

Eduard Frederich Poeppig (1798 – 1868)

Born in Plauen, Germany, on 16 July 1798, Eduard Frederich Poeppig was the son and only surviving child of Christian Gottfried Poeppig, co-owner of a calico business, and his wife Carolina Amalia Wattler. A daughter born the following year died in infancy. Eduard received his early education at the Thomas School in Leipzig, and from 1810 to 1815 attended the secular St Augustine State School in Grimma. After studying medicine and science at the University of Leipzig, he graduated in 1822. Long walks in the countryside stimulated his early interest in plants and enhanced his extensive botanical knowledge.

Soon after taking his medical degree Poeppig sailed for Cuba and explored and collected in the West Indies. In 1824 he continued to Pennsylvania, North America, to study and describe the flora and fauna there. His quest for adventure and knowledge then took him to South America, landing at Valparaiso in March 1827, and his extensive expeditions in Chile, Peru and Brazil during the next five years earned him fame. He was one of the first botanists to penetrate into the high Andes, and the third European to travel the length of the Amazon. Staying at local villages, he observed the indigenous people and their habits, documented the geology of the areas he traversed and collected and described the plants and wildlife.

By October 1832 he was back in Leipzig with an enormous amount of material from his travels: several hundred animal specimens, more than 17,000 dried plants, a collection of ethnographic objects and copious notes and manuscripts. He had also sent or brought back with him seeds and

plants, and introduced a number of new species to Europe. One of his most important finds was the spectacular waterlily, *Victoria (Eurale) amazonica*, previously seen but not named or botanically described. In 1833 he was appointed professor extraordinary of natural sciences at the University of Leipzig, and the following year was made director of its expanded zoological museum. In 1846 a full professorship in zoology was established for him.

Poeppig, like his contemporary, Humboldt, wrote a general account of his travels, which was published in two volumes, 1835–36. His illustrated natural history of the animal kingdom first appeared in 1847–48, and helped popularise the subject. His most important work, on the flora of South America, was published in three volumes (1835–1845), part of it in collaboration with the Austrian botanist Stephan Endlicher. From about 1850 he withdrew from public life, leaving many of his transcripts unpublished, and on 4 September 1868 he died in Leipzig, aged 70 years. His wife since 1834, Isadore Hasse, had died in 1864, and it seems that their three daughters did not survive infancy.

Highly ranked among the early 19th century scientists, Eduard Poeppig was a member of scientific societies in Philadelphia and Baltimore, as well as the Royal Saxon Society of Sciences, and was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Royal Order of Merit. Although his work has been largely forgotten over time, several plant species that he discovered and described still bear his name. However, the species of strap fern in New Zealand that was mistakenly called *Grammitis poeppigiana*, is now *Notogrammitis crassior*.



Notogrammitis crassior

Notogrammitis, (Greek *noto* 'southern'; *gramma* 'line') in the family Polypodiaceae, are recognised by their narrow, undivided fronds with the sori forming a herringbone pattern on the underside. They are commonly known as finger ferns or strap ferns. One of the few truly alpine ferns in New Zealand, *Notogrammitis crassior* (formerly *Grammitis poeppigiana*) has a mat-forming habit, with long creeping rhizomes and tiny fronds 0.5–3 cm in length. The sori in 1–5 pairs are confined to the tips. It grows in rock crevices, mostly in subalpine or alpine areas from East Cape and Taranaki/Mt Egmont, to Campbell Island, but descending to lower levels in the far south. It is also found in Australia, South Africa, South America and many of the islands surrounding Antarctica.