

depressa glistened on the forest floor. *Leptopteris superba* and *Blechnum colensoi* were found near the stream, and *Tmesipteris tannensis* was recorded on tree fern trunks. Following this we drove a short distance further inland to explore a large sink-hole. A steep benched track led us down towards fluted limestone walls and overhangs. *Blechnum chambersii* was locally common, and we were soon rewarded with a cluster of *Blechnum nigrum* on a shady damp bank, the dark green colour and large terminal and basal pinnae making identification easy. Alice pointed out a cluster of spleenworts, arguably looking different from the usual suspects. Some were later tentatively identified as the cave spleenwort *Asplenium cimmericum* (Naturally Uncommon), these plants bearing spores of a much smaller size than the superficially similar *Asplenium bulbiferum*. On our climb back up we came across patches of *Lindsaea trichomanoides* growing alongside sprawling patches of kiekie (*Freycinetia banksii*).

Our thanks go to Alice Shanks for organising such a diverse and interesting field trip.

A dialogue 1906 from the Correspondence of Sir David Prain

Jan Prain Chaffey

Much could be written about Sir David Prain, a Scottish botanist and physician. Born 1859 in Fettercairn, Kincardineshire, a graduate of the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh, he became curator of the Calcutta Herbarium, 1887-1898, then superintendent of the Royal Botanic Garden Calcutta 1898. In 1888 he became a member of the Linnean Society.

He had a wonderful career in India with many publications to his name before he followed Sir William Thiselton-Dyer to become Director of the Royal Botanic Garden, at Kew in England in 1898. At the end of 1904, Prain brought all the Sikkim-Tibet frontier collections of the Calcutta Herbarium to Kew. From 1916-1919 he was made President of the Linnean Society. He received many honours, and in 1912 was awarded the CMG (The Order of St Michael and St George) and Knight Bachelor (Burkill 1943-1944).

In 1990 Andy Thomson was the archivist at the DSIR Lincoln. He knew of my interest and pointed out to me that Sir David regularly corresponded with Leonard Cockayne, who had a collection of portraits of notable botanists. Sir David was one of them. He (Sir David) told Cockayne he had relations in New Zealand (Thomson 1980, p. 412, §19).

I have continued to source information about Sir David and recently came across some of his correspondence from the Kew Archives (Anon. 1906) that has a tale worth telling. The letters are between Sir George Watt who became Professor of Botany at Calcutta University and Sir David.

Replying to a query from Sir David, “Watt writes at length to Prain on the difference between ale and beer. He informs Prain that ale was originally made from sugar, water, a handful of malt and a slice of bread. Whereas beer is presently made from barley, one lot malted and the other not malted. Beer is made purely from barley water whilst ale has sugar added. Many of the dictionaries do not offer correct definitions of ale and beer”.

Watt continues “the natives in the plains of India had just begun making ale. The Mongolian hill tribes have however perfected the art of making beer as they have no sweet fluids to ferment for making ale...”.

Watt adds a postscript informing Sir David that the Turkish word ‘buza’ was possibly carried to India and that strictly speaking it means beer. Emperor Barber talks of the drinking bouts with ‘buzeh’ and Watt believes the English expression is ‘to bouse’ though no dictionary records it as such. Buza is usually made in India from Elusine.

As *Eleusine indica* is a small annual grass in the Poaceae what could it possibly taste like? Maybe we have found the source of the word ‘booze’.

References

- Anon. 1906. Letters from Sir George Watt to Sir David Prain, folio 371. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew Archives. Director’s Correspondence.
- Burkill IH 1943-1944. Obituaries. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London, 156th session (1943-44), 223–229.
- Thomson AD 1980. Annotated summaries of letters to colleagues by the New Zealand botanist Cockayne, Leonard. 2. New Zealand Journal of Botany 18: 405–432.