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Historical Records *of* Australian Science

VOLUME 14, 2002–03

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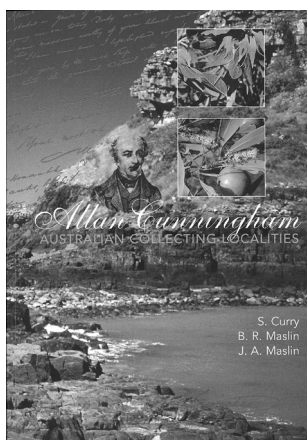


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Suzanne Curry, Bruce Maslin and John Maslin: *Allan Cunningham: Australian Collecting Localities*. Flora of Australia Supplementary Series Number 13. Canberra: Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS), 2002. 90pp, 40 maps, ISBN 0 642 56818 9 (PB) \$25.



Places and plants in the Australian landscape eponymously echo the name of an English botanist, Allan Cunningham, whose plant specimens and information shaped European knowledge of Australia's peculiar flora in the nineteenth century. Various botanists used his specimens (now called type specimens) to name and describe new species, many being cited last century in George Bentham's *Flora Australiensis* and currently in ABRS's *Flora of Australia* and Australian National Botanic Gardens' magnificent database, Australian Plant Names Index (APNI).

British botanists, George Bentham and Robert Brown, named a profusion of Australian plants, many from specimens Allan Cunningham collected. They named some to commemorate him, including *Solanum cunninghamii* Benth. and *Crotalaria cunninghamii* R. Br. which are pictured on the book's cover. Since the taxonomist's authorial name remains

attached to the plant's taxonomic name, but the name of the collector of specimens used by the taxonomist does not, it is fortunate that, in recognition of the importance of collectors, taxonomists name new species for them. A decade after Cunningham's death (aged only 48) in Sydney in 1839, Robert Brown named a beautiful plant, now commonly known as Green Bird Flower, *Crotalaria cunninghamii* R. Br. Cunningham deserves his many botanical eponyms. During less than 17 years in Australia he sent thousands of plant specimens to England. And he provided taxonomic and geographical information about them.

Son of Wimbledon House's head gardener, Allan Cunningham worked at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England, assisting with the revision of the catalogue of plants cultivated there, *Hortus Kewensis* (1810–13). The scientific adviser to the royal family and honorary director of their Gardens, Sir Joseph Banks, wanted botanical information and plants from the whole world, and in 1814 appointed Cunningham as a botanist collector, sending him first to Brazil and then to the colony of New South Wales. After arriving in Sydney in December 1816, Cunningham received Banks' instructions to join Lieutenant Phillip Parker King's coastal surveys, which would add geographical details to earlier surveys by Matthew Flinders and James Cook. From December 1817 to April 1822 King carried out four hydrographic surveys of the Australian continent — mainly north-western, northern and north-eastern coasts — and one of Tasmania, then called Van Diemen's Land. Cunningham welcomed the opportunity to add to earlier plant collections made by Banks during Cook's voyage and Brown during Flinders'.

This slim volume includes some biographical information and a bibliography of published work about Allan Cunningham, and a synoptic, chrono-

logical list of his itinerary during the two periods he spent in Australia (1816–31 and 1837–39), including various inland exploratory expeditions. There is also an index of Australian geographical names used in Part 1, the main part of the book. This part is a refinement and elaboration of Suzanne Curry's and Bruce Maslin's paper in the *History of Systematic Botany in Australasia* (1990) on Cunningham's collecting localities during King's surveys, plus maps prepared by John Maslin. It provides, in text and maps, precise dates and localities for plant collections Cunningham made during King's five hydrographic surveys. A map-studded chapter is devoted to Cunningham's collecting chronology during each survey. The authors do not discuss the plants Cunningham collected, nor who used his specimens to describe new species. That is not their aim.

In their introduction the authors note the importance of establishing as precisely as possible where and when Cunningham collected plants. Such information aids those curating Cunningham's herbarium specimens (now in various Herbaria around the world) and those visiting his collecting localities. But it has a wider historical importance. Cunningham focused botanically-intelligent eyes on the Australian landscape. He recognised plants already named and suggested genera for the Huon Pine and other taxonomically unnamed plants. His collections of live and herbarium specimens and his taxonomic and geographic observations during King's voyages contributed to European botanical knowledge and taxonomy, and enhanced his botanical reputation. As various botanists used his specimens to name new species, he contributed to plant taxonomy, especially the taxonomy of Australia's flora and its universal (scientific) lexicon. In shaping the scientific knowledge and documentation of Australia's flora Allan Cunningham is an important participant in the history of Australian science. Places

from which he extracted botanical information and specimens, many of which remain rather remote and inaccessible, are sites of Australia's scientific heritage. They are part of Australia's post-Botany Bay botanical history.

Even if you do not share my fascination with Australian botanical history you may find this book interesting. As you surf the web or read about Australian plants, you may happen across information about plants Cunningham collected somewhere along Australia's coast. For example *Solanum cunninghamii* Benth. grows in red sandy soil near Broome in north-western Australia. Benthham used a specimen Cunningham collected near Cygnet Bay to describe this species of *Solanum* in *Flora Australiensis*. Map 40 shows where King's brig anchored in Cygnet Bay, from where (according to the accompanying text) Cunningham collected plants on Cunningham Point and other red sandy coastal areas in February 1822. The weather was helpful. According to Cunningham's account in King's published *Narrative*, in contrast with many drought-desiccated places they visited, recent rain allowed the vegetation around Cygnet Bay to bloom during their visit.

Allan Cunningham: Australian Collecting Localities provides a ready geographical reference to compare with the localities of other coastal plant collections, such as those made previously by Banks and Brown or subsequently by Mueller. Unfortunately the authors have not distinguished which places were named before King's surveys and which names were generated during those surveys. Did King name Cunningham Point for Banks' botanist? And what about Pine Cove in Tasmania's Macquarie Harbour? When King anchored there in 1819 was it already named, presumably after the timber-providing Huon Pine, or did King name it while Cunningham collected the not yet taxonomically named Huon Pine there?

You may like to read this book in concert with Marsden Hordern's recent biography of Phillip Parker King, *King of the Australian Coast* (1997).

The Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS) is to be congratulated for publishing this reliable geographic reference, which was prepared primarily from Cunningham's unpublished journals and King's published *Narrative* (1827) and unpublished hydrographic charts. Thank heavens for surveying and scientific accuracy and for archives and herbaria where such precious manuscripts, maps and plant specimens are protected from the ravages of time, greed and ignorance.

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