



**P.O. Box 383
Sylvania Southgate.
N.S.W. 2224**

**www.suisekiaustralia.com.au
'Suiseki Australia'**

President: Brenda Parker

Mob: 0412 384 834

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OUR NEXT DAIZA WORKSHOP WILL BE ON THE 20TH SEPTEMBER AT RAY'S NURSERY STARTING AT 9AM

Thank goodness we are in spring and hopefully all the bad weather is behind us so we can knuckle down and get some work done on our stones.

When all the rain was about recently, I set myself up in where I keep a lot of my stones indoors in the laundry, and thought it was a good time to sort out my stones.....the 'keepers' and the 'non-contenders'. I ended up with 3 boxes of not-so-relevant stones for suiseki. So, the idea was to bring them to our bonsai workshops for our members to take what they wanted to embellish their bonsais with. Well, the rush was on, and they were all gone in a few minutes. I didn't want to throw them out as they were still nice stones but not suitable for a formal suiseki display. I did keep a few of smaller ones and these I will wrap in fancy paper and use them as a 'Free Children's Lucky Dip' at our upcoming suiseki display at the School of Bonsai Show in October. I have asked all our local members to do the same and at least children will and hope they get interested in stone collecting. Last year we did the same thing, and the box had to be refilled twice and this was before lunchtime. The looks on the children's faces was amazing, so I hope that leads them on a wonderful 'journey' for stone collecting..... maybe some future geologists in the making!!!! The looks on the children's faces were incredible, and we described what they could represent in nature to help them along. One girl came up to me and asked if she could have another one or two.....I said to 'go for it', and told her that if she looks after it, it will be her 'lucky stone'. The wonderful look on her face was worth it.

When you do go out fossicking, try to be selective and in the excitement of the moment, we are all the same. I think we try to get as many as we can when possible so that we don't have the chance to be too selective, especially if we have special permission from property owners. Of course, it is the same when we are out in the open country, we hope that there are not any rangers keeping an eye out for us 'thieves'!!!!!! We do try to respect the environment without disturbing it too much. When we are at our workshops, I always ask where they got their stone/s in the first place.

In the very early days, our bonsai clubs had contact with farmers and large property owners to help them eradicate rogue trees like privet, desert ash, African olives etc. that grows wild, but they are great bonsai material. Obviously, while digging up these trees, we always look out for that elusive nice stone and 'sneak' them into our buckets etc.

I remember one place north of Sydney we went to was to a very large cattle station and on the property was a lot of petrified wood in magnificent shapes and colours. The landowners were worried that their cattle would hurt themselves while walking in the area. So, we ventured up this hill and through a wire fence and got to the problem area. Our jaws dropped when we saw this huge petrified nebari of a huge tree that was glistening in the sun.....so shiny and the colours!! This tree base was about 3-4 feet in

diameter and the rest of the tall tree which had fallen down a shallow valley, was where it was all broken into many pieces and nice shapes as well. We also found some ironstone in lovely shapes as well. This tree must have been over 100 feet tall and we all wondered what happened to it when it died and how long it would have taken to become petrified?? It would have been eons!!!!

I found this rather large piece complete with crystals in the 'rings' of the big branch and it was HEAVY!!! When we got back to our minibus the driver said, "where do we put that in the bus??" I said that I needed to take that home as it was 'special' even if I must sit on it, I will!! He laughed and shook his head. We all came away with a fabulous bounty of petrified wood. I still have that big piece in my garden and the sun catches the glistening crystals to bring back some wonderful memories.

Over the many years of collecting stones, I have some great memories of going to bonsai conventions and there you would see some (not many) stones that members of the club were selling, and these were snapped up very quickly. I remember one time in Adelaide at their convention, on the Monday after the proceedings we were invited to go up to the Adelaide Hills to dig up rogue trees for bonsai, for example Desert Ash, African Olives, White Poplars etc. but little-old-me always looked for stones, small ones of course as I travelled to Adelaide by plane, so weight was a consideration. I must admit I got a few small ones in my luggage with no problems, oh! Also, a few small trees for bonsai wrapped in plastic that I still have today.

Sofala west of Sydney is an old gold mining town and is also a great place to look for stones. There are many stones in very shallow flowing creeks that with a lot of investigation some great stones can be found. One of our members did just that and found a fabulous stone.

The stories just go on and on and I hope that some of these tales can help our newer members to investigate who they can ask to go on their property or similar to search for that elusive special stone!!

So, I hope I have given some hints on where and how to find stones for our newer members?

This is my 'Iguana' stone I found at Sofala. All natural just as I found it.



DESERT VARNISH – WHAT IS IT??

When stones are out in the elements for years and years especially on flat dry plains e.g. the Birdsville Track in Australia or the Gobi Desert in Mongolia etc. the wind picks up sand particles, oxides and clay particles and over the many years it 'cements' a smooth shiny surface on stones – especially very dense stones.

It takes about 2000 years to form on rocks in arid areas, but it has formed in less than 50 years on the Mojave Desert.

This 'varnish' can range in colour from reddish brown to black, depending on the proportions of iron and manganese oxides and it is often shiny with a hard covering to the stone. This also gives a very natural patina to our stones. The varnish can provide clues about the past climatic conditions in these arid areas.

Some clues as to this phenomenon-

- Chemical weathering - where dissolved minerals in water (like rainwater and dew) are carried to the rock surface and deposited as the water evaporates.
- Biological activity – Micro organisms that deposit manganese and iron all baked by the sun over many, many years to give a naturally formed ceramic glaze or patina.

When we search for stones, we bypass the 'sandstones' and always search for the dense and sometimes naturally shiny stones that have had this 'weathering' over all those hundreds of years.

On a recent trip to Canberra, I attended a bonsai convention and there was a vendor there with everything for sale for bonsai, then..... I came across 2 boxes filled to the brim with stones from the Gobi Desert in northern China and southern Mongolia. Luckily, I was the first person there and I had a pick of them!! These stones are all covered in a natural patina that made them very tactile to touch. They felt just like a smooth caramel!!

I travelled to the convention by car from Sydney, so I didn't have any trouble bringing them home to Sydney. I counted them and I had bought 30 of them – all stunners. Boy, was I lucky for a change!! The vendor couldn't believe how many I had bought, and they were as cheap as chips, so wouldn't I take the opportunity of snaffling them up?

Now, I will have enough stones to keep me busy making daizas for them.

In other places we have searched for stones locally around the Sydney area but not too many smooth stones with a lovely patina on them. One of our local beaches has some very nice ironstone that all have this 'varnish' on them, but if we get caught taking them, we could be in serious trouble. The rangers are trying to help the beach from getting too much erosion from the rough seas.

All that I can suggest to you is to keep your eyes open wherever you go and you may be pleasantly surprised at what you can find.



Above: a natural 'desert varnished stone' of mine found here with a natural waterfall on the right-hand side. The daiza was made by me.



Above: Another one of my stones with a natural patina found at the back of Nowra, New South Wales

(The article below was written by our own John C. back a few years ago and I thought it would help our newer members to get acquainted with the woods to use for daiza making).

Western Red Cedar

Botanical Name; *Thuja plicata*

Western Red Cedar or WRC as it is called in the trade is a softwood timber native to the North West region of the US and extending into Canada. Trees can reach an average height of 55m.

The timber is imported into Australia and is mainly used in the building trade for cladding, roof shingles, window and door frames and also used for indoor / outdoor furnishings.

It is quite soft and light and as such would not be used for framing; the cost of the timber is quite high so it's mainly used for specialty work.

The colour of the timber varies with the heartwood ranging from pinkish to dark brown, sapwood is yellowish white. The grain is generally straight with a fine texture and few knots.

Timber has natural chemicals which tend to minimize wood rot and termite attack. It has a pleasant cedar fragrance, and shavings can be placed in a container in a cupboard and used as a deterrent to moths.

This is a great timber for daiza making. It is soft and easy to work, the colour is good and usually only needs a clear coating to really enhance the natural appearance.

Some things to be aware of when using WRC are.

- * Due to its softness, it will mark very easily so much care is needed when using any tool, power or otherwise, to avoid damage.

- * If you intend to do any intricate carving you may be better off using a harder, close-grained timber (these will be covered in future Timber Talks).

- * Due to the natural chemicals in the material, care should be taken when working, particularly when sanding. Some people may have an allergic reaction from the dust particles if inhaled.

Supplies for WRC are readily available from timber merchants, larger hardware outlets and if you're lucky enough, from council cleanups, good hunting.

See you all on the 20th of September at Ray's.

This stone composition captures the enlightenment of Buddha under the Bodhi Tree. The radiance of the enlightened, Golden Buddha is a spectacular feature of this stone. The tree is Chinese White Jade and the Buddha is a valuable Gobi Desert Stone with a high degree of natural 'Desert Varnish' which indicates that this stone has weathered for many, many years on top of the ground, buffeted by dessert sands and not just dug up as is more frequently the case.



