Bloedel Plant Profile – The Bunya-Bunya Pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*)

The Bunya-Bunya Pine is an ancient tree dating back to the time of the dinosaurs. Despite its name, it is not a pine – it is in the same family as the Monkey Puzzle tree. To add confusion, the Latin name of this Australian tree is from the name of the tribe that lives in Chile, where the Monkey Puzzle grows, and the name of the Englishman, John Carne Bidwill, who took the first living Bunya-Bunya Pine to England in the 1840's. The trees grow in the Bunya Mountains in Queensland. Their huge seeds, up to 500 times the size of pine nuts, were a food source for indigenous Australians. The Bunya feasts were of great local importance[1]:

"Special envoys carrying message sticks from custodians of the trees travelled through surrounding districts to invite selected groups to attend the ceremonial feasts. ... They were times of great spiritual significance, when Aboriginal people gathered to receive strength from Mother Earth. They were also times for arranging marriages, settling disputes and for trading goods and sharing dances and songs. ... Aboriginal people considered the bunya pine to be sacred, and there is scant evidence that they used parts of the tree other than the edible nuts. Curr mentions, that the headman of the Kaiabara tribe wore an armband made of bunya fibre as a mark of office and Meston states that the bark of dead trees was used as a fuel. Symons and Symons also mention that the gum and roots were a food source. The roots were peeled before being roasted. ... Custodians collected the nuts by climbing the trees and knocking off the cones with a stick or stone tomahawk."

The first European to see this tree was Andrew Petrie (1798-1872) who discovered it in 1838. In Queensland, it was first called *Pinus petrieana*.[2] In 1842, Bidwill (1815-1853) published an account of this 'new' species of Araucaria. He took some to England and in 1843 an *Araucaria bidwillii* was sold in auction for 20 guineas - this is at least C$3,400 in 2017 prices, arguably over ten times that.[3] Bidwill died in March 1853, aged 38, never really recovering from 8 days of starvation after being lost in the Australian bush while surveying a road in April 1851.

The cones of the Bunya-Bunya Pine are huge – bigger than a bowling ball. A falling one can kill and trees in populated areas often carry warning signs.[4]

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[1] http://www.conifers.org/ar/Araucaria_bidwillii.php

[2] http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/emuwebnswlive/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=55764&reftable=ebibliography

[3] https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php

[4] https://permaculturenews.org/2013/11/27/the-bunya-bunya-pine-araucaria-bidwillii/

Family Resemblance

The four members of the Araucariaceae below all have leaves growing straight out of their trunks. True pines do not show this. There are Monkey Puzzle trees growing in Queen Elizabeth Park, down the road from the Bloedel Conservatory car park. The Conservatory has a Bunya-Bunya Pine and several Norfolk Island Pines. (Norfolk Island is between Australia and New Zealand.) The Wollemi Pine was discovered in New South Wales in Australia in 1996. It was found in Wollemi Park by David Nobel, hence *Wollemi nobelis*. A potted Wollemi Pine has been at the Conservatory from time to time and may return. During the summer, a Wollemi Pine grows in the 'Australia and New Zealand' section of the Southern Hemisphere Garden at VanDusen Botanical Garden. This delicate plant is in a greenhouse over the winter.

Monkey Puzzle Tree
Araucaria araucana

Norfolk Island Pine
Araucaria heterophylla

Bunya-Bunya Pine
Araucaria bidwilli

Wollemi Pine
Wollemia nobilis