

CORYBAS RIVULARIS - THE WET ONE

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I am indebted to Mr Anthony Wright and Dr P.J. Brownsey for help in searching the early collections of Cheeseman and Thomas Kirk.

## PRELUDE

On 27 July 1983 Mark Clements wrote from Kew to Dorothy Cooper, telling her that he had found among other things, in the Lindley Herbarium, the type material of Cunningham's Acianthus rivularis. Item 3 of his letter read -

' ...Corybas rivularis is without doubt the correct name for the plant known as C. orbiculatus. This leaves the species previously interpreted as C. rivularis without a name. I suggest that this be named as soon as possible'.

Mrs Cooper passed this letter on to me. I wasn't even surprised. For years I had wondered why Corybas 'rivularis' was so often to be found in cloud forest on high ridges, miles from the nearest stream; massed on mossed logs, clustering a couple of metres up the trunks of old tree ferns or clinging to trackside embankments. Over the same years I had several times commented on the aquatic tendencies of C. orbiculatus, and I was relieved to find that rivularis (as its name implied) was after all the wet one.

After looking into the literature and searching the Cheeseman Herbarium and the Index Kewensis, I wrote to Mr Clements suggesting that the orphan be named (from the shape of the mature leaf) Corybas acuminatus.

On 24 February 1984 I received from Kew a photograph of the Isotype of Acianthus rivularis, which confirmed Clement's opinion that Cunningham's species was identical with Corybas orbiculatus.

The nameless species was eventually redescribed as Corybas acuminatus M. Clements and Hatch (1985).

ACCOUNT OF THE MISINTERPRETATION OF Corybas rivularis

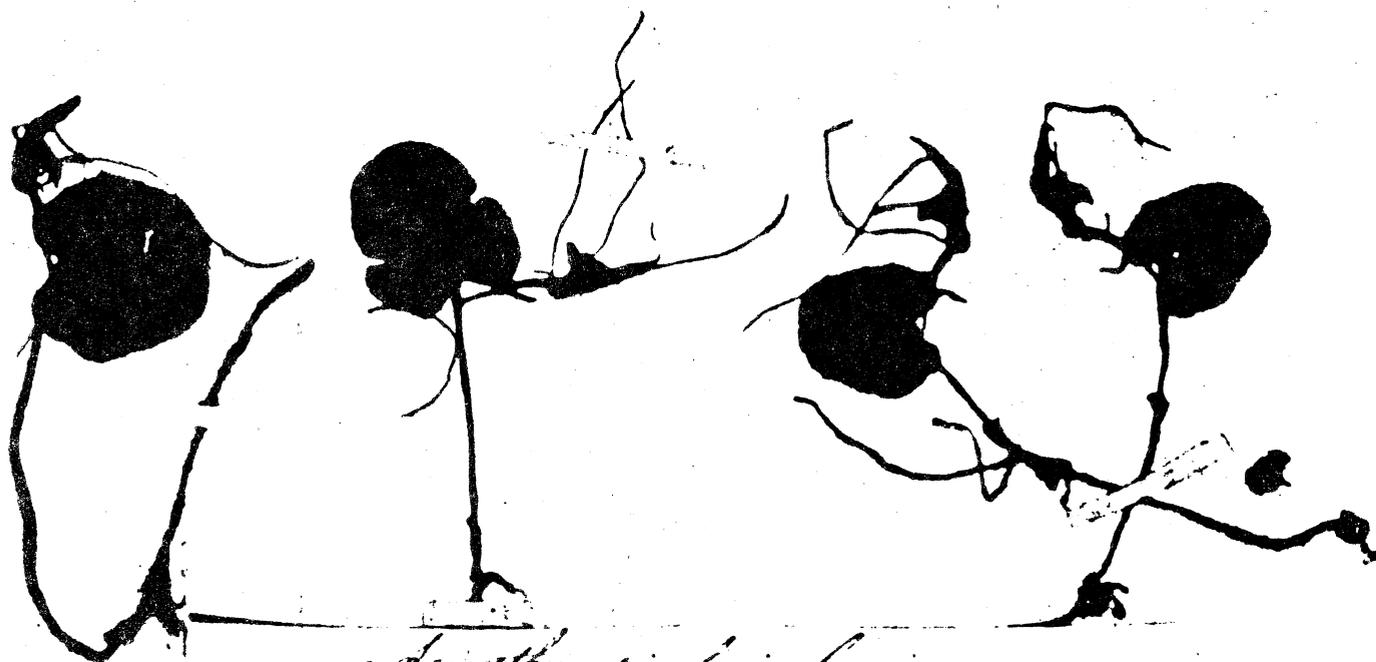
1826: On 6 November Allan Cunningham found an orchid - ' ...growing among moss upon rocks in the bed of a briskly running rivulet, flowing through a deep shaded ravine near Wangaroa... ' (1837).

He gathered flowering specimens (one of which had a pandurate leaf) and took them back with him to Sydney.

1837: In the Precursor (1837) he described these specimens as Acianthus rivularis (= pertaining to streams). He recorded the petals and lateral sepals as of equal length, filiform and extremely long; and the labellum as cordate-acuminate, with very thin, crenulate margins; but didn't mention the leaf or the dorsal sepal at all. Nor did he give any illustrations of his new species. These omissions caused the subsequent misinterpretation, for while rivularis and acuminatus both have long filiform petals and lateral sepals, the orbicular-apiculate leaf and acuminate dorsal sepal of rivularis are distinctly different from the ovate-acuminate leaf and filiform-caudate dorsal sepal of acuminatus. It is also possible that Cunningham's use of the name Acianthus added to the confusion, for the mature leaf-shape of acuminatus is superficially similar to that of Acianthus fornicatus var. sinclairii.

1838: In a letter dated 4 December Cunningham asked Colenso if he had found -

' ...my little darling, the subaqueous Acianthus of the great falls of Keri Keri and Wangaroa'. (1948).

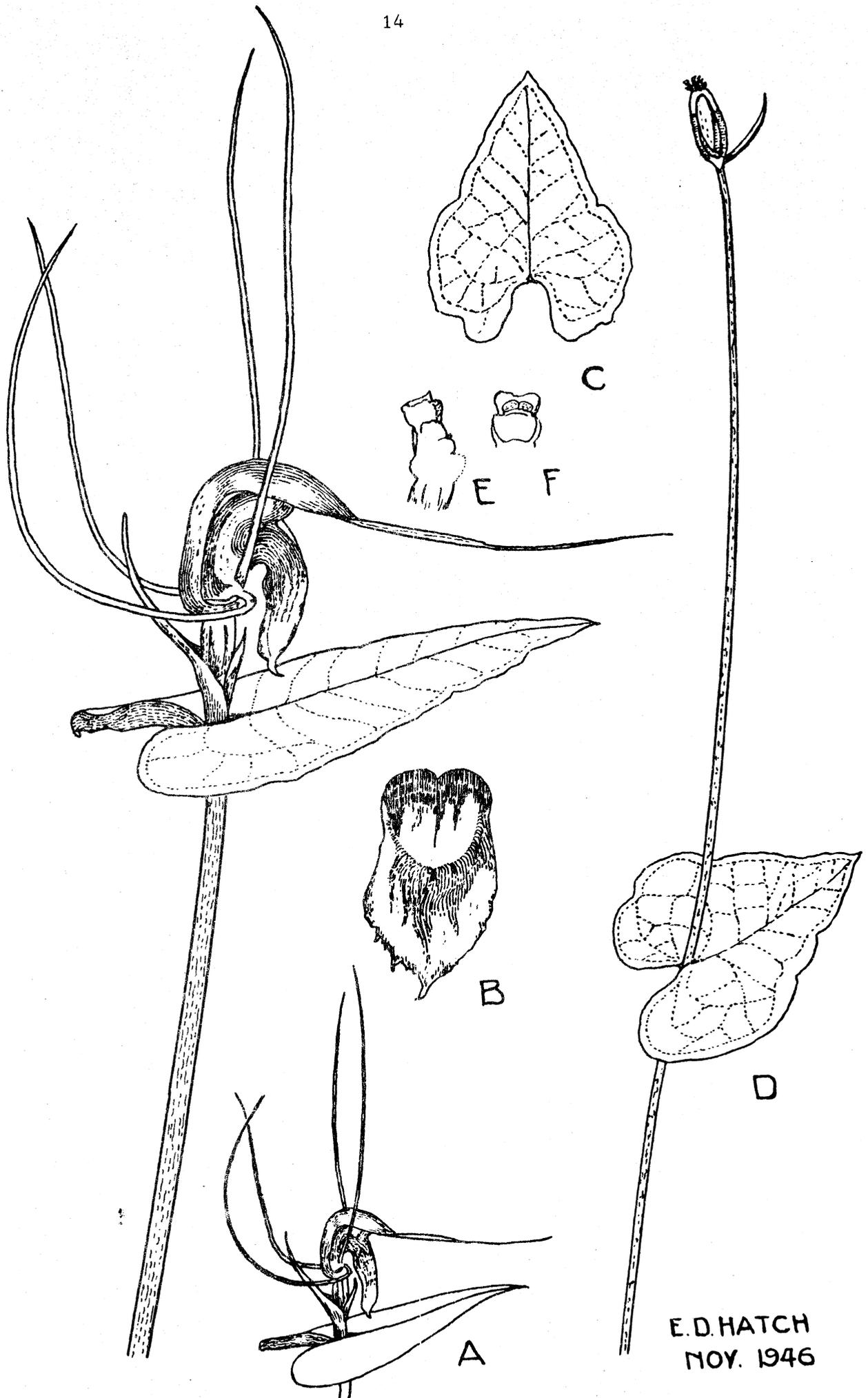


*Acianthus rivularis* C.  
 subrotundifloro, ovatis longissimis, labelli disco papilloso,  
 cuspidato ~~transversim~~ ~~ovato-crenulato~~.  
 Discovered among moss, in the rocky bed of a brook border  
 forming the a deep ravine, in the vicinity of Whangarei  
 New Zealand, where I gathered it in flower on the 8<sup>th</sup>  
 Nov. 1826. *ef.*

*Acianthus rivularis* A. Cunn.

Isotype.  
 HERB. KEW.

= *Corymbus rivularis* (A. Cunn.) H. G. Reiche.  
 DET. *at* *Chambers* 16/3/1983



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- 1844- J.D. Hooker listed rivularis under Acianthus in (1844); under  
 1864: Nematoceras in (1853); and under Corysanthes in (1864); and it  
 is probable that in one or more of these accounts he was mixing  
rivularis and acuminatus together. Only a careful study of the  
 material preserved in the Hooker Herbarium at Kew will decide how  
 many species were in fact involved.  
 What is certain is that Thomas Kirk, in July 1864 (WELT 18877)  
 and again in December 1866 (WELT 18879) collected rivularis sens.  
 orig. from a waterfall at Great Omaha, near Leigh, and determined  
 it as Corysanthes rotundifolia.
- 1867: Having unwittingly disposed of Cunningham's species Kirk looked  
 round for something to call rivularis and found it in December  
 1867 (WELT 18901) on the Great Barrier Island. His specimens are  
Corybas acuminatus.
- 1872: In his Botany of the Titirangi District &c. (1872) Cheeseman  
 recorded Corysanthes rotundifolia with a question mark. His  
 voucher sheet (AK 3653) is labelled 'Corysanthes ...Titirangi,  
Oct. 1870 TFC'. The specimens are rivularis sens. orig. A  
 further collection from the same locality (AK 3652) is labelled  
'Corysanthes rotundifolia Titirangi, October 1873 TFC', and  
 several pandurate-leaved specimens are marked var pandurata which  
 however he did not describe until (1925). In his Titirangi paper  
 (1872) Cheeseman also listed Corysanthes rivularis. The voucher  
 specimens for this (AK 3644) are in fact Corybas acuminatus.  
 These errors, by whom and however they originated, were 'fixed'  
 by Cheeseman in (1906) and the rest is taxonomic history. (1970).

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