to bid our host farewell and head back to base, where we arrived well after the stars had started to show their lights. The *Calochilus* have been left for another day (or year). Being beggars for punishment, we just had to stop at a number of locations on the way home, spots which before this trip I would not have bothered with, and yes, we saw more *Pterostylis* in flower.

What a couple of days these had been, an experience I will long remember. Once again I

was left wondering just where else these little treasures will be located and how many we have missed or lost through the clearing of the countryside for cultivation and grazing. Low rainfall areas, around 500mm (20 inches) a year, appear to be suitable to a number of species and I expect they will be recorded even further west than these present sightings, given time.

Upon returning home some four weeks and 4,000km later, we had seen only some of the areas where terrestrial orchids occur. I believe there are still many orchids to be discovered in areas such as those I have described. ❀

AROUND THE GROUPS

A.N.O.S. NORTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL

The third meeting of the Council, hosted by A.N.O.S. Wide Bay Group, was held at Maryborough on the 29th October, 1994. Delegates from the seven affiliated groups in attendance. The meeting was preceded by a barbecue and plant auction. The auctioneer, George Rex, managed to extract \$55.00 for a specimen plant of *Dendrobium speciosum*, reported to have been collected from Linderman Island 80 years ago. All plants were donated and \$233.50 was raised and given to Council. Business transacted during the three hour meeting was:— Opening of a bank account; Acceptance of Interim Budget, effective as soon as Council is incorporated; grateful acceptance of a \$200 donation from the Orchid Council of Queensland. Agreed to keep A.N.O.S. Far North Coast Group, A.N.O.S. Townsville Group and Len Lawler, who has a small band of A.N.O.S. supporters at Cairns and the Tableland, informed on Council's activities.

Submission of a draft paper on Council's Conservation Policy — to be ratified at the next meeting.

General agreement with the latest draft paper by the Department of Environment and Heritage in reference to the alterations to the Regulations on Flora and Fauna in Queensland.

Reaffirmed that correspondence be secretary to secretary. A motion to affiliate with O.C.Q. was left lie on the table. Council's Model Rules for submission to the Department of Consumer Affairs for incorporation, finalised. Sub-committee set up to investigate the best insurance cover, for the Council, after incorporation. Sub-committee set up and charged with the drafting of the Council's badge and floral emblem. A.N.O.S. Northern Regional Judging Panel appointed as the official judging panel of the Council. Foundation membership of the Council to be established.

Received a generous donation from Lyn and Harry Verroen of Alick Dockrill's recent books Volumes 1 and 2. Decided to raffle them as a set, \$1.00 a ticket, after the next Council meeting.

Next meeting to be held in Maryborough on the last Saturday of February, 1995.

The informality of the barbecue is a great way of getting to know fellow delegates. Delegates came from Mackay, Wide Bay, Kabi, Logan, Gold Coast, Brisbane and Toowoomba. The hospitality of the Wide Bay Group has to be sampled to be appreciated. Other groups will have difficulty in beating this when they host a council meeting. ❀



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