

# AUSTRALASIAN BRYOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER

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### Cover Page

This issue of the newsletter features Helen Ramsay on our cover page. Helen has just celebrated a birthday milestone, and the following tribute is in recognition for many of those years that have been devoted to Australian bryology.

As editor, I am grateful to Elizabeth Brown for the cover photo and to Rod Seppelt for organizing and collating the following contributions.

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## HELEN RAMSAY - A VERY SPECIAL PERSON

In preparation of this testimony to Helen Ramsay in her 75<sup>th</sup> year, and in recognition of her contributions to Australian Bryology and bryologists, I am indebted to Alison Downing, Ron Oldfield, Wilf Schofield, Zen Iwatsuki, Ben Tan, Jessica Beever, Elizabeth Brown and Andi Cairns for their personal offerings and insights, and to Bob Coveny for compiling most of the bibliography.

Australian Bryology has come a long way since the first moss was apparently collected by the mariner William Dampier. There was the early phase, prior to about 1915, when a few avid collectors forwarded material to specialists in Europe for determination. Between the two World Wars, little happened. The post-1945 revival saw a significant expansion of effort by largely self-taught exponents, commencing with the work of Ilma Stone, ably supported by Jim Willis, George Scott and David Catcheside. The third phase could rightly be referred to as the future, with an increasing group of younger students with renewed enthusiasm. However, students and beginners – no matter what the age – need mentors.

One person who has witnessed the development and expansion evident in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and contributed significantly and with considerable humility to the onset of the next phase through her own research efforts (cytology, taxonomy, checklists) and by considerable encouragement given to anyone prepared to show an interest in bryophytes, is Helen Ramsay. For that, Helen, we thank you. It is a pleasure, therefore, to be able assemble this testimonial with the assistance of others, in recognition of your past contributions, and we look forward to your continuing involvement in research and your encouragement for a good many years yet.

Just how significant your contribution to Australian bryology has been will, I believe, become plainly evident through the eyes of the following contributions and contributors.



Helen is truly an amazing botanist who has persisted, in spite of all sorts of difficulties, where many others would have stopped in their tracks. Helen completed her doctorate in bryophyte genetics in 1966 at Sydney University. Immediately after handing in her thesis and accompanied by husband Frank and three small children, she headed overseas to take up a Fellowship at Bangor, in Wales, travelling by ship. They had to transfer the family, with three VERY large trunks, and 7 VERY large suitcases, onto a train to Wales where, Helen recalled, there was “Jones the Butcher”, “Jones the Real Estate Agent”, “Jones the newsagent” – everyone seemed to be related, and all with the same surname, “Jones”. Their choice of residence turned out to be a 100-year-old stone house, with a magnificent view over Anglesea, but with chronic rising damp. In summer, when they travelled to London for a few weeks, to be economical they turned the heating off. When they returned, the moisture had crept up the walls, and all was dank and mouldy!! They soon realised why the heating needed to stay on all the time. As well as housing, Helen and Frank had to find schools for the children, with their eldest son Graham just starting at high school and the two younger children at primary school.

It didn't get any easier. Helen met Professor Paul Richards on the day she arrived, only to find that he was heading overseas the next day, and would not see her again until the end of the Fellowship, 15 months later!! Helen soon established herself in the laboratory, and as there was one researcher working on bryophyte mitotic cell division, she decided to specialise in meiotic division, using every opportunity to learn more

skills and techniques. She completed and submitted for publication a substantial body of work on this subject before returning to Australia.

On the family's return to Sydney in 1968, Helen took up a tutorship at University of New South Wales, eventually retiring as a senior lecturer. Retirement was, however, not a word in Helen's vocabulary.

We had not really thought about Helen's contribution to bryology until we began searching the collections at the National Herbarium of New South Wales (NSW) for records of bryophytes from the Blue Mountains. The records indicate two outstanding periods of bryophyte research and collecting. The first was from 1885 to about 1915 when Whitelegge, Watts and Forsyth collected extensively throughout the region. The second period is from about 1985 to the present. Helen has had an extraordinary influence on both. The early collections had originally been loosely wrapped in parish newsletters, newspapers and magazines, but Helen, together with Julie Seur, had packeted ALL these early collections. Helen has told us that, while at the University of NSW, she came across a species list of NSW bryophytes prepared by Alan Burges. She decided that it would be very useful to publish this list. Well, it must have been a mammoth task!! There are an extraordinary number of boxes of specimens, all now with the information clearly on the outside of the packets, but with the original parish newspapers and their handwritten notes inside. However, it was not just a list that Helen produced from this work, it was the "Census of New South Wales Mosses", "Phytogeography of mosses of NSW" and "Mosses of Lord Howe Island" and, with Heinar Streimann, "Mosses and their distribution in the Australian Capital Territory". These 4 works comprised a whole volume of *Telopea*, published in 1984. The "Census of NSW Mosses" is effectively an inventory of taxa occurring in each botanical division and subdivision of New South Wales. The Census has proved immensely valuable to us. While working on it, Helen tells how she had a great deal of support from the then Director, Dr. Laurie Johnson, and Deputy Director, Dr. Barbara Briggs, and it was at this time that Helen was appointed as a Research Associate of the herbarium.

The second outstanding period of bryological research, from about 1985 to the present, is undoubtedly the result of Helen's determination, dedication and her encouragement of everyone with an interest in bryology. The recent collections at NSW include those of Elizabeth Brown, Robert Coveny, Alan Brooks, Alison Downing, Will Cuddy, Hannah MacPherson and Ron Oldfield. Helen worked incredibly hard, again with the support of Laurie Johnson and Barbara Briggs, to secure the appointment of Elizabeth Brown to the staff of the herbarium. This has been a real success story and Elizabeth now has her own staff and students, and continues, like Helen, to encourage others.

After reviewing the collections at NSW, we wondered where we would find other collections made between 1915 and 1985. There are substantial collections in the John Ray Herbarium at Sydney University (SYD), and here we found magnificent collections of liverworts from Helen Hewson's doctorate. The moss collections were, perhaps not surprisingly, dominated by collections made by Helen Ramsay while studying for her doctorate. She later told us that it had been very difficult to work at Sydney University, as she had been studying genetics and was located on the southeastern side of the campus and really longed for the rare occasions when she had reason to visit the Botany Building on the northern side of campus, and enjoy the interaction with other bryologists, including Helen Hewson, Geoff Berrie, Patricia Selkirk, and also ecologist/taxonomist Roger Carolin.

It is worth noting that Heinar Streimann completed his post-graduate studies on *Papillaria* with Helen at the University of NSW.

Helen's publications have been extensive. Her early work was on bryophyte genetics, and her bryophyte chromosome studies continue to be referenced. The "Catalogue of Mosses of New South Wales" and a similar paper on Australasian Alpine Bryophytes have brought together a vast amount of information. She has just completed a study of tropical mosses with Andi Cairns from James Cook University, following on from some substantial work that Helen had done with Ilma Stone on tropical mosses.

Probably the most daunting of all the studies undertaken by Helen have been on some awe-inspiring taxa and families. The first was a study with Dale Vitt on *Macromitrium*. Recently, Helen, Wilf Schofield and Ben Tan completed a series of publications on the Australian Sematophyllaceae. We have seen many bryologists look at specimens of *Bryum* and walk right on, but again, Helen, with John Spence, have been working on this challenging group of mosses.

In 1979, bryologists from around Australia gathered in Melbourne to attend the first bryophyte course taught by George Scott. At this meeting a decision was made to have a workshop somewhere in Australia every two to three years. This would give bryologists, working in isolation, opportunities to meet, work together, and to study bryophytes from different regions of Australia. Paddy Dalton undertook to organize the first in Hobart. Either at Helen's instigation or with her encouragement, later workshops were held at Kuranda in north Queensland, in Canberra, and in the Blue Mountains.

Another outcome of George Scott's workshop was the commencement of the "Australasian Bryological Newsletter." In the early years, this was produced by Helen and Patricia Selkirk at Macquarie University, with help from Alison Downing. Helen and Patricia produced the newsletter for quite a few years before handing over to Paddy Dalton in Hobart, and it has now evolved to be a beautifully produced and electronically generated newsletter.

In 1981, Helen, together with George Scott, Ilma Stone and Patricia Selkirk mapped out the field trip from Melbourne to Sydney for the International Botanical Congress. George and Ilma planned the Victorian section, from Melbourne out through western Victoria and into southern NSW, Helen and Patricia planned the NSW itinerary, particularly the section through the Blue Mountains. Both Helen and Patricia also planned one-day bryological field trips from Sydney as part of the Congress.

Helen also has welcomed many visiting bryologists to Sydney, and always tried to arrange for those of us not at the Herbarium to meet them and, if possible, to spend some time in the field with them. In this way we met Dale Vitt, John Spence, Ben Tan, Wilf and Peggy Schofield, Tamas Pocs, Celina Matteri, Jon Shaw, Professor Lin from Guanzhou, and others. Helen has also always made a point of keeping us up to date with new publications, particularly taxonomic keys which we are less likely to encounter at Macquarie University than if we worked at the Herbarium.

At one time, Wilf Schofield spent 3 months in Australia, much of it based in Sydney. Helen organized some wonderful field trips with Wilf, including many to the Blue Mountains and one very special trip to Jenolan Caves. Helen commented that we had to go to Jenolan because the bryoflora was so very interesting and different. This has been really important for those of us at Macquarie University, in particular Alison Downing, Patricia Selkirk and Ron Oldfield, and has resulted in a series of papers, detailing the bryophytes of many important karst outcrops in Eastern Australia and calcareous arid and semi-arid lands of south central Australia

Helen, although a powerhouse in terms of bryological studies, always kept things in perspective, and her family has always been the most important part of her life. Her husband, Frank, was in the navy during the second world war. Exposure for weeks and months on end to the bitter, icy cold of the north seas left him incapacitated, and this was later complicated even more by Parkinson's disease. However, in spite of his on-going ill health, we have always loved visiting Helen and Frank in their Sydney home. We have always enjoyed a warm welcome, and Frank captivated us with his charming but sometimes very naughty sense of humour. Frank knew many bryologists, and also knew many bryophytes. After a VERY large gathering of bryologists at their house in 1981 during the International Botanical Congress, he delighted in telling us about the hordes of bryologists, hunting in the garden (another of Helen's great loves) for bryophytes. Helen and Frank were, in every sense of the word, a true partnership all their married lives. As Frank gradually succumbed to illness in his later years, Helen's workload increased enormously as he required much attention. Helen never considered the caring to be a hardship.

Helen Ramsay is truly an amazing bryologist. We feel very fortunate to have her come to Macquarie University each fortnight and work with us. When we asked Helen why she had taken on so many bryological responsibilities, her modest, matter-of-fact response was typical. "Well, I suppose that I could see that these things needed to be done, so I just got on with it and did them".

..... Alison Downing and Ron Oldfield.

When I visited Australia with Dr. Hattori in August 1981, I met Helen for the first time. At the Botanical Congress we were most impressed by the number of lady bryologists in Australia. Helen invited us to her home, a visit we enjoyed very much. In 1983, I met Helen again in Tokyo at the World Conference of

Bryology. I was hoping to start a cytotaxonomic study of *Fissidens* and was very glad to see Helen again. During the Conference we had a fairly strong earthquake one evening. Nobody was hurt, but I remember many Australian bryologists rushing to the telephone booths to tell their families back home what had happened.

Helen has published several significant bryological papers in the Hattori Botanical Laboratory journal. As Editor, I was surprised to receive a large manuscript on the taxonomy of Australian Sematophyllaceae, which she had written with Wilf Schofield and Ben Tan. The family has been considered one of the most difficult groups of mosses. The first part of this work was published in 2002. The second part was delayed in completion by the passing of her husband, but was finally published in 2004. Despite losing her husband, Helen wanted to complete this large and important work and I admire her greatly for her enthusiasm and efforts at this time. I think Helen is not only a cytologist, but an excellent taxonomist, and I hope she will continue her bryological works.

..... Zen Iwatsuki.

Helen is a very determined and hard working colleague in the field of plant systematics. In her undertaking of her studies on the systematics of the Australian moss flora after her many brilliant contributions to moss cytology, she has overcome the obstacles created by lovingly caring for her husband Frank, her less than ideal working conditions after retirement and, like many, her lack of background training in taxonomy and nomenclature. Working with a fixed timetable in mind, she has always pushed colleagues to complete joint projects on time.

As a person, Helen is very thoughtful and kind to all her collaborators and always takes good care of the needs of her co-workers and visitors, even long after the collaboration has ended. During the years of my working with Helen, I saw her giving great encouragement and attention to young bryologists who sought her advice.

..... Ben Tan.

Helen organized and implemented the re-curation of the Watts herbarium so that it could be incorporated into the Herbarium (NSW) rather than lying around in various places in boxes in their newspaper packets. This was a mammoth undertaking, given the state they were in. She has worked extensively on Watts' collections, locating types, material on which nomina nuda were probably based, etc., and publishing this information so it is available around the world (the only reason the liverworts have not been done is because I have held it up). I don't know what state they would have been in or how many would have been lost without her efforts. She has been tireless in urging bryologists to consider the Sydney collections when they are revising groups.

..... Elizabeth Brown.

I believe Helen started, and edited for a long time, the Australasian Bryological Newsletter, and was thus instrumental in fostering the excellent networking we have today in Australasia. Also, she had an important part in persuading Paddy Dalton to organize the first Australasian Bryophyte Workshop, in Hobart. Both are now institutions!

I do recall taking Helen straight from Auckland airport to stay over-night in our cottage in the Waitakere Ranges, and she commented how wonderful it was to be able to collect *Macromitrium* before breakfast. We then drove the length of the North Island to the 2<sup>nd</sup> John Child Workshop, organized by Pat Brownsey and team in the Akatarawa Range, near Wellington. We turned back on the road up to the alpine zone on Mt Ruapehu (me driving Helen's rental car, my first time in an automatic) because I couldn't reassure her that in New Zealand heavy rain doesn't necessarily result in back-country roads turning to custard (and after all, the car was hired in her name!). I think we can all be impressed at her research and publication record, knowing that all the while she had considerable family commitments, and a full time teaching load. I'd like to include a personal thank-you from me for her enthusiastic encouragement when I was a near-beginner, and her wonderful example to us all of friendly bryological networking.

..... Jessica Beever.

It was in 1972 that I first met Helen. It was at an ANZAAS meeting in Sydney. Her welcome was characteristically warm; we have been strong friends ever since, sharing in bryological enthusiasms and research as well as family lore. Our correspondence has been frequent, especially when we were working on publications. Helen's love for Australia is immediately apparent and her enthusiasm to share it contagious. Her dedication to an understanding of the bryophytes has been critical in bringing together the researches (and researchers) fundamental to the bryological volumes of the Flora of Australia.

Helen and Frank visited Vancouver in 1983. Again, this was for research on the Sematophyllaceae, as well as for cytological study of local mosses. On a trip to the Mt Baker area in Washington State, we explored the subalpine area. On an unstable boulder slope I lost my balance and the shock made me lose consciousness briefly. I warned Helen what was likely to happen, as the landscape faded. After her initial alarm had subsided, Helen remarked: "Do you do this on all field-trips with foreign visitors?" In spite of this mishap, it was a great day.

In 1983, my wife Peggy and I returned to Australia. Helen had arranged support for us to collect mosses, especially Sematophyllaceae, for our research with Benito Tan to treat that family for the Flora of Australia. We acquired modern specimens of a high proportion of the species. We explored many areas of great interest and beauty, some with Helen and Frank, and some with Ilma and Alan Stone.

Helen's contribution to the Flora of Australia has been outstanding, not only in the assembling of modern checklists, but also in inducing collaborators. This began with her many studies of cytology of mosses but continued with active encouragement of anyone who showed an interest in the bryophytes of the country. This has been essential to the present resurgence of careful study of Australian bryophytes.

During her academic career, Helen was deeply preoccupied with teaching. This led her to share her excitement for botany as well as her delight in the flora of Australia. Helen possesses a steady determination to get the job accomplished. This has greatly advanced the knowledge of the bryophytes of Australia as well as her many studies of the cytology of mosses of both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.

..... Wilf Schofield.

**Helen Ramsay** – cytologist, bryologist, teacher, mother, long time deeply devoted partner to her late husband Frank, founding editor of the Australasian Bryological Newsletter, committed advocate of the Bryophyte Flora of Australia, mentor to many, may you continue to be an inspiration to all.



Helen Ramsay with the next generation of bryologists, Scott Gilmore, Niels Klazenga and Val Stajsic at the VIth Australasian Bryophyte Workshop, Blue Mountains, September 2001

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## 20<sup>th</sup> John Child Bryophyte Workshop

28<sup>th</sup> October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2004

The 20<sup>th</sup> workshop will be held in Golden Bay at the NW corner of the South Island, an area of considerable botanical and geological interest. It will be based at Pohara and field sites are likely to include alluvial forest and lowland river valley forests, montane forest on marble at the top of Takaka Hill, coastal rata-podocarp-broadleaf forest on karst limestone and forest on dolomite at Mt. Burnett.

**Convenor: Peter Beveridge**, c/o Botany Department, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, PO Box 467, Wellington, New Zealand.

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## 8th Australasian Workshop

**Paluma village, North Queensland  
Saturday 25 June to Thursday 30 June  
2005**

In the depths of winter, while the cold winds are howling in the south of the continent (not forgetting chilly Tasmania and snowy NZ!), come visit the tropics — North Queensland is paradise in June!

### About the workshop

The 8th Australasian Bryophyte Workshop will be based at Paluma. The Paluma Range, 65 km north of Townsville, is the most southerly point of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Townsville has a major airport with connecting flights to and from Brisbane and Cairns.

Accommodation will be in dormitories at one of the two Environmental Education Centres in the village, with all meals provided. (Alternatively, you can organise your own accommodation in Paluma.)

There will be opportunities to visit various forest types and guided day trips will take participants to local areas of bryological interest, such as Wallaman Falls, Cloudy Creek and Jourama Falls. There will be trips for different interests and different physical abilities!

One afternoon and evening will be set aside for special-interest sessions and talks. We expect that most evenings will be spent on the microscopes, but if there is sufficient interest we may schedule some optional talks.

### Approximate Cost

Our best estimate of costs at the moment, in Australian dollars, is as follows:

Accommodation (5 nights).....	\$100
All meals and transport*.....	\$350
TOTAL.....	\$450

\*Note: Transport includes transport from Townsville to Paluma, transport during workshop, and return to Townsville.

### About Paluma

The village of Paluma is situated near the summit of Mt Spec (1000 m altitude), and is accessed by 18 km of sealed road that winds up the mountain from the coastal plain, through eucalypt forest and casuarina woodland, to tropical rainforest at the top of the range.

Once a busy settlement servicing the tin mining and logging industry, Paluma today has a permanent population of only around 20. However, visitors to the area number in the thousands and the surrounding tropical rainforest is well known for its plant and animal life. The village boasts two Environmental Education Centres – and every child of school age in the Townsville and Ingham districts spends at least a few days at Paluma in their school career, learning about the rainforest!

Paluma is unique in having a large variety of habitats in close proximity, including tropical rainforest (simple notophyll vine forest) and wet sclerophyll forest, with dry forest and woodland to the west of the range.

More information on Paluma Range National Park (Mount Spec and Jourama Falls sections) and Lumholtz National Park (Wallaman Falls Section) may be found at these web sites:

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[http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00136aa.pdf/Paluma\\_Range\\_National\\_Park\\_Mount\\_Spec\\_Section.pdf](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00136aa.pdf/Paluma_Range_National_Park_Mount_Spec_Section.pdf)

[http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00135aa.pdf/Paluma\\_Range\\_National\\_Park\\_Jourama\\_Falls\\_Section.pdf](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00135aa.pdf/Paluma_Range_National_Park_Jourama_Falls_Section.pdf)

[http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00124aa.pdf/Lumholtz\\_National\\_Park\\_Wallaman\\_Falls\\_Section.pdf](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p00124aa.pdf/Lumholtz_National_Park_Wallaman_Falls_Section.pdf)

Expressions of interest are sought NOW! As numbers will be limited, please complete the following form to register your interest, and email to:

[andi.cairns@jcu.edu.au](mailto:andi.cairns@jcu.edu.au)

or mail to:

Andi Cairns, Tropical Biology, James Cook University, Townsville, 4811, Australia

Hope to see you there!

Andi Cairns & David Meagher

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**8th Australasian Workshop**  
**Paluma village, North Queensland**  
**Saturday 25 June to Thursday 30 June 2005**

**Expression of Interest**

Yes, I am interested in attending the workshop

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

email .....

NOTE: Accommodation at the Environmental Education Centre is in dormitories. There are also holiday homes for rent in the village. If you would like information on separate accommodation (at your own cost) please indicate:

- YES please send me more information
- NO I'm happy with dormitory-style accommodation

email to: [Andi.cairns@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Andi.cairns@jcu.edu.au)

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**New Publication**  
**The Moss Flora of Macquarie Island**

This book just published in June, describes the moss taxa of subantarctic Macquarie Island. It is a culmination of many years of research by Rod Seppelt. Eighty-four species are described in detail with keys accompanying the text. Clear and precise scientific illustrations assist to identify species, of which approximately 80% are also found in the flora of Tasmania and south-east Australia.

**To order a copy, please see the flyer that is enclosed with this newsletter.**

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