**Essays on Mount Crosby - The Harrisia Cactus Lady**

If you are observant, or lucky, and perhaps a little of both, you may have noticed the occasional overnight explosion of cactus flowers on the high side of Colleges Crossing cutting. They are the flowers of a noxious weed species, *Harrisia martinii*, but if you'll allow yourself for a moment to see the plant as one of nature's interesting things, I'll tell you a story I've heard might be true about how the *Harrisia* made its way to Colleges Crossing.

It's said that the station master's wife at the Tivoli railway station, that once was on the railway line to Mount Crosby, was a keen collector of cactuses (in Mount Crosby they were never called cacti, except perhaps by a newly appointed teacher). The Tivoli station operated from 1898 to 1965 and, though I am not in possession of the years our important lady occupied the post, sometime near the turn of the century that now anonymous lady is said to have grown the *Harrisia*, originally collected in South America, at the station awaiting the wonderful short showing each summer of their white orchid like flowers.

The flowers were not only admired by the railway family, but also by the local birdlife that knew the flowers would be followed by tasty red fruit. Using the birds as a vector, the seeds of the fruit were distributed about the countryside and found the cliffs of Colleges Crossing very much to their liking (probably because not much else could grow or go there) and each year for the same short time they put on a little show for you. If you happen to stand on one, you'll put on a different sort of show, and snap back to thinking of them as a noxious weed.

Keep an eye out next summer and enjoy the *Harrisia*, but don't feel bad if the council gets to cleaning them up before you see them.

Col Hester