

## 'FORSYTH (FL. 1835)': A PHANTOM BOTANICAL COLLECTOR AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE EXPLAINED

At the instigation of Dr Peter Goldblatt, I have attempted to establish the veracity of the inclusion of a collector named Forsyth by Gunn & Codd (1981: 157) in their roster of botanical exploration of southern Africa. This individual was credited as follows: 'Collected at the Cape 1835; also in Indonesia and Mascarenes Is.'. Those authors cited Hedge & Lamond (1970) as their source. In the index to collectors in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Hedge & Lamond (1970) noted that the Forsyth specimens were not dated and that they were included in the herbarium of Archibald Menzies.

Among African specimens associated with this Forsyth are the type specimens of *Ferraria macrochlamys* (Baker) Goldblatt & J.C.Manning (Goldblatt & Manning 2004) and *Babiana spiralis* Baker (Goldblatt & Manning 2005: 72). Both species are endemic to Namaqualand, but no collector named Forsyth is known to have visited Namaqualand before 1835.

Concerning the first taxon, Baker (1876: 338) noted that he had seen only one specimen 'without a note of its special locality', and gave the collection data in the following form: '*C. B. Spei*. Forsyth in Herb. Bentham!'. Regarding the second taxon, Baker (1892: 183) reported that he had described it 'from specimens in the herbarium of Forsyth', adding later (Baker 1896) that the two specimens 'without locality ... [were] in the Forsyth's herbarium, purchased by Mr. Bentham in 1835.'

Forsyth is not an unfamiliar name in British horticulture—*Forsythia* (Oleaceae) was named by Vahl to honour William Forsyth (1737–1804), a distinguished Scottish horticulturist and one of the founders of the (Royal) Horticultural Society of London. His son, also named William (1772–1835), was a nurseryman in

London throughout his life. Desmond & Ellwood (1994) list several others with this surname, but none of these individuals is recorded as having been a plant collector at the Cape of Good Hope. There is no entry for Forsyth in Lanjouw & Stafleu (1957).

The date 1835 and Baker's allusion to specimens from Forsyth's herbarium purchased by Bentham in 1835 provided the clues to unravelling this enigma.

The younger William Forsyth, who died on 28 July 1835, 'had an excellent horticultural library' (Desmond & Ellwood 1994: 257) which was sold by auction by Sotheby in London during November 1835 (Sotheby 1835; Chalmers-Hunt 1976). An annotated copy of the catalogue of the sale (Sotheby 1835) survives in the Botany Library, The Natural History Museum, London, and indicates that 2 597 lots were auctioned including this, the penultimate, one: '2596. A very extensive and well-arranged *hortus siccus* contained in ten cases, forming a range, with five mahogany doors'. William Pamplin, publisher, bookseller and dealer in botanical specimens, who annotated the catalogue, noted that it was sold for £17 6s. 6d.

George Bentham's manuscript diary, which survives in the Archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, confirms that Bentham attended this auction, buying a few books as well as Forsyth's entire herbarium:

18 November 1835: '... to Sotheby's sale rooms to the auction of Forsyth's books, but got there too late for today's sale ...'

20 November 1835: '... to Forsyth's sale where bid for several books but they all went too dear ...'

21 November 1835: '... then for the whole afternoon to Forsyth's sale where bought Vahl's works & two or three others also, [and] the herbarium which appears to contain a large quantity of W. Indian plants for which I gave 16½ guineas'.

Sixteen and a half guineas equal £17 6s. 6d. A copy of Vahl's *Symbolae botanicae* (1790–1794), inscribed 'Will F. 1800' on the verso of the title page, and with a book plate 'Presented by George Bentham Esq 1854', is in the Linnean Collection in the library at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (J. Flanagan pers. comm., 19 September 2005). Pamplin noted that it was sold for £1 17s. 0d.

On 23 November Bentham went to Sotheby's premises '... to settle for my Saturday's purchase which had taken to the Hort Soc in order there to get rid of superfluous paper—then at the Hort Soc looking over several parcels which appear very satisfactory'. Bentham spent the following two weeks at the premises of the Horticultural Society, of which he was the Honorary Secretary (Stevens 2003), sorting Forsyth's herbarium; by 28 November he had packed '25 large bundles' which he arranged to 'bring home'. Bentham must subsequently have shared duplicates with other botanists including Archibald Menzies—that is the most likely explanation for presence of 'Forsyth 1835' specimens in Menzies' herbarium in the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

It may safely be concluded, therefore, that annotations on southern African specimens indicating Forsyth and 1835 came from this miscellaneous collection which Bentham purchased on 21 November 1835, and that they should not be read as indicating a collector and collection date.

Who actually collected these specimens must remain a matter of conjecture, unless other evidence, in the form of contemporary annotations, occurs on the herbarium sheets.

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E.C. NELSON\*

\* Tippitiwichee Cottage, Hall Road, Outwell, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, PE14 8PE, UK.  
MS. received: 2005-10-12.