INTRODUCTION

Along this walk you will see some of the plants used by the various groups of Rainforest Aboriginals who lived in the Cairns to Mareeba area.

The main groupings of the Cairns region were:

- DJABUGANYDJ. Kuranda to Mareeba area.
- GUNGGANYDJ. Yarrabah area.
- YIDINYDJ. Mulgrave River to Upper Barron River on Tablelands.
- YIRRGANYDJ. Barron River along the coast to Mowbray River.

*(Please note there are no clearly defined boundaries between the different groups. Areas indicated are only to be used as an approximate guide).

ABORIGINALS, PLANTS & KNOWLEDGE

The Rainforest Aboriginals did not practice farming as we know it, although they used alternative techniques to improve their food gathering. For example they set fires in adjacent sclerophyll forest to induce fresh grass growth which in turn attracted animals that could be hunted.

They also used native Australian plants as a major source of food, shelter, medicine, clothing, utensils, tools and weapons, over a period dated in excess of 40,000 years. During this time they developed an extensive and detailed knowledge of the properties and uses of these plants.

The forest was the source of life, a fact that we today are only beginning to relearn for ourselves.

Much of this knowledge has been lost due to the scattering of the various peoples and a movement away from traditional values and uses. Fortunately Aboriginal elders, scholars, historians and scientists are now working together in an effort to regain and record as much of this traditional lore as possible for the benefit of future generations.

FURTHER READING

The following publications are recommended to those persons wishing to obtain further information regarding the Rainforest Aboriginals and Aboriginal plant use.

- ‘Words of our Country’ compiled by RMW Dixon 1991 ISBN. 0 7022 2360 3.
- A Guide to Traditional Rainforest Plant Use’ by the Kuku Yalanji of the Mossman Gorge 1995. ISBN. 0 646 229915

Flecker Gardens Cairns Qld Australia
TOXIC PLANTS

Many species of Australian rainforest plants are edible, but a significant number are also extremely poisonous. Over the years the Aboriginal people learned to detoxify some of these plants to a level of safety.

The process of detoxification is often long and complicated, sometimes taking five or six days to complete. For example fruit from cycads was roasted, sliced, crushed and leached in running water to produce an edible flour which was then cooked and eaten.

*Aboriginal names given to the plants listed are from either the Yidin or Djabugay speaking peoples.

Other groups of aboriginals used the same plants but sometimes in completely different ways and for different purposes.

1. **Zamia Fern** Bowenia spectabilis
   **JAYUR Pron: JA-YOOR**
   These cycads are the smallest members of their family. They grow in the shelter of the rainforests and develop only one to three leaves. Because the plants are poisonous, the roots and the seeds were roasted, crushed and soaked for twenty-four hours, then roasted again in hot ashes before eating.

2. **Native Ginger** Alpinia coerulea
   **ZINGIBERACEAE BARRGAL Pron: BURRAGULL**
   The leaves of this ginger were laid under or used to wrap meat when it was cooked in earth ovens. This imparted a spicy taste and protected the meat from the dirt.

3. **Native Banana** Musa banksi
   **MUSACEAE JADAM/YUMUN Pron: (JUN-DUM/YOO-MOON)**
   Native bananas grow in clumps and reach heights of approximately 5 metres. The thin yellow fruits are edible but so full of small angular black seeds that there is very little edible flesh. The leaves were used to wrap food when cooking to keep it clear of dirt and ashes as well as keeping it moist.