

Hong Kong Natural History Society

A Report on the February Outing to North-east New Territories

A smaller than average group turned out for our February hike to visit some of the “lost villages” of the North East New Territories, possibly because of the cold weather; however, in fact we had a beautiful day.

We started from Bride’s Pool, where, after crossing the stream, we paused to look at an interesting ancient bridge constructed of stone spans hewn into the shape of planks of wood. In the village of Wu Kau Tang, we passed a tree which had grown around a small building, now disappeared, leaving behind only a shadow in the shape of the root system which had formed around it.

After climbing the hill behind Wu Kau Tang, we took a coffee break overlooking Starling Inlet, before descending to Lai Chi Wo, where we stopped to see the fung shui wood. This contains several notable trees, including the “five fingered camphor” (*cinnamomum camphora*) which unfortunately lost one of its fingers during the Japanese occupation, a hollow autumn maple tree (*biochofia javanica*) and another autumn maple which is supporting a dominant Chinese banyan (*ficus microcarpa*). Some of us spotted a red necked keelback (snake) in the wood.

On the other side of the village, we visited an area of intertidal mudflat, now a nature reserve, where a giant white flowered derris (*derris alborubra*) is entwined around the other vegetation.

We had lunch on the pier just outside Lai Chi Wo watching the many small fish in the water, before climbing over the hill to the long abandoned village of So Lo Pun, reminiscent of Angkor Wat due to the many trees growing on and in the ruined houses. Over another hill is another uninhabited village, Yung Shue Au, which is in much better condition, with some of the houses having signs of having been visited recently, such as a plate of fruit on the table in front of photographs of the former occupants, and red paper decorations for Chinese New Year on the door.

Outside Yung Shue Au, we spotted an “Air Plant” or “Canterbury Bells” (*bryophyllum pinnatum*), which is an epiphyte which needs no root in the soil, so can grow anywhere, usually on a host plant. The second common name is derived from the plant’s pendulous flowers. (Many thanks to Dave England for this information and the accompanying photograph).

The remainder of the walk took us along the shore of Starling Inlet, where the contrast between the high rise development and container port on the mainland side and the natural state on the Hong Kong side was very apparent. We arrived at our destination, Luk Keng, a little later than scheduled but still in the daylight (a record, some were heard to comment).

We were delighted to welcome two new members, Ted Cheng Yui Tat and Linda Csellak on this walk, and look forward to seeing them again soon on future outings.

Andrew Olson

(Photo attached on next page)



The pendulous flowers of *bryophyllum pinnatum*