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### **JUNE NEWSLETTER 2009**

Dear Members,

For those of you who did not go to the AABC Convention in Brisbane a few weeks ago, I hate to tell you but you missed out on an incredible weekend, with lots of bonsai, bonsai friends sharing knowledge, some great stones, and of course some great food to boot!

The weather was a bit 'iffy' at the start with lots of rain in the week leading up to the event. A few people couldn't attend as there was a lot of flooding and quite a few roads were blocked and for the few who lived on properties they had to stay home to tend to their animals and herd them to higher ground. Quite a few places along the north coast of New South Wales were completely flooded and that caused a lot of damage. That was the shame about it all but as ever, the sun finally showed us that Queensland weather is definitely perfect the next day, and yes you guessed it; that was the day we were all leaving Brisbane!

We had a very limited space to display our stones, and I was very surprised to see so many beautiful stones turn up on the Friday set-up. I thought that we had too many but of course we didn't want to offend anyone by refusing their effort in bringing them along to the show. The stones were very varied not only by shape and description but by colour.

Suiseki is relatively young in this country so it was intended to display all the stones with a mind of educating the general public who were paying visitors to the show on that weekend. The only thing that were lacking were a few bonsai stands to display them on but in hind sight the area would not have taken too many stands with stones on them. So we made do with the aid of a few bamboo place mats that were put in my suitcase to help a few people out who were traveling by plane.

In the end people were amazed at the diversity of stones from all over the world and quite a few from Australia. It is one of my greatest ambitions to have a suiseki display as they do in Japan and Europe – well spaced out in a simple and elegant way. Until then, we will strive harder to get suiseki recognized and accepted within our bonsai clubs and shows in this country. It will all depend on us helping to spread to word and appreciation of this great art form. I would recommend all members of the bonsai community around this great country of ours to show a few stones at their local bonsai meetings for all to see, and then maybe it will become second place at all club meetings. Of course, if they were beautifully displayed on stands complete with a very small accent plant to add colour, most clubs would most probably add a special section for suiseki within their tree display – here's hoping anyway!

Happy Hunting, Brenda

**THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH**

‘Nature reveals its wonders only to the one who  
keeps bonsai and suiseki in his heart.’

- Old Chinese Proverb

**Some of the stones displayed in Brisbane at the AABC Convention, 2009.**





**Apologies from our resident woodworkers, George and John this month as John and his wife are on a well earned holiday and will be back next month. In the meantime, to keep in the wood theme I have a couple of ‘wood’ news items that you may be interested in.**

### **ITEM 1**

Firstly, at the Brisbane Convention there was a vendor who was selling these incredible pieces of wood similar in hardness and durability to mallee root. I had never seen it before and it was told to me by the vendor that it comes from South Africa. If you have fish aquariums you may know it as Mopani wood and it is used to decorate fish tanks. It is so tough that it will not rot in the water and it comes in a two-tone colour of chocolate brown and beige. They come in incredible shapes and can be used for either bonsai or as I thought, it could be used in suiseki perhaps maybe to display a stone that resembles a bird on it.

The tree, *Colophospermum mopane*, grows in hot, dry, low-lying areas and is found mainly in the mid to southern parts of South Africa. The name *Colophospermum* is Greek for oily seed, in reference to the resinous seeds. Part of the name, *colophos*, refers to the strong turpentine smell of the resin. *Colophony* is another name for rosin, a substance obtained from turpentine.

Mopani wood is one of Africa’s heaviest timbers and is difficult to work with because of its hardness. It is also termite resistant. Outside Africa, mopani is gaining popularity as a heavy, decorative wood, its uses including aquarium ornaments, bases for lamps or sculptures, building houses and fences and also popular for flooring. The only drawback with the wood when used in fish tanks is that over time the strong colours in the wood permeate into the water causing it to go a caramel colour.

### **ITEM 2**

Recently I spent a bit of time with my aging parents who had both been very sick. My Mother was in hospital so I stayed with my Father to help him around the house and garden.

For years as a child I remembered this particular ornament that was always on display in our home and which is still on display to this day. I knew that my Father had made it but I wasn’t quite sure of the circumstances that surrounded it. I made it my business to find out more about it so it could be noted and documented as a treasured memento to be kept in the family.

I always knew my Father was talented with his hands as he was a very fine fitter and turner and had held a few very important jobs over the years. He then told me the story of this ornament that he had made during his internment during the war along with a lot of his Italian friends and family.

The Italians and Germans were placed alongside each other in the same camp with only a strip of dirt separating them and fenced in on all sides with only tents to reside in. During the years of the Second World War all of the detainees built the barracks, upgrading them from the old tents that were very cold in winter.

Mallee roots were collected by trucks for the boilers to be used for washing dishes, cooking and for the railway steamers used in the showers.

For amusement and to pass the time my father would collect nice pieces of mallee root with a view of making something out of it. He would scout outside where the old tents once stood and found and collected left over tent pegs. These were put into the fire of the boiler, softened and then with a hammer they were shaped into chisel shapes and used on a pedal lathe to shape the mallee root. The pedal lathe was made by my father and it resembled an old sewing machine.

He proceeded to carve the very hard wood which took so long but time was of no consequence as he had nowhere to go and a lot of time to do it in. Meticulous would have to be the word I would describe the craftsmanship on this cigarette holder, match holder, ashtray and cigarette holder combo that is so delicately carved with only the eye to guide him and no other tools.

The white cigarette ends of the holders were made with the left over bones of a hogget leg that was once eaten at some meal. The fine hole in this holder was done with none other than a stolen bike wheel spoke that belonged to the Major. It was sharpened at one end to produce a sharp drill. Again this was an arduous task and very time consuming.

The top of the match container has sandpaper glued on to strike the matches on. The silver ends of the cigarette holders were crafted from a threepence that were moulded to finish them off.

The part of the story that I found so amusing was the base that this ornament stands on was stolen by my Father, when one night he snuck over to the German side of the camp and took their bottom step that went into the barracks. Resourceful to say the least! Funnily enough, neither the Major nor the Germans ever found out that it was my Father who stole the wheel spoke or the wooden step to help him in his creation.

Another Italian friend of my Father's had a great handwriting so my Father asked him to put his name and inscription on the side of the cigarette holder in Indian ink. The 'R.D.M.P.' stands for Ricordo Della Mia Prisonea or translated as 'a record of my imprisonment 1943'.

Stories like this don't come along very often but it is one that I will treasure for many years to come and I will make sure that it gets handed down to my grandchildren when they are old enough to appreciate it.

I have included a few photos of this ornament for you to enjoy.



Front view



Left side



Right side



Another set of small containers made from Mallee by my Father

Meetings for Suiseki Australia are held at the Don Moore Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks at 7.30 p.m.

We meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month (except for school holidays).

Daiza workshops are held at Ray Nesci's Bonsai Nursery, Sagars Road, Dural starting at 9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Details as follows:

20<sup>th</sup> May Suiseki meeting at North Rocks

17<sup>th</sup> June Suiseki meeting at North Rocks

19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> June Wood Working Show at Fox Studios, Moore Park

20<sup>th</sup> June Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery

No Suiseki meeting in July

18<sup>th</sup> July Daiza workshop at Ray's

8<sup>th</sup> August Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery

19<sup>th</sup> August Suiseki meeting at North Rocks

12<sup>th</sup> September Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery

**\*\*\*16<sup>th</sup> September Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery\*\*\***

17<sup>th</sup> October Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery

21<sup>st</sup> October Suiseki meeting at North Rocks

14<sup>th</sup> November Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery

18<sup>th</sup> November Suiseki meeting at North Rocks

Come along and visit us and learn more about collecting and enjoying suiseki and viewing stones.

**CORRECTION:** \*\*\* The date marked with the asterisks was wrongly noted as a Daiza workshop at Ray Nesci's Nursery. It is indeed a Suiseki meeting. Apologies. Ed.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, at 7.30 p.m. at North Rocks.

George has kindly offered to bring in a small Tokonama and we will experiment with some lighting on our stones at this meeting. Could you please bring in some stones on stands to display together with a small accent plant to see what special effects we can gain from different lighting.

**Reminder** – (1) The Wood and Working with Wood Show is on at Fox Studios, Moore Park on the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> June.

(2) Daiza workshop at Ray's Nursery on the 20<sup>th</sup> June at 9.00 a.m. Bring your lunch.

See you all then.