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Carpoxylon at the Natural History Museum, London

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The rediscovery of a small population of *Carpoxylon macrospermum* H. Wendl. & Drude on the island of Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, ranks among the most exciting and significant events in palm biology in recent years. In John Dowe's description of his rediscovery (Dowe 1988, 1989), he acknowledged the role that chance and luck played in finding *Carpoxylon*. In his words (Dowe 1988), "*Carpoxylon* had been rediscovered almost by sheer accident."

For over one hundred years, *Carpoxylon* was known only from the original description and illustration of the endocarp and seed. The original publication contains no indication of which specimen was the basis for the description nor details of the collection data. Without a bona fide specimen to examine, subsequent palm systematists had only the description and drawing, however inadequate, upon which to base their conclusions about this strange palm. For want of physical material to study, Moore (1973) and Uhl and Dransfield (1987) left *Carpoxylon* unplaced in their generic schemes. When more material was at last collected, a new and complete generic description was possible and its proper relationships with other genera of the Iguanurinae were revealed (Dowe and Uhl 1989). One intriguing mystery still remained: How did Wendland and Drude know about this unusual palm from a far-off Pacific island? Where was the specimen upon which Wendland and Drude based their original description of *Carpoxylon macrospermum*? Or, in botanical parlance, where was the holotype specimen? It was assumed to be in the herbarium at Göttingen (Dowe and Uhl 1989), where most of Wendland's specimens reside, although no such specimen has ever been found there.

In June of 1994, I had the pleasure of visiting the Natural History Museum, London to examine materials, including holotype specimens, of *Veitchia*. Of particular interest to me was the holotype of *V. spiralis* H. Wendl. collected by MacGillivray

(variously spelled M'Gillivray or McGillivray) from the island of Aneityum (now Anatom), New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in 1860. Through the perseverance of Dr. Roy Vickery, the holotype of *V. spiralis* was located in the carpological collection, a collection of bulky fruits kept separate from the pressed herbarium specimens. Among the boxes of *Veitchia* fruits was an especially large box. Upon opening it, I was astounded to find 13 endocarps of *Carpoxylon*! This was indeed a serendipitous rediscovery: The holotype has been found at last

The label of the holotype specimen read: "Isle of Aneiteum. Nohoich. Areca! McGillivray 1860." Someone had written "no!" next to the identification as *Areca*, and somehow the collection had been filed with *Veitchia*. The meaning of the word "Nohoich" is obscure. It may represent a common name for the palm, as MacGillivray was known to record such information, although it does not correspond to the common name, *ninuvusa*, given by Dowe (1988).

The collector was John MacGillivray, chief naturalist on the voyage of the *Herald*, a British vessel that surveyed the islands of the South Pacific from 1852-1861 under the command of Capt. H. M. Denham. According to notes of the voyage preserved at Kew (examined by P. S. Green), the islands of Anatom and Futuna, Vanuatu, were visited in November, 1853, a date which does not correspond to the dates on the specimens of *Carpoxylon* and *V. spiralis*. It is possible that the label referred to the date when the specimens were received by the museum, not the actual date of collection. It is also possible that the specimens were collected during a second voyage to Anatom in 1859 (J. Dowe, pers. comm.) and received by the museum in the following year.

Dowe's rediscovery of *Carpoxylon* on Espiritu Santo does lead one to wonder whether Anatom was the source of *Carpoxylon* or the specimen was somehow mislabeled. There is, however, no

error in the label of *V. spiralis*, also from Anatom, nor is there any indication that the *Herald* visited Espiritu Santo, so I see no reason to conclude that the *Carpoxyton* label is in error. Dowe (pers. comm.) believes that the Espiritu Santo palms were planted and perhaps not truly indigenous to Espiritu Santo. Although the palm was not relocated during a brief collecting foray on Anatom (Hodel 1982), areas of the island's interior are still imperfectly explored. Anatom may yet prove to be the home of *Carpoxyton*, just as MacGillivray said over 130 years ago.

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