

Lucy Cranwell Lecture 2001 – Introduction

Ewen Cameron, President

Welcome everyone to the 17th Auckland Botanical Society's Annual Lucy Cranwell lecture, and a very special welcome to our guest speaker Ken Hill and his wife Lesley.

Lucy Cranwell was our Society's patron for many years, until she passed away in June 2000, in her 93rd year. Lucy grew up in Henderson and in 1929 she graduated from Auckland University and was appointed Museum botanist, starting only a few months before this building opened in the same year. She held this position until 1944 and worked on a number of pioneering topics during that time, including collecting seaweeds, northern mountain floras (Mt Moehau and Maungapohatu), offshore island floras (Hen & Chickens, Poor Knights Is), instigated the Cheeseman Memorial Flower Shows to stimulate an interest in our native flora (hours of preparation), active on the conservation front (Smith's Bush & Rangitoto Id come to mind) and encouraged children groups, her newspaper articles culminated in "The Botany of Auckland" which she published with Arnold Wall in 1936. In 1937 she was instrumental in founding our society. Her more internationally known work soon followed – pioneering work on pollen from peat indicating past forest types and climate change.

During the war years, in 1943, she married Captain (later Major) Watson Smith and the following year moved permanently to live and continue her pollen studies in the USA, especially Gondwanan pollen. But she never lost touch with Auckland, and two big loves in her life the Auckland Museum and the Auckland Botanical Society. Both benefited from her generosity. In 1985 the Lucy Cranwell lecture series was initiated by the Society in Lucy's honour, as a special lecture to be given by a notable botanist. Lucy was always keen to share her knowledge and as Ross Beever put it last year, "in a small way the Lucy Cranwell Lecture series continues this tradition of sharing knowledge".

This evening's lecturer Ken Hill is most fitting because of Lucy's interest in conifers, and specifically fossil pollen. I suspect *Dillwynites* pollen, now known to be indistinguishable from Wollemi pollen was probably known to her from her Antarctic studies.

Ken was educated at University of New England at Armidale, northern tablelands of NSW. He is currently working on *Cycas* for his PhD. He has worked at various things including exploration geology in Northern Territory and in northern Sudan. He joined staff of National Herbarium of NSW in 1983 as research assistant working on eucalypts with the late Lawrie Johnson, later systematic botanist and eventually to Senior Research scientist. The herbarium

is wonderfully based in the grounds of the Royal Botanic Gardens by Sydney's waterfront.

His main research interests have continued to be eucalypts, with a milestone in the splitting of the genus and the recognition of the new genus *Corymbia* in 1995, where Hill & Johnson recognised 113 species, 33 of these being new.

He also has strong interests in the "gymnosperms", leading to involvement in the Wollemi pine discovery, and the recognition and description of it as a new genus and species. Wollemi pine has produced tremendous interest worldwide and his photograph has appeared in numerous articles in numerous languages, where he is often pointing at the same fossil in slightly different poses (see Fig.1).

Another major interest has been cycads, with the revision of *Cycas* in Australia (he has described 17 of the 27 Australian spp.), New Guinea and Thailand already published, Vietnam *in press* and continuing work including extensive fieldwork in other parts of Asia. Evidently Ken often returns from Asia with interesting stories (particularly foods considered delicacies - some which shouldn't be mentioned here!) and slide shows such as the comparison of bathrooms in different countries. I doubt if any of these are included for tonight's talk. He is also a keen grower of orchids and is interested in hoyas.

Ken was the Australian Botanical Liaison Officer (ABLO) at Kew 1997-98, during which time he carried out molecular work on *Cycas*. One of the main purposes of the ABLO is to search for and provide details of Australasian plant specimens held in British and European herbaria, especially type specimens. Ken was particularly helpful in this regard to NZ botanists as well as to his Australian colleagues.

He is extremely interested in computers and their use in producing on line floras, keys and maps. Ken looks after a very nice set of cycad web pages. He is a keen motorcyclist and a member of the Ulysses Club – whose motto is 'growing old disgracefully'. As you can see Ken has wide interests, not only in botanical topics.

Many of us have read James Woodford's recent popular book on the discovery of the Wollemi pine, and I'm sure what we'll hear tonight will be a slightly different story.

[The APEC room in the Auckland Museum was full with some 130 people, and the stage nicely highlighted with potted New Zealand conifers supplied by Geoff Davidson of the Oratia Native Plant Nursery.]

