

Veronica perfoliata

The dried burnt-looking specimen is special. It was collected by *gubernator Latrobe* as noted in Ferdinand Mueller's, Victoria's first botanist's, own handwriting ('gubernator' being Latin for governor). Its botanical name is *Veronica perfoliata* (Diggers Speedwell) and it is in the Plantaginaceae family. This specimen is 170 years old and was collected by the *illustrious Governor La Trobe* on his exploration of the Great Dividing Range in the upper reaches of the Loddon River in 1850. The Loddon River rises near Trentham and flows north and to meet the Murray near Swan Hill.

The labels give an interesting insight into the history of this specimen. It was first classified by the English botanist Robert Brown (1773-1858) and he named it *Veronica perfoliata*. There is a 'B' in the top left hand corner and that is a reference to the English botanist George Bentham (1800-1884), so we know it was sent to England at one stage. In Ferdinand Mueller's handwriting (bottom right hand corner) is the other name it was known by, *Veronica acutiflora* Ferd. Mueller, but Bentham renamed it *V. imperfoliata*. The specimen returned to Australia and in 1968 it was classified for the National Herbarium in New South Wales as *Parahebe perfoliata* by B. G. Briggs and Ehrend. Then in 2004 the National Herbarium of Victoria (as part of the Australian Virtual Herbarium project) had another look at the plant and described it as *Derwentia perfoliata*. Finally, in 2014, there was another name change – back to its original *Veronica perfoliata*, the name Mueller listed on the labels originally.

Derwentia in the former description referred to it being named after the Derwent River in Tasmania, when it was first described as *Veronica derwentia*. Perfoliata means the leaf wraps around the stem, and thus has no petioles (the small stem that attaches the leaf to the stem).



It is difficult to believe that this beautiful blue flower specimen is what the dried specimen once looked like.

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