



North West Weeds

NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL UNIT FOR GWYDIR AND INVERELL SHIRES

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Rock/Mulga Fern



Mulga fern
- also referred to as "rock fern"
Cheilanthes sieberi subsp. *sieberi*

(Warialda area 6 Jun 03 - LR Tanner)

Rock fern species are native plants and quite common in light soil country throughout many parts of the north-west. Every now and then, unfortunately, stock - especially cattle new to an area - will decide to feed on the plants.

EFFECT ON ANIMALS

Rock fern species have been blamed for the poisoning deaths of up to 30 head of cattle on a property halfway between Bingara and Warialda, over a three months' period to May 2003. Post mortems on some animals confirmed the deaths resulted from feeding on fern species. Later examinations on other animals by another local veterinarian revealed the presence of (reddish) fern stalks in the gut, further confirmation of the earlier diagnosis. Reports were also received of cattle deaths in the Ashford area during the same period.

ROCK FERN (*Cheilanthes tenuifolia* ssp. *tenuifolia*) and **MULGA FERN** (*Cheilanthes sieberi* subsp. *sieberi*) are very similar in appearance. According

to the excellent reference book "*Plants of Western New South Wales*" by Cunningham, Mulham, Milthorpe & Leigh (published by Inkata Press), the two plants "may be present together in many areas".

[Photo on right - mulga fern patch on a sheep camp - Ashford area 04]

"*Plants of Western New South Wales*" states that both species are "not grazed readily by stock but may be utilised in times of extreme food shortage". While many sheep and cattle deaths have been attributed to rock fern in the past, its close relative mulga fern is the species most likely to have caused the problem.

Selwyn Everist's "*Poisonous Plants of Australia*" (published by Angus & Coote) indicates "mulga fern or rock fern" poisonings occur when the fern is in a dry state and when little other feed is



MORE INFORMATION? PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL WEEDS OFFICER:

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OR check out our website on www.northwestweeds.nsw.gov.au

ROCK FERN (CONT)



Photo, left, shows the size of rock/mulga fern in comparison with a car tyre...

available. In NSW cases are usually reported between January and March while in Queensland cases have occurred more from July to September.

"Effects on animals are worse if they are driven after eating the fern and if continued the animals usually die. The best option is to remove from the paddock if possible. In drought years 1969-70 heavy losses of cattle were experienced. To avoid losses,

don't drive stock, don't allow access to paddocks with fern or remove them after 10 days grazing and place on other feed for three weeks before returning for another ten days".

NB Rock/mulga fern is NOT a declared noxious weed within Inverell and Gwydir Shires. It is a widespread, native plant, especially in lighter soils.

TREATMENT

Native plant. No herbicides are registered for treatment of rock or mulga fern.

MORE INFORMATION:

- "Plants of Western New South Wales" by Cunningham, Mulham, Milthorpe & Leigh (published by Inkata Press).
- "Poisonous Plants of Australia" by Selwyn Everist (published by Angus & Coote).

DISCLAIMER: The information contained herein is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of North West Weeds or the user's independent adviser.

(LRT 28/06/06)