

THE STRINGYBARK PINE (*Callitris macleayana*) IN THE PATERSON VALLEY

All of the reference books that I use nominate that the occurrence of *Callitris macleayana* is or was North of the Williams River. Occasionally a reference can be found that states it occurs Northwards from just North of Newcastle which is a more open option. Some evidence, both actual and anecdotal still exists of its occurrence North of the Williams River, with a handful of specimens still occurring in the National Park and Chichester State Forest. I have observed these specimens for the past 19 years with no seed set occurring. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the species occurred as far South as Pinebrush, an area so named because of the occurrence of the species there. While I have not been on every square metre of every property in that area, there is little obvious evidence that the species ever grew there.

Why has there been no seed set in the remaining specimens? I really have no idea, but it is a well known fact that when a species either plant or animal is reduced to a very low level, extinction is only a matter of time without positive human intervention. One alarming aspect for me are remarks from current landholders like “Ah, there used to be a couple near the front gate but the old man got sick of them and cut them down.”

However, back to the Paterson Valley issue, I have always accepted the ‘*North from the Williams River occurrence*’ without question until the issue was raised by Dr Cameron Archer at a Tocal Field Day. It appears that in the course of research for his thesis, Dr Archer found a reference to this very question in a thesis by Greg Giles on the vegetation of the Paterson River Valley. The earliest reference to a *Brush Cypress* was in government reports about 1820. Presumably, this is what we now know as *Callitris macleayana*. The last reference to this species in the Paterson Valley is by the Reverend HMR Rupp in a survey he did about 1924. This was a complete surprise to me, I was well aware of Rupp’s work in the area but only with the family Orchidaceae and did not associate him with other flora (more of this later).

There is little evidence left of any members of the genus *Callitris* in the Paterson - Allyn valley. Until about 2 years ago there were still 2 specimens of *Callitris endlicheri* on a rocky outcrop at Glendonbrook and there is still one specimen to be seen on the same kind of outcrop at Torryburn, below East Gresford. I presume these are granite outcrops which is a typical habitat for this species.

Callitris macleayana however grows in much wetter areas, although not always on good soils, it seems to prefer what we usually refer to as pipeclay soil profiles. My observations have shown that this type of preferred habitat occurs as far North as the Wingham-Comboyne areas and probably further North as well. While we regard this type of soil as “poor”, the reverse is true in the rainforest. A deep cover of decaying litter turns these basic soils into very rich soils, remove the litter and we are left with today’s “poor soils”, a lesson that current farming practises seem to ignore.

Just why did this species (*C. macleayana*) become extinct in the Paterson valley in the first place? The answer is relatively simple. Like *Podocarpus elatus*, young saplings made the best tool handles, they were light but strong, easily worked and very smooth. The mature trees provided excellent timber so the demand on them could not be sustained. Other species such as Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*) survive today simply because the young saplings were of no practical use. Talks with the late Mr Stan Lawrence support this theory. In his later years, Stan was an inveterate timber-worker and having been born and raised in the upper Paterson area and also working there for most of his life, he had an intimate knowledge of the forests and the species in them. If there had been no demand

for the saplings of Podocarpus and the Stringybark Pine, they may have survived as well as the Red Cedars. It would seem then that the proposal to reintroduce *Callitris macleayana* into the Paterson Valley is well founded.

The Reverend HMR Rupp was the resident clergyman at Paterson and botanised wide areas around Paterson and as far afield as the Barrington Tops. The late Mr Lindsay Hopson of Eccelston acted as his guide on his forays into the Barrington Tops and described the trips in great detail to me. I often wondered why they took such circuitous a route to the Barrington Plateau, later I came to realise that two things dictated the routes they took - firstly, I realised that they were following ancient aboriginal trails and secondly, the trails they followed took them through some of the most significant rainforest areas in the southern foothills of the Barrington Tops. Lindsay was able to describe to me in some detail the very spot where Rupp collected the type specimen of *Prasophyllum rogersii*, so much so that I was able to go to the exact spot and observe the very colony from where Rupp took his specimens. I often pondered just how much time Rupp spent tending to his flock as some of these trips would have taken him away for long periods of time. Given that it was a long day's ride from Paterson to Eccelston, then another day to the Barrington Plateau plus allowing for at least two days on the Plateau and the return trip of two days, I can understand why Lindsay said, it was a close call for the Sunday morning service on a number of occasions.

See ya along the Track.

Noel Jupp