

The

149

North Queensland Naturalist

The Journal and Magazine of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club.

Vol. X.

CAIRNS, 1st DECEMBER, 1941.

No. 67

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB

Meets at Girls' and Infants' School, Abbott Street, Cairns,
usually on second Monday in March, June, September,
and December, at 8 p.m.

NEXT QUARTERLY MEETING, MONDAY, 8th DECEMBER.

REPORT OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday, 8th September, 1941.

Direction of Officers:

President: Dr. H. Flecker.

Vice-Presidents: Miss M. E. Hooper,
Mr. F. R. Morris.

Hon. Secretary and Treasurer: Mr. J.
Vyer.

Hon. Auditor: Mr. R. J. Gorton.

Committee: Officers above ex officio;
also Mr. J. Foster, Miss Jean Whittick.

Resolved that during the currency of
the war, meetings be held quarterly
instead of monthly.

Financial statement and annual re-
port were received and adopted.

New members elected. Miss E.
Goss, Cairns; Mr. J. J. C. Hamilton,
Lands Department, Cairns.

New members proposed: Mrs. Nanki-
vell, Cairns; Mrs. Christiansen, Mt.
Spurgeon; Mr. Derek Scott (Junior
Member), Green Island.

BOOK REVIEW.—17. Principles of
Botany for Queensland Farmers. By C.
T. White, Government Botanist. Issued
by Direction of the Hon. F. W. Bulcock,
Minister for Agriculture and Stock,
Brisbane, and printed by David Whyte,
Government Printer, Brisbane, 232 pp.,
103 plates, although written for farmers,
the inclusion of the last three words in
the title appears to be superfluous for
it makes an excellent introduction to

the study of botany for any individual,
giving every phase of botany, the illus-
trations all being drawn from Queens-
land material, the five parts comprising
Morphology, Anatomy, Physiology,
Classification and Plant Geography and
Ecology. It can certainly be recom-
mended as a valuable aid to those de-
sirous of having practical botanical
knowledge, whether farmers or not.

SPEAR-THROWERS OF THE NORTH QUEENSLAND COAST

(By Keith Kennedy, Primitive Arts and Crafts Museum, Townsville.)

Although the Australian aborigine is famous throughout the world for his use of the boomerang, his chief weapon is not the boomerang but the spear which, on most parts of the continent, is thrown by means of the spear-thrower. Amongst different tribes this implement has different names, but it is known to whites all over Australia by the New South Wales term womera.

The spear-thrower is one of the most ancient implements of man, and evidence points to the fact that it was in use prior to the invention of the bow and arrow. Specimens have been unearthed from cave deposits of the Magdalenian period fashioned from horn and bone, and from the cave Mas d'Azil in the North of France, some fine examples of which, beautifully carved from reindeer horn in the form of a chamois, grouse and other objects familiar to cave men, have been excavated by archaeologists. (1).

Prehistoric man originally threw his spear by hand, as is still done by some primitive races of the present day. He must have observed that a man with a long arm could throw further than a short-armed man, and some early inventor conceived the idea of lengthening his arm by holding a deer horn or stick with a projection on the end to fit into the butt of the spear, and so the spear-thrower came into being. In Europe the spear-thrower became gradually superseded by the bow and arrow, and is now limited to two areas of the world—parts of the American continent extending to Northern Siberia, and the Australian continent reaching to New Guinea.

In Central America the Aztecs used the spear-thrower under the name of atlatl, and further north it was found

amongst the Indians of California. Along the western coast of North America it extended, with gaps to the Eskimo, who made it of bone and horn as did the glacial age Magdalenian cave men.

Two bamboo spear-throwers from the north of New Guinea in my collection (2), are characterised by the fact that instead of a peg to take the butt of the spear, there is a recess into which the spear end fits; so the spear does not need a depression in its butt as do the Australian spears. However, the spear-thrower is rare in New Guinea, the favourite weapon being the bow and arrow, which spreads northwards across Torres Strait to the tip of Cape York Peninsula and there it comes to a close and the spear-thrower in various forms takes its place. Why the Australian aborigine prefers the spear-thrower to the bow and arrow is problematical. It might be that the dry climate of Australia causes wood to become brittle and therefore difficult to keep a bow elastic; or perhaps the open forest of Australia is more suitable to the employment of spears.

In parts of Australia, such as around Brisbane, and extending from Rockhampton to Townsville, no womerars were used by the blacks (3), the spear being thrown direct by hand, although in surrounding districts the aborigines had the womera. This rather mitigates against the "diffusion of culture" theory, but probably local influences of which we have yet to learn, had something to do with its absence.

Australian womerars can be divided into two main groups—those round or sometimes oval in section, like the "tassel," and the milkwood varieties of the Northern Territory, and those

flat in section, to which belong the Queensland, Central Australian and Western Australian forms.

On the North Queensland coast the peg is attached on a plane with the flat surface. The implement, when projecting a spear, is swung with the edge forward so that it cuts through the air. In other parts of Australia the peg is fixed at an angle to the surface, and the flat side is swung forward. The former method is more scientific as there is less wind resistance. Because of its shape the North Queensland form is a specialised instrument and, except for parrying spears, cannot be used for any other purpose, whereas the broad, slightly concave womerars of Central and Western Australia can be employed as trays for carrying objects on while travelling, and palettes on which to mix red ochre and pipe-clay for adorning implements and the dancers of corroborees.

The North Queensland womera varies in width. One I got at Cooktown many years ago (4), has the following measurements: length 34 ins., width at proximal end 1½ ins., gradually widening to 2½ ins. in the centre, and tapering to 1½ ins. at the distal end. The peg is attached with sinew and gum, and has a notch near the point to facilitate it getting into the depression in the butt of the spear. The proximal end is hafted with two oval sections of Melo shell (5), 4½ ins. in length, gummed together each side of the handle in an upright position.

A narrower womera I collected at Ingham (6), is almost lath shaped, being 1½ ins. at the proximal end widening

N.B.—The spelling womera was adopted by the Anthropological Society of N.S.W., and the University Anthropological Department, but is also spelt wommerah and wommerera. For the sake of uniformity the spelling womera is adopted in this article.

only to 1½ ins. in the centre, and tapering to 1½ ins. at the distal end. The peg is not notched, and the shell hafting is absent. Its length is 37 ins. A similar narrow form was also used on the lower Tully River.

A very rare form, the bent or moon-shaped variety, was used only on the Bloomfield River and the strip of country between it and Cape Grafton (7). A specimen in my collection (8) is shaped like a boomerang 29½ ins. in length, with the distal end truncated to take the peg which is attached by strips of lawyer cane (*Calamus* sp.), and gum. The "ballur," as it was called, was employed for spearing fish and birds at close quarters, and is a good example of how an implement can vary from the standard form in a limited area of country. When throwing a spear North Queensland womerars rest between the index and middle fingers, the ring and little fingers grip the handle, while the spear shaft is held by the index finger and thumb; but according to Roth the ballur was held with the blade resting between the thumb and index finger, both of which also held the spear.

It is worthy of note that the spear-thrower is of special interest to ethnologists, as it is the most ancient implement for projecting a missile of which so far any traces have been found. Because of this it has been designated "the first machine invented by man."

REFERENCES.

- (1) Figured by BREUIL and P.
- (2) Kennedy Ethnological Collection Nos. 225 and 311.
- (3) Roth N.Q. Ethnography Records Australian Iy. Bull. 13.
- (4) Kennedy Eth. Coll. Museum, 1909.
- (5) Melo diadema, I. No. 29.
- (6) Kennedy Eth. Coll. Lamk.
- (7) Roth N.Q. Coll. No. 27.
- (8) Kennedy Ethnography, Bull. 13. n. Coll. No. 28.

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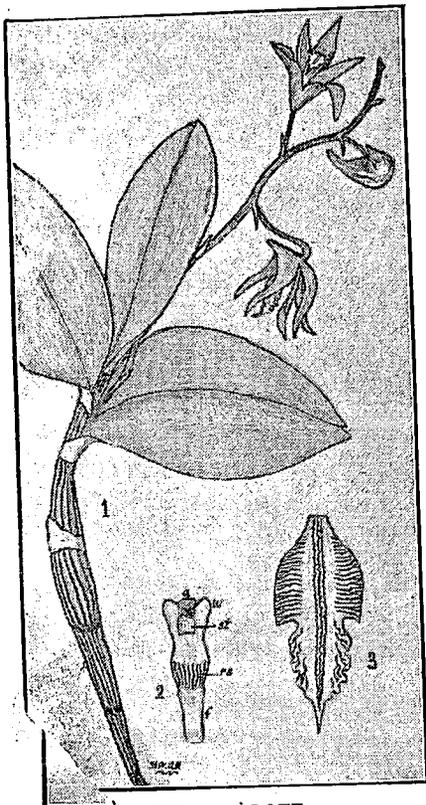
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DENDROBIUM WILKIANUM, sp. nov.

(By Rev. H. M. R. Rupp.)

Planta gracilis, in specimini meo ad foliorum bases 9 cm. alta, in medio leviter tumida. Folia 2-3 ad caulis summum, pulla, ovato-lanceolata, 3-9 cm. longo. Racemus floribus paucis, 13 cm. longus. Flores fuscis, trans segmenta 4-5 cm. Sepalum dorsale anguste oblongum, vix acutum; sepala lateralia falcata, ad bases 8 mm. lata, ad apices acuta; petala angusta, acuta leviter

tortilia. Labellum flavoviride lineis rubris prominentibus, 2 cm. longum; lobis laterales incurvi, lati, lineis rubris transversis; lobus medius acutissimus cum marginibus crenulatis crispisque et lineis rubris incompositis; discus jugis longitudinalibus 3-5, undulatis, fere ad apicem extendentibus. Calcar 7 mm. longum, obtusum. Columna 7 mm. longa, lata, infra striata; alae non anthero altiores.



s. ft

KEY TO PLATE.
 leaves, and raceme (about natural size).
 1. Stem, leaves, and raceme (about natural size); a, anther; w, wings; st, stigma; rs, red striae; f, foot;
 2. Enlargement of column and foot; a, anther; w, wings; st, stigma; rs, red striae; f, foot;
 3. Enlargement of labellum flattened out, from above drawn a little (The lateral lobes too narrow).

A rather slender plant in general appearance resembling a giant *D. aemulum* R. Br.; stems in my specimen about 9 cm. from the base to the leaves, slightly swollen about the middle. Leaves 2 or 3 at the top of the stem, dark, ovate-lanceolate, about 8-9 cm. long, with a few whitish scariosus bracts. Flower brown, 4-5 cm. across the perianth. Dorsal sepal narrow-oblong, hardly acute; lateral sepals obliquely falcate, 8 mm. wide at the base, acute; petals narrow, especially at the base, acute, slightly twisted. Labellum yellowish-green with conspicuous deep-red lines, 2 cm. long; lateral lobes broad, incurved, with numerous fine transverse red lines; mid-lobe very acute, with crenulate-cripsed margins and irregularly-curved red lines; disc with 3-5 longitudinal ridges or plaits, which are minutely undulate and extend almost to the tip before coalescing. Spur 7 mm. long, obtuse. Column as long as the spur, broad, striate below; wings not higher than the anther.

Babinda, North Queensland, J. H. Wilkie, 10/1941.

The flowers suggest affinities with *D. undulatum* R. Br. and with *D. fuscum* Fitzg., but the plant itself is very different from either of these. The labellum is at least twice as broad as that of *D. fuscum* according to Fitzgerald's description in the Gardener's Chronicle Nov. 1879, and the mid-lobe about four times as long.