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### BACK COVER

Another startlingly lovely palm from the Ledo Road, the leaf sheath of a *Calamus* in the *C. nambariensis* complex. See article p. 115. Photo by A. Henderson.



## NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PALMS

In this issue we present a new regular feature for PALMS – *Growing Palms*. Compiled by Randy Moore, this feature will run short items highlighting aspects of growing palms, such as handy tips for dealing with commonly encountered pests and diseases, methods for boosting palm growth, record-keeping for palm collectors and many other aspects of palm horticulture. We invite all you growers out there to consider what experiences of growing palms you would like to share with others, write them down and send them to Randy Moore or to the Editors. We are convinced that many members of the IPS have valuable experiences in growing palms that could be of great interest to the membership.

On 13 June 2005 the BBC website ran an extraordinary story under the title *Date palm buds after 2,000 years*. The same story appeared in several newspapers across the world. Israeli researchers claimed that they had succeeded in growing a date palm from a 2,000-year-old seed from a batch discovered during an excavation of the ancient fortress of Masada. In the report, Dr. Sarah Sallon, a pediatric gastroenterologist and director of the Louis L. Borick Natural Medicine Research Center in Jerusalem, claimed that the palm is from a variety that became extinct in the Middle Ages and was reputed to have powerful medicinal properties. Seeds from the same batch from Masada were radiocarbon-dated and shown to be  $2000 \pm 50$  years old. The seed that germinated was assumed to be the same age. It is difficult not to be skeptical about this extraordinary report. We wonder how the researchers could claim that the seed was from a variety of the date that became extinct in the Middle Ages – what variety was this, and how could it be identified from the seeds alone? Could contamination with modern date seeds or a simple greenhouse mix-up be ruled out? Nevertheless, this is an astonishing claim.

Two other items in the news remind us that palms, both real and artificial, are sometimes the focus of controversy. The UK News Telegraph website recently reported that 17 artificial palms installed at a marina in Brighton, UK, are causing an uproar with some of the residents. While no photographs were included in the news item, the artificial palms, 20-foot steel poles clad in coconut fiber and topped with plastic “leaves,” certainly do not sound appealing. A spokesperson for the marina claimed, “The trees are part of our efforts to make the marina an inspiring lifestyle destination. We took advice and were told that the high salt content of the soil and the wind and climate meant that real palms would not have survived.” Meanwhile, the San Luis Obispo Tribune reported that real palms, in this case, Canary Island date palms and Mexican fan palms, are striking a discordant note along a scenic drive in Cambria, California. A local resident has lined the driveway to his estate with some 50 palms valued at an estimated \$60,000. The coastal highway along which the estate is located is an acclaimed scenic route, and some residents have complained that the non-native palms are jarringly inappropriate choices for landscape material. In both the Brighton and Cambria cases, the news reports stated that the disputes are unresolved.

On a happier note, we are pleased to report that *Dies Palmarum*, the 4<sup>th</sup> European Palm Biennial, is scheduled for 24–26 November 2005. The event, hosted by the Centro Studi Ricerche per le Palme, is held in Sanremo, Italy, and promises to be a lively and informative event whose theme this year is “Palms of the Genus *Phoenix*.” Information about the event is on the website <http://digilander.libero.it/centrostudipalme/new/>.

THE EDITORS