

A final word from *Lepidium obtusatum*?

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I was asked recently if I might be interested in looking through a private herbarium belonging to a friend of the family, Enid Bishop. Enid, together with her husband Henry had immigrated to New Zealand from the United States of America at the end of World War II. Henry worked as a veterinarian for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, at first in Wellington, from where the family moved to Hamilton in the early 1950s. In those days Enid Bishop was a keen gardener, and in that capacity she soon befriended Waikato amateur botanist Michael Gudex. During her botanical forays with Michael Gudex, Enid routinely collected small pieces of various natives and introduced plants, which she then compiled, mainly by family and name, within a series of old school exercise books. Although the majority of the specimens obtained were of common species, occasional novelties were also gathered. One of these, a specimen of *Ophioglossum petiolatum* gathered by Enid during 1960 from the Marokopa Falls Scenic Reserve, near Te Anga, following my prompting was

gifted to CHR in March 1984 (CHR 415492; de Lange 1988). However, aside from this rare example, where the majority of the collection details were known, the greater part of the herbarium lacked collection details. So when I pondered over it last May, it was with a more critical eye.

Only one specimen proved sufficiently significant to warrant gifting to a mainstream herbarium. On a page marked "Breaker Bay, Seatoun, Wellington, 1951, ?*Alyssum*" was mounted a single flowering and fruiting piece of *Lepidium obtusatum* (fig. 1). Hitherto, the last known gathering of this Presumed Extinct species (de Lange et al. 1999), had been from much the same locality by R.K. Ward in 1938/39 (CHR!/WAIK!) (Norton et al. 1994; Norton et al.



Fig. 1. *Lepidium obtusatum* herbarium voucher.

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1997; Norton & de Lange 1999). Therefore, it would seem that at least until 1951 *Lepidium obtusatum* persisted at its type locality. However, whether the species became extinct as a consequence of this final collection, or whether it later succumbed to the plethora of weeds which now dominate its former habitat, it is hard to say. In any case this 'last' collection has now been lodged in the Auckland War Memorial Museum Herbarium (AK 250616). Here, I guess it will—like the stuffed specimens of huia, bush wren, and piopio—serve as a pertinent reminder to professional and amateur botanists alike that nature is a fragile thing, and that plants, like birds, can also become extinct. Nevertheless, I cannot help wonder whether this is truly the last specimen of this distinctive species to have ever been gathered. Isn't it nice to think that it may still lurk out there in some remote part of the Cook Strait or Waitakere Coast? Sadly, I guess that unless we are indeed very fortunate this does seem to be the final word in the sorry chapter of this species extinction.

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