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AUGUST NEWSLETTER 2010

Dear Members,

When I first joined Suiseki Australia I would always here the word 'patina' and how important it was to be on the stones that we found. It had to be natural or artificially applied to the smooth stones to give them an aged appearance. There were many 'recipes' on how to apply this so-called patina and that included wiping the brow to wipe off the natural oils and then applying it to the stone over many years to build it up. Then the more recent suggestions was to use baby oil and olive oil and the like to improve the stone's appearance by applying it and then the continuous rubbing with a soft cloth for the same end result. Another way of achieving this was to leave the stone out in the elements for many years for it to be done naturally. My thought on that is, wasn't it already out in the elements when the stone was found so why waste another ten years or so waiting to enjoy the stone???

ABOUT DESERT VARNISH (ALSO CALLED PATINA)

- Desert varnish is found across the world.
- It is often found on canyon walls.
- It is one of fourteen different types of rock coatings.
- Desert varnish was used by Prehistoric and Neolithic people to create images known as petroglyphs, which they crafted by scraping away the dark varnish to reveal the light rock beneath.
- Desert varnish is sometimes mistaken for fusion crust, the melted glassy exterior of a meteorite that forms when the meteorite passes through the atmosphere.

This following article was printed in the Californian Suiseki Club's newsletter by Wanda Matjas and permission was gained to print part of it.

'Desert varnish is known as one of the most remarkable biogeochemical phenomenon in arid desert regions of the world. Although it may be only a hundredth of a millimetre in thickness, desert varnish often colours entire desert mountain ranges. This thin coating, called *patina,* is made up of manganese, iron and clays that are on the surface of sun-baked rocks and boulders. Its origin has intrigued naturalists since the time of **Darwin**. Desert varnish is formed by colonies of microscopic bacteria living on the surface for thousands of years. The bacteria absorb trace amounts of manganese and iron from the atmosphere and release it as a black layer of manganese oxide or reddish iron oxide on the rock's surface.

This thin layer also includes cemented clay particles that help to shield the bacteria against desiccation, extreme heat and intense solar radiation. The hardness of the varnish has been tested and

the results show it to be almost as hard as quartz (nearly a 7). Varnish bacteria thrive on smooth rock surfaces in arid climates. According to some scientists perhaps 10,000 years are required for a complete varnish coating to form in the deserts of the southwestern United States.

Desert varnish is widespread on the Earth, and its existence has been proposed on Mars based on data from various space missions to the red planet.

Current research indicates that the varnish process may involve microbial action plus inorganic processes in which the minerals and clays are cemented together and literally baked onto the surface of the rock.

The Yuha desert has fine grained sand that is constantly on the move, by winds alternately burying and exposing the rocks. These winds can be quite strong, making the sand very abrasive to the exposed surface of the rocks. A polished surface and fine features can result from this sand abrasion. This could explain why the top exposed portion of a rock is very highly polished where as the underside is dull and has no shine. The rocks can actually become pitted from the abrasion of the sand and yet still have a polished surface.'

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In conclusion – what is it?

Formed on rock surfaces and exposed pebbles, desert varnish (also called desert lacquer or patina) is a reddish brown to almost black coloured deposit, possessing a laminar structure and a composition independent to that of the underlying rock. Oxides or manganese and iron constitute 30 per cent and are dispersed within a clay matrix, which forms the bulk (70 per cent) of desert varnish deposits. Trace elements such as potassium, barium, sodium, strontium, copper and titanium are also identified in the make up of desert varnish.

How is it formed?

The ways desert varnishes are formed are not completely understood or universally agreed upon. Theories are divided according to the source of desert varnish components (external and internal) and according to the mechanisms of desert varnish formation. Early research (Blake, 1905) proposed the precipitation of manganese and iron oxides derived from the host rock via 'rock transpiration' under conditions of high evaporation – surficial physico-chemical weathering processes. Other research has promoted the organic weathering of rock surfaces by lichen or micro-organisms such as fungi, algae and bacteria.

Infra red analysis has identified that rocks deficient in manganese, iron and trace elements found within desert varnish are equally capable or developing a desert varnish coating, which suggests an external source of these components. Wind blown dust has been proposed as a viable external source.

Originally scientists thought that the varnish was made from substances drawn out of the rocks it coats. However, tests show that a major part of varnish is clay which could only arrive by wind. Clay then catches additional substances that chemically react together when the rock reaches high temperatures in the desert sun. Wetting by dew is also important in the process.

Desert varnish often obscures the identity of the underlying rock, and different rocks have varying abilities to accept and retain the varnish. Limestones, for example, typically do not have varnish because they are too water soluble and do not provide a stable surface for varnish to form.

Where is it found?

Desert varnish is found across the world, in low and high latitudes, but it is particularly well developed and a common feature of rock surfaces in warm dryland areas, where it is thought that high temperatures and low moisture levels promote thicker and darker varnish. Desert varnish forms very

slowly and may take up to 10,000 years for a heavy varnish to form and becomes thicker and darker with age.

At the end of her article, Wanda Matjas says, 'When you bend down to pick up that polished rock, I hope that you will contemplate how nature made this stone so beautiful.'

Happy Hunting,
Brenda

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

'The finest workers in stone are not copper or steel tools,
but the gentle touches of air and water working at their leisure with a liberal allowance of time.' - Henry David Thoreau

Well, sorry **John**……when the cat is away the mice will play! This month the **TTTTs** are changed from '**T**imely **T**imber & **T**ool **T**ips' to '**T**yrie's **T**imber **T**ales from **T**aree'. John and Dianne unfortunately had family commitments and couldn't be with us so I am giving the account of our weekend.

Brenda and myself were invited up to visit the Taree Bonsai Club to give them some tips and a workshop on making daizas for their very active suiseki influence within their club.

We travelled up there on the Friday to be ready for the early 9 a.m. start on the Saturday morning fully loaded with all of the necessary woodworking equipment needed. There was a bit of a worry though with heavy rain at home during that week but when we arrived up there the weather was just glorious and it stayed that way for the rest of the weekend.

We unloaded and set up the workshop area and when we tried to put up the trestle tables a very romantic couple of green tree frogs had themselves hidden under one of the tables. We had to wait until our host; Garry very gently pried them into a bucket to be relocated back into the garden. Brenda was so excited as these frogs are her favourites and feature very much so in her collection of frog figurines.

Come Saturday morning we were greeted by about 20 of their members at 8 a.m. and we were supplied a very delicious barbeque breakfast with all the trimmings. Yum!!!! Again there was another interloper who tried to infiltrate the group, another green tree frog who was intent on sitting on one of the plastic seats.

Then it was off to work. I gave some verbal instructions on daiza making and explained the dimensions and what tools we would be working with. Brenda had her time taken up with doing a bonsai workshop and you guessed it……on azaleas.

It wasn't long after that, that you could hear the whirring of dremels, routers and sanding machines. Our aim was to get as many daizas done for their stones so they could at least take home a few finished ones, only to sand and stain. Their collection of stones were absolutely amazing and of a very high standard.

Before we knew it, it was time for lunch. All the girls had put together the most amazing lunch with as much variety as a hotel smorgasbord.

Back to work again. By this time we were progressing along very nicely with everyone having their turn on the machines I had taken up there….the scroll saw, dremels, bench sander, router and the pole sander which Brenda affectionately refers to as the 'Pole Dancer'. Brenda then joined in to help with the daizas as the trees had run out.

One of the members asked Brenda if she would like to take back some unwanted woodturning wood so it could be shared among the Sydney's group. He had even bought along his own chainsaw and together with Garry sawed them up in the slab sizes most commonly used. It included Camphor Laurel, White Cedar, Banksia, Jacaranda, White Poplar and some odds and ends.

We got to about 6 p.m. with only a few bits of finishing and cleaning up to do and we were then called in for dinner. Another great feast awaited us with a very relaxing glass of wine. It was decided at dinner to show us the sights the next day at Hastings.

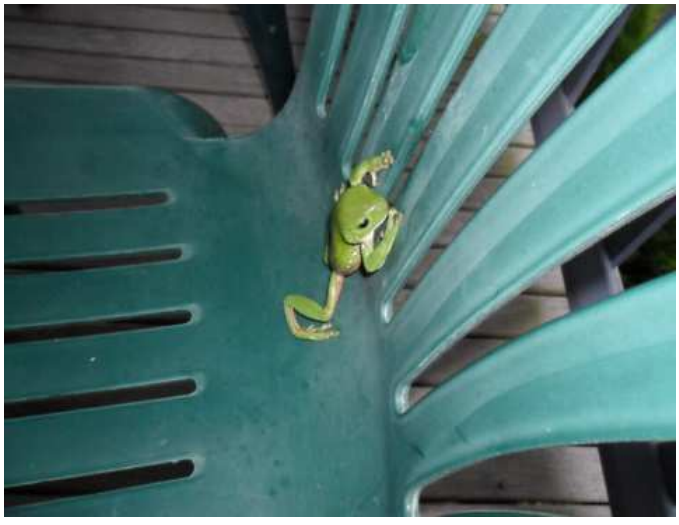
Few of the members met us at the beach for morning tea and then it was up to the old Lighthouse with the hope of seeing some breaching whales. They did honour us with their display and it was both our first time at seeing these beautiful majestic creatures.

Of course on the agenda was to go to the other side of the point for a rock hunt and we just had to be in that! We all got something to take home and the rock formations were absolutely amazing.

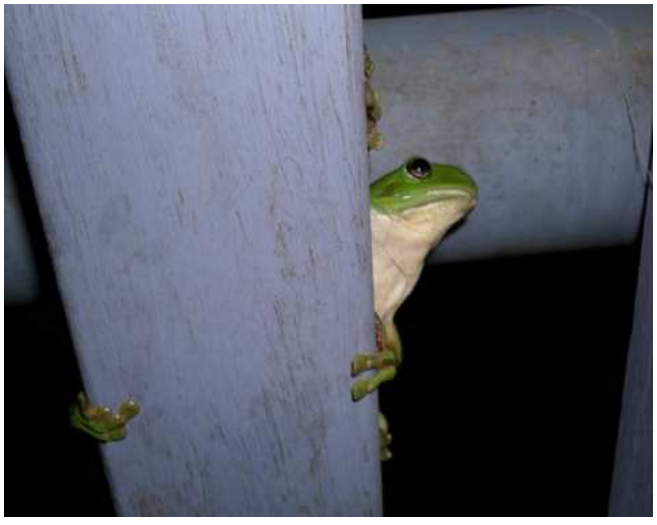
It was then decided to have lunch overlooking the Hastings Wall at the river mouth and what better food to have than fresh fish and chips.

Then came the saddest part of the weekend and that was to go home back to the hum-drum but with some wonderful memories.

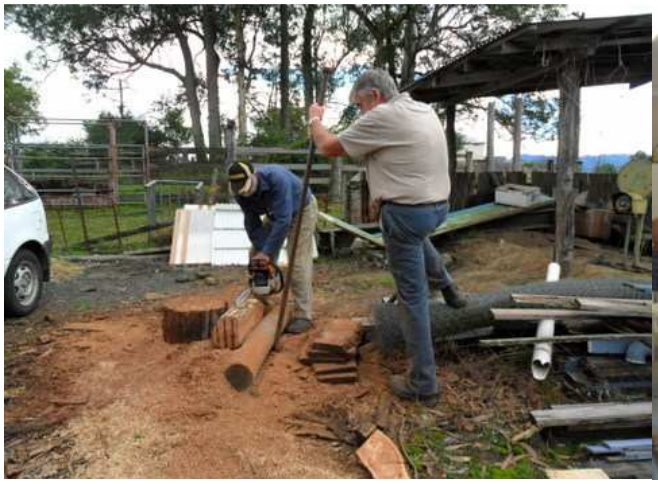
I have included a few photos of our weekend and hopefully next month the club will send us the photos of their finished daizas so they can be included in the next newsletter.



^ The little 'freeloader' at breakfast.



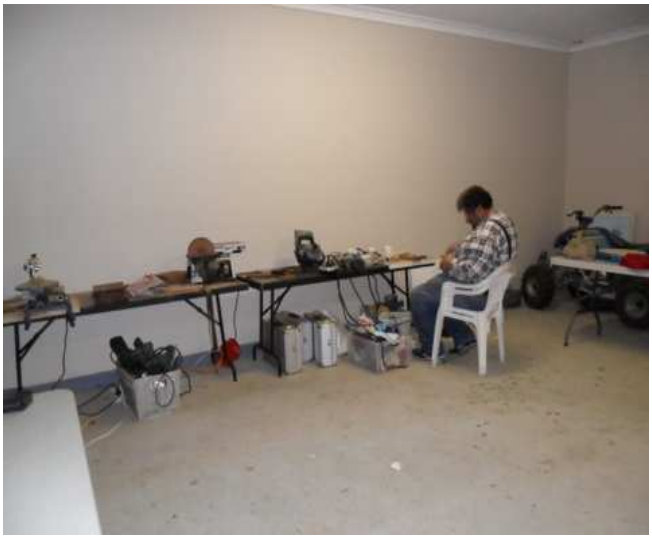
^ 'If I can't have any breakfast I am going to watch you eating!'



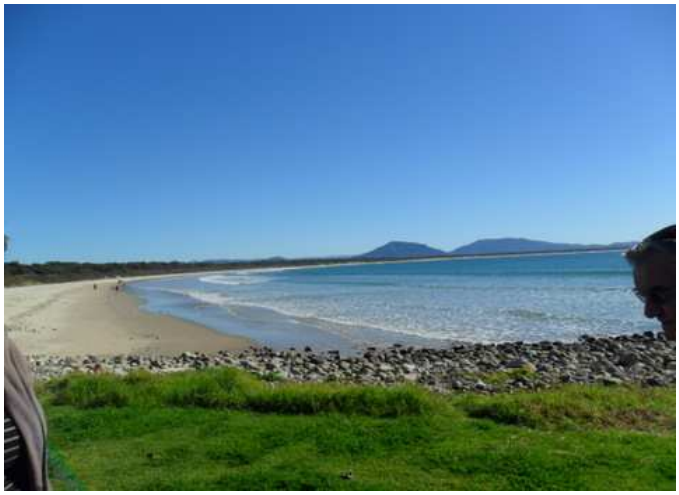
^Will that be one or more slabs cut to size?

^Before the activities started.

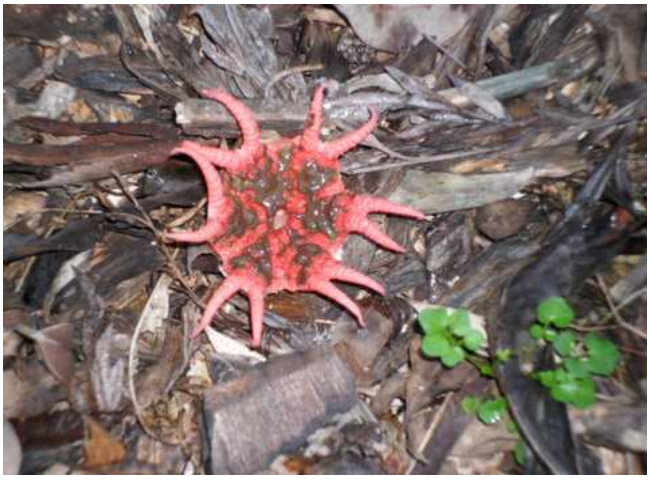
^ Amazing rock formations at the rock hunt.



^ That's me – the last man standing!



^ Hastings Beach where we had morning tea.



^An incredible red fungi growing in the garden

So for this month it is cheers from George.

This article was sent to me by Arthur Skolnik from Canada who is a great exponent of bonsai and suiseki. His video/DVD, "The Growing Art of Bonsai", is considered by many well known and respected sources as being the best English language video on the market.

FANTASTIC STONES
Arthur Skolnik, March 2010

The first time I saw Viewing Stones or Suiseki on display was at a Bonsai show in Tokyo. Many magnificent trees had companions, Suiseki, beside them. I'll never forget the feeling I experienced while looking at one particular stone. It was low, smooth, subtle, unpretentious and profoundly quiet. In one instant I became initiated. It breathed life into all the other stones. I started seeing and really appreciating the rest of the stones not in a passive sense, but as an active process. I was overwhelmed by this new found awareness and connection and then realized all the other people gazing at that stone were being transported too, to nature, mountains and the vast expanse of the human imagination. I knew we couldn't all be moved to the exact same place in each of our minds but I marvelled at the power of suggestion the stone had to split our focus…it transfixed our physical gaze and at the same time conjured memories and scenery and a kind of peacefulness. How powerful I thought. I could hardly wait to start searching for my own stones and turning my friends on to this new sensation.

Outside of work, I'm the only landscape designer-contractor/Bonsai person in my large group of friends. It has astounded me that so few of my friends are passionate for stones or even like them more than to ask about them when they visit, to be polite. "Nice rock, where's the beer?" One friend is a professional athlete, another a bar-tender and yet another is a criminologist. Other than a juggler and zoologist, I have friends whose jobs cover all the letters of the alphabet. That's a pretty wide base of experience and exposure yet only a small group of them regards Suiseki as enthralling as I do. I don't understand. Shouldn't everyone?

By now we've all become familiar with the arts and crafts that adorn the walls and floors of our museums, concert halls and homes. We've learnt to appreciate how art moves us and how much time is often required to produce a finely constructed craft. The art of appreciating the sensations a beautiful stone can evoke, is without question as much of an interactive experience as any other artistic experience. A great mystery to me will always be why so few of my friends and people in general are not as crazy for stones as those who are.

So, why are so few into it? I think it's because the object of this art, a stone, has not been shaped, altered, embellished or otherwise improved by the hand of man. This in turn requires two forms of appreciation (obviously not the sort of ability available to the uninitiated). The first is implicit. If the stone commands respect because it's shape (or suggestibility) captivates the viewer's imagination and springboards it into the ether, it is art, similar to many other forms of art. The second is explicit. The art object is merely a stone. To us, the stone is understood as *the* medium. To those who see the stone but don't see the art in the stone, they can't get past this fact, and see only a stone. Then they ask where the beer is.

I want to explain it to my uninitiated alphabetized friends this way. Why do fonts speak volumes? Is it memories or life experiences that fabricate these feelings? Why do bubbles rise up from our sub-conscious and tint our perception when we look at words that have been embellished by specific fonts? At some level we're obviously making associations with the font and connecting it with the context of the text it was chosen for, and at that deep level, imperceptible to our awareness of it, we give fonts the ability to influence us. Most of us have not had font recognition training and not made mental associations with the power a particular font has to heighten or enforce the impact of the written word.

Look at the following examples. **Impact**, Gautami, **HARRINGTON**, *Freestyle*. Don't each of these font names and styles work well together? Now look at the same words in Ariel, Impact, Gautami, Harrington, Freestyle. They don't have the same 'taste'. It's not that the second group is boring, (although the font does lack distinguishing features); the first group is alive with character.

I think it has to do with connection, connotation, context and nuance and I also think it has to do with memories and life experiences. Before learning the different names for the different classifications of stones the Japanese have come up with depending on which feature of the landscape they represent, the uninitiated stone viewer needs to learn how to see with his eyes *and* emotion.

If you're crazy for stones or want to learn more about them (or want to try something more enlightening than beer) a show devoted exclusively to stone appreciation will take place in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, September 30 – October 3, 2010. The International Stone Appreciation Symposium is the name of this fascinating, educational and inspirational symposium designed to be the most comprehensive event of its kind. The 6 organizers (Jim Doyle, Glenn Reusch, Marty Schmallenberg, me, Sean Smith and Bill Valavanis) love Bonsai but are passionate enough about the world of Viewing Stones we have, for the 5th time, undertaken the role of hosts. Our goal is to promote the pure joy and beauty of Stone Appreciation. This will truly be a unique learning and sharing experience. Each of the past 4 shows has been successful on all levels and the 6 of us have, after each of the last 4 shows, been thanked, sometimes overwhelmingly by registrants for the quality and quantity of information and insight we've been able to deliver. We, in turn, have the speakers and registrants to thank for making the shows fulfilling and enjoyable for us all. The list of speakers this time includes Rafael Monje Garcia from Spain, Kemin Hu from China/USA, Seiji Morimae of Japan, Larry Ragle from the USA and Peter Warren from the U.K. There will be displays, workshops, demos, critiques, vendors, raffles, a connoisseur's auction, lots of camaraderie and plenty of fun. The only complaint we've had in the past, "There's too much information, too many demos, not enough time to relax between events". Well, we can live with that kind of complaint. Have you ever been to a show where there was too much information about a topic you loved? For a complete list of events, scheduling and registration information go to www.stoneshow2010.com

Beer anyone? Or will it be stones. See you at the International Stone Appreciation Symposium and we'll have both.

Top 20 reasons to pursue Suiseki as a hobby…

1. Can be purchased or found making them eminently collectable.
2. Great mementos of trips to far away lands.
3. No import or export regulations on 'geological specimens'.
4. Can become family heirlooms.
5. Great stocking stuffers at Christmas.
6. Make great substitutes for eggs at Easter.
7. Astonish your friends with your extensive knowledge of an ancient Japanese art form.
8. Show you have a broad imagination.
9. Can double as a paperweight, door-stop or ballast.
10. Requires no maintenance other than an occasional dusting.
11. Can be displayed in dark areas at home or office.
12. Do not depreciate with the passage of time or through neglect.
13. Can capture and hold your memories for decades.
14. Are springboards to contemplation.
15. Can lead to a greater insight about the universe.
16. Great spot to place gift prizes found in Cracker Jacks or cereal boxes.

17. Can lead to writing poetry.
18. Show you are in touch with your need for inner peace and solace.
19. Are fun to dress up and disguise for Halloween.
20. Win bets with friends when you tell them you know what the pawn broker will say…."You want how much for it? You're crazy, it's just a rock".

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DAIZA WORKSHOP

The next workshop will be on 14th August starting at 9.00 am at Ray Nesci's Nursery. The last workshop was a little light on so we hope to see more members there for this one. There will be pieces of beautiful timber to be given out that was given to us at Taree.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on 18th August at 7.30 pm and hope to see a few of you there. George and I will have photos and lots of interesting tales to tell about our trip to Taree.

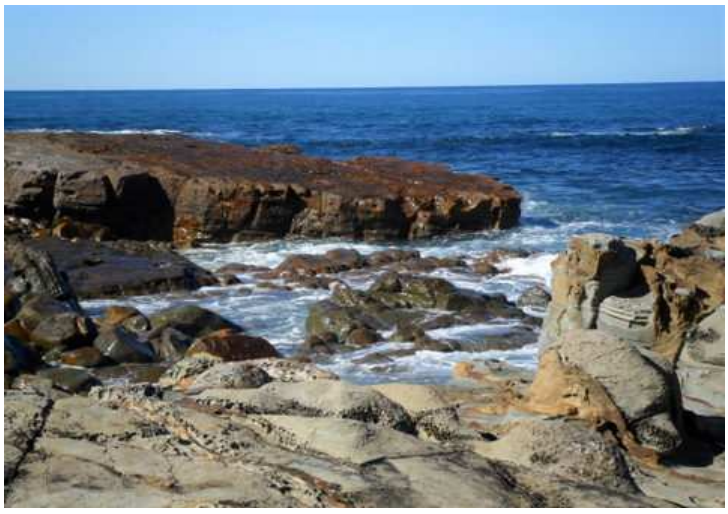
CLUB BADGES

A note to remind any of our members that we have Suiseki badges available at only $5.00 each and if you would like one send a cheque/money order plus $2.00 extra for postage and handling. Remember to put your name and return address on your request.

WHERE AND WHEN

Our meetings are held at the Don Moore Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks. N.S.W. on the third Monday of every month except at school holiday time to start by 7.30 p.m. sharp.

You can contact me at brendap7@bigpond.com if you require any further information.
Alternatively you can contact me on my Mobile 0412 384 834.



Another scene of the foreshore at Hastings.