

THE SUPPLEJACK - (Ripogonum scandens)J. Beever

Although our twining obstructive supplejack is a good native New Zealander in its own right its common name is by no means so. Captain Cook, as good a Yorkshireman as you could wish for, wrote about our N.Z. bush, "In many parts the woods are so over run with supplejacks that it is scarcely possible to force one's way among them." And William Anderson, surgeon and botanist, on Cook's third voyage wrote, "One in particular which bears a red berry is much like the supplejack and grows about the trees stretching from one to another in such a manner as to render the woods almost wholly impassable."

From their straightforward use of the name it is obvious that these British born explorers had known the word long before coming to New Zealand. The big Oxford Dictionary supplies much of the following detail. Like cabbage tree and Spanish bayonet, supplejack was current in the West Indies a century or more before the discovery of New Zealand and had become a familiar word in England. In 1748 the early novelist Smollett in his *Roderick Random* wrote, "He bestowed upon me several stripes with a supple Jack he had in his hand." Even earlier in 1725 Sloane in "*Jamaica*" wrote, "Supple-Jacks. The stalk ... is about the thickness of one's thumb, ... They grow in woods and are used for walking sticks." In a poem in 1785 Wolcot had,

"Take, take my supple-jack,  
Play Saint Bartholomew with many a back."

Thus Cook and his men classed our Ripogonum scandens as another supplejack and we have continued the practice. Perhaps an indication of the age of the name is given by the pronunciation which I remember back in the 1920s and 30s was still SOUPlejack, as it had been passed on through some generations. Only since we began to learn about trees from books rather than from our elders have some of us tended to shorten the vowel to SUPP. In 1890 in a novel by George Meredith a character says, "A good knot to grasp ... there's no break in it, whack as you may. They call it a Demerara supplejack." (Demerara, a well-known kind of sugar, gets its name from a town of that name in Guyana.)

Thus it seems there are many supplejacks but what are their botanical names. The O.E.D. says that in the West Indies the supplejacks are mainly members of the Sapindaceae and commonly are species of the genera Paullinia, Sergania or Cardiospermum. In Central America, Berchemia and Zizyphus were the usual genera while in Australia the species was Ventilago viminalis and in N.Z. Ripogonum parviflorum (now R. scandens) and Rubus australis are quoted as our species.

Inter alia, someone during the 19th Century, probably J.D. Hooker (1853), changed the Forster's Ripogonum to Rhipogonum so that most New Zealand botanical books in the first half of this century spelt it Rhipogonum. The error was pointed out by Arnold Wall and H.H. Allan in "The Botanical Names of the Flora of New Zealand" published in two editions in the period 1930-50. J.R. & G. Forster had spelt it correctly as Ripogonum derived from ripos = pliant twig, and Wall and Allan recommended that the h should be dropped. This was done in *Flora of New Zealand*, Vol. II, Moore & Edgar, 1970.

So there are many species of plants called supplejacks and even in New Zealand other species such as the bush lawyer (Rubus australis) was sometimes included among them. Recently Mr I. Powell of Porirua kindly drew my attention to a publication of 1883, "The High Alps in New Zealand" by the Rev. Wm. Spotswood Green who writing about travel up the side of the Tasman Glacier said, "Here a new difficulty was encountered as in some places the scrub composed of the thorny wild Irishman interlaced with supplejack was so dense that getting through it was impossible, and scrambling over its surface so often resulted in a tumble upon a clump of spaniards with their bayonet-like leaves ready to receive us on their points ...". Mr Powell points out that Hugh Wilson's book on Mount Cook National Park does not include Ripogonum scandens in the park, and suggests that this supplejack was a muehlenbeckia.

Ripogonum scandens stems have been used in the past for crayfish pots and when split they were used for making baskets. Many sheep farmers liked to get a supplejack cane with the rooted knob attached at right-angles. This if neatly cut formed a shepherd's crook, a riding crop and was useful to open and shut gates while on horseback. But although it could be useful the lasting memory that all early travellers in the bush carried away was expressed by Solander its discoverer who wrote, (translated) "An excessively annoying shrub that everywhere trips and obstructs one's movement through the forests."

#### ROBERT LYND

#### Early Plant Collector in Australia and New Zealand

R.O. Gardner

This article records a few facts about a collection so far overlooked by our flora-writers. Its extent and composition are still to be determined but one is tempted to speculate that it will contain the earliest material of some of Auckland's adventive plants.

Robert Lynd, a career soldier born in Plymouth, England served in Tasmania and Sydney before coming to Auckland in December 1847 as Barrack-Master. His reputation as a person keenly interested in natural history arrived with him ('New Zealander' Dec 1, p.2(3)) but hardly anything is known about his botanical activities here. Presumably he knew the botanist-collector Andrew Sinclair (then Colonial Secretary) and when Charles Moore from the Botanic Gardens, Sydney visited briefly in late 1850 he was assisted by these two men, getting live N.Z. plants from Lynd.

Amiable and public-spirited though of retiring disposition Lynd became Vice-President of the reorganized Mechanics Institute in 1850 and again in 1851. His signature and handwriting can be found in the Minute Books of this body (Auckland Public Library).

Lynd died, aged 53, on 24 September 1851. In October the newspapers (e.g., 'Daily Southern Cross' p.2(1), 1851) carried a Sale by Auction notice to dispose of his effects: as well as household goods and books there were "shells, insects, stuffed Australian birds" and "a large collection of Botanical Specimens from New South Wales, Norfolk Island, New Zealand and elsewhere ... accompanied by Catalogues and manuscript observations by their late author". Apparently no sale was made and in 1853 ('New Zealander' Mar 2, p.2(1)) Lynd's executors again advertized the collections - "some thousands of dried plants".