

WBC 08, Cairns - by Kerry Tate.

NB. This is a personal report, for which I take full responsibility. It is lengthy, so beware!

I arrived in Cairns Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> June, early arvo, travelling with a fellow brom mate Shane. I had pre-booked 2 apartments, just around the corner from the International Hotel (I.H.), the venue for the conference. Once settled in, we checked out what was happening at the I.H., which is pretty plush. The Board Meeting was apparently in full swing in some private meeting room, and some others were also in full swing playing golf. Golf? hmmm....never was keen on that futile game, so I lay down and the urge to play went away.... Meanwhile, the foyer of the I.H. was buzzing with activity. People were busy setting up brom displays, volunteer organisers were handing out registration show bags and I.D. tags, and others were generally loitering and catching up with fellow early arrivals. We found Jack Koning, also staying in our party apartments. We were also trying to find 'Singapore Girl', who was meant to be staying with us – but we didn't know her name or what she looked like. I finally met Uncle Derek and Aunt Margaret face to face – what a pleasure! We have corresponded for several years, and I have great respect for them. By the end of the conference, Unc D had nick-named me "The Incurable Kerry". LOL

An invitation to dinner on Tuesday night by Chris Larson – convener of the TPE (Tillandsia Participation Event) – was accepted by many of us Till nuts. There, at an Italian restaurant, I was able to put many faces to names, aided by the start of much wheelin' and dealin' of under-the-counter business brom card exchanges! That certainly happened a LOT throughout the conference.  
eg. "Here Kerry, take my card. I'm sure I can do you some better deals outside of eBay. Just give me a ring or send an email." Ha!

Wednesday was the whole day and evening TPE (Tillandsia Presentation Event). This event was the most educational for me, especially being early on, conference-wise. The "inner circle" comprised of those who presented till-related topics (but some didn't?), and the "outer circle" comprised the rest of us plebeians - the majority. Those in the inner circle were privy to the special tills being passed around for discussion/show and tell, tables, and bowls of mints, whereas we plebs just got a chair in the dark. However, we all got the same yummy morning tea, lunch, and afternoon tea, catered by the I.H. I was a dutiful, note-taking student - which is just as well, because until I re-visited my notes, I couldn't remember much!

Andrew Flower (editor of BSI Journal and fine fellow with good politics) gave us some tips on photographing broms, and discussed aberrant behaviour of some tills eg T.palacaea, tectorum, and heteromorpha.

Bob Hudson showed us a couple of tills.

Chris Larson showed and discussed the differences between T. juncea and juncifolia from Guatemala, taught us the difference between "lumpers" and "splitters", and stressed the need for more collecting in the wild for accurate I.D. and descriptions.

Len Colgan discussed tills with differing flower colours, in great detail. I have extensive notes on this topic if anyone would like a copy. Basically, Len says it all

boils down to “Location, Location, Location!” – big differences in form, colours, and scents according to location (i.e. in natural habitat).

Derek Butcher presented and explained his work on the tillandsia species I.D. DVD, a remarkable study and coalition of information with accompanying photos. I bought a DVD – invaluable to all till fanciers. Apparently the ‘Butcher Opus’ also includes the full study of most, or all, other genera! Derek also discussed, briefly, the inclusion of the catopsis genus on the Till DVD, and fertiliser recommendations for tills.

George Stamatias presented growing tills in warm, sub-tropics of South Africa - very interesting.

Another fellow, not sure of his name, discussed various aspects and differences between forms of *T. capitata*.

Greg Aizelwood put Derek’s I.D. code into practice, and suggested we join the Tilly Nuts forum on the web for I.D. help.

Mick Romanowski discussed Peruvian tills, the problems with importing from South America, and the hazards of collecting in the wild. He showed us great habitat photos, and stressed the importance to instil interest of native broms in the local South American folk, so they can respect, study and care for them over time.

Peter Tristram presented an interesting inner circle involvement of identifying tillandsias and vrieseas, with dead, dried material as the source. I learned that the major difference between a till and a vriesea, is that vrieseas have nectar scale at the base of their flowers, whereas tills do not. Peter also discussed the likelihood of silver vrieseas being granted their own genus.

Derek spoke again on natural hybrids.

Barry Genn showed us some of his lovely small till hybrids with colourful inflorescences.

Then we had a break for tea, then finally re-met for the Brag Session. I stopped making notes by this stage, so apologies to anyone I missed. Chris Larson showed us some beauties, as did Len Colgan, Mark Paul and Bob Hudson. For the last presentation of the brag session, Yours Truly represented the outer circle (and females), by showing photos of my tills in garden, especially trees, and then the awful frost damage to them of last winter.

While many of us were learning about tills on the Wednesday, others were still arriving, or busy delivering their prized show plants, or preparing broms for THE SALES, or experiencing G.B.Reef tours.

The International Reception was held at 6pm.

.....still no sign of ‘Singapore Girl’.

Thursday. I could sleep in – yay! – much needed, as nights were very late, what with chatting broms to all and sundry. The show comp judging went all day, and those judging folk worked very hard. Some others enjoyed breakfasting with the birds. The other guests staying in our apartments arrived, so more partying, but still no ‘Singapore Girl’.

At 4pm (not a minute later!) the Official Opening was held. The huge conference room was full to the brim. Over 400 delegates – still not sure of exact figure – were there. The opening went smoothly, and major awards were presented. Grace Goode won the Wally Berg Award for her contribution to bromeliads, and both Peter Waters and Derek Butcher were also presented with major awards, as was Maureen Green at

the banquet dinner. Joyce Brehm, Madam President, introduced the BSI Board of Directors.

THEN! – the sales were (supposed to be) opened to registrants at 7pm. But the line-up was so big, of course, that they opened the doors half an hour early..... Well! After all that physical training and investment of super-duper runners, it was, alas, to no avail. Once in, I could not even jog on the spot, for fear of squashing some poor veteran's toes. I grabbed some nice broms from sellers near the entry door, then picked up a few species sold by Peter Tristram, including a white clone of *Alc. odorata* (\$150 !!), and then I just wanted/needed to get out. The room was far too small for the number of people and sales. In hindsight, I think it would have been much better if there was some sort of ballot system, and when your number comes up, you and say 30 others have 10 minutes to themselves in sales room – then the next 30 for 10 minutes etc. Due to people continuing to enter, the room filled so quickly, and then to get out was nigh impossible. Payment was made outside the exit door, but there was a hold-up with eftpos - card payments, so everything stopped at the exit end.....and the room kept getting more crowded..... it was a nightmare! I didn't even see 3 quarters of the initial sale plants, just trying to get out. It took me an hour to reach the payment area, waiting in a line which kept getting wider in front of me! It was hot, and sweaty, and hideous, and I honestly feared someone might have a heart attack – maybe me!!

When I finally got to some fresh air with my handful of new broms, 'Singapore Girl', whose name is Lee Jun, was patiently waiting for me ☺. We took her back to our apartments for her to settle in, and for us to recover from the first sales. We then decided to brave it again – the first sales were on for three hours. So back at 9.30pm, knowing that sales would be open until 10pm, maybe later, as was announced at the official opening. Yes, the crowd had finally thinned by then, but the entry door was closed, and we were told they had closed early. I stood my ground, insisting that sales were advertised as on 'til 10, so they shut me up by letting us back in. Of course, many of the most desirable broms were already sold, or were too expensive for me. I was surprised to see several tillandsias offered for sale by Pam Hyatt (of Birdrock Tropicals). She must have arranged for her broms to be exported to Australia (Cairns Quarantine Station?) many months earlier, probably when she was here for the Australian brom conference in September last year. They all looked very healthy, despite recent quarantine treatment, although I missed out on buying any of the really special ones.

Friday was the first of 2 full days of seminars. The 6 presenters on this day were:

Paul Isley 111 – “A Tillandsia Species, Hybrid & Cultivar Cornucopia”

\* Well-titled and very interesting. Excellent photos of development of his nursery. Lots of big fake rocks and waterfalls in landscaping.

Vic Przetocki – “Bromeliads in Time and Space- hybridising”

\* Professionally-presented images on the hybridising of many of his neoregelias and billbergias, including photos of the parents and their beautiful progeny.

Cristy Brenner – “Bromeliad Adventures in the Venezuelan Tepuis”

\* very animated presentation with amazing images of these remote areas. Thoroughly enjoyable, and a highlight for me.

Herb Plever – “Indoor Techniques and Insights For All Setups”

\* unfortunately, I missed this seminar. I heard that people were most impressed with what a grower needs to do to grow broms in such adverse conditions. Reminded me of what our Sander has to do!

Larry Giroux – “What about Cryptanthus?”

\* again, I missed this one. I am not so keen on growing crypts, and the Show Plants room had just opened, so I photographed in there instead. Sorry, Dr Larry!

Chester Skotak – “Skotak’s Colourful World”

\* aah! drool material again and again and again!!!, and Chester wasn’t bad either! Highly entertaining and another highlight for me.

The sales room was opened to the public on Friday, but it seemed just as crowded and chaotic as the previous evening. I walked in, then out straight away without any more purchases, as I knew I would miss Chester’s seminar as well if I tried to purchase and get on that long line out to pay.

The show plants room was also very popular, but again plants and people were crammed in a small space. In defence of the organisers, the number of both sales and show plants had increased dramatically compared to the numbers originally claimed by sellers and growers. However, the quality of the show plants, and their arrangement within the room, were outstanding, and IMO, did Australia proud. I also think the displays by brom societies and larger nurseries were fantastic! They were tastefully artistic and decorative, with beautifully-grown broms – a real credit to the growers and arrangers. Much effort and sacrifice is made to represent these groups.

Friday night was the much-anticipated rare plant auction, with the proceeds going to the BSI. Many generous donations were offered for auction, including brom books, artwork, garden statuary, and lots and lots of special, sought-after plants. The auction was well-attended, and very lengthy. Len Trevor did a fine job as auctioneer. I have not heard the amount raised yet, but I can only imagine it was mega bucks. I did not bother getting a bidder’s number, as I knew the plants I really wanted would also be desired by those less financially challenged. The record single sale was \$4,500 for Alcantarea ‘Bobbie Powell’. Other items sold for over \$2,000, and many between \$500 and \$1000. There were plenty of items which sold for more realistic prices.

NB. In fairness, I think that once a person has won an item, they should be disallowed to bid again, so that the 'little person' has a chance of winning something.....but then the profits would not be so high.....hmmm.

Saturday was day 2 of all day seminars.

By this stage, I was suffering severely from sleep deprivation, and would have loved a 'day off', before coming back for more brom info. Getting together with long-lost brom friends takes its social toll. My apologies to the majority of presenters whose seminars I missed on Saturday.

They were:

John Catlan – “Colours in Neoregelias”

David Liddle – “Reactive Microclimates”

Andrew Flower – “Dihydrogen monoxide Interaction with Bromeliads”

Derek Butcher – “Diaphoranthema”

Robert Kopfstein – “Ed Hummel – Plantsman, Hybridiser, Eccentric”

Jay Thurrot – “Weevil Control Update & Hurricane Winds”

Peter Bak – “The art of Breeding and Producing Millions of Seedlings”.

I did catch the last of Peter Bak's presentation (why did all events start earlier than advertised????). Wow!!! Talk about mass production!

While missing most of Saturday's presentations, I did meet up with other bromfolk finally, like Michael Kiehl in the sales room, who was a very popular fellow. By Saturday the crowds had thinned in the sales room, and I bought a few more nice broms - but either all the best stuff of interest to me were gone, or they were too expensive. I took more photos, and true to form, talked a LOT!

Although I was a bit of a party-pooper by then, others were still partying hard, and having fun at the casino across the road. I enjoyed spending time with Lee Jun, who has the interesting job of working for the Singapore company which looks after the huge shipments (15,000 at a time!) of broms from Tropiflora for the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Before she was employed by that company, she knew nothing about bromeliad care, and was sent by her company to learn more about them at the WBC.

Sunday offered an optional local garden tour, but only for the conscientious early risers, as they had to meet at the I.H. at 7.30am. Toooooo early for me! My flatmates and I had a civil brunch together, and chilled out. I picked Jack K's brains on foliage vriezea hybridising, then had a much-needed beauty kip, in preparation for the grand banquet dinner.

We arrived in our finery early, we thought, but folk had already bagsed tables and some were already eating when we got there! Hellooooooo!

The dinner was delicious and plentiful, as were all the meals catered by the I.H.

Everyone looked pretty, and more socialising was done, and photographs taken.

Maureen Green received her award, and Lynne Hudson was presented with a finely-executed seascape painting for all her hard work. Many were leaving the next morning, so farewells were bid, and more cards handed out. This event was the ideal opportunity for self-promotion and making connections – of which there was a plenty!

Monday, the final day for most, offered the pre-booked tour to Peter Sargent's Wyanbeel Arboretum, north of Cairns at the start of the Daintree, including lunch. Two bus loads headed off bright and early. This popular tour was booked out well before the conference, and many missed out. My mate Shane and I were lucky enough to be invited by Peter to visit after the masses had been, in the arvo - and what a highlight that was for us. We hired a car, and enjoyed the magnificent coastal scenery along the way. Unfortunately, we did not see Peter's home garden, but he showed us his nursery, or "playground", as he calls it. His nursery is beautifully landscaped with rare tropical plants on a mass scale. Gingers, heliconias, bromeliads, palms etc abounded, all by a natural rainforest setting. It is a large operation, and we so appreciated Peter's generosity of time, enthusiasm and knowledge.

We unpotted and packed our brom purchases carefully in banana boxes, as checked-in luggage, for our flight back to Brisbane on Tuesday, then final leg of drive home - exhausted but happy.  
I bought 29 broms all up.

I loved the conference, and am now trying to work out the logistics of getting to New Orleans for the next WBC in 2010. I will be attending the next Australian brom conference in Adelaide next year. Yes, I am hooked!

Best of all was the camaraderie of old and new friends, all sharing the same passion, amongst fantastic displays and vast knowledge. My congratulations and thanks to the voluntary organisers for all their hard work, challenging at times I'm sure.

Finito.....

Cheers,  
Kerry ☺