

## NATURE'S SMALL SPLENDOURS

### ORCHIDS AND PHYLLOGLOSSUM

By J. Seymour

To move into an area where native bush was almost unheard of was a shock, after living with and taking trees for granted most of my life. We missed the trees terribly and tried to grow our own, only to find ourselves limited to the few coastal species that could stand our very strong salt-laden winds. In our second year (1975) a friend suggested that instead of looking skywards for splendid growth we should look groundwards for small splendours -- wonderfully good advice! So we set out to explore a most forbidding looking swamp. We had hardly stepped into it when cries of glee announced that the friend had found an orchid -- a Thelymitra, just one of those odd weeds that my husband had topped with the flaying blade of his slasher the previous spring! We continued to search with eyes downwards, and in less than a hundred yards more shouts of joy -- another and larger orchid. Months later it seemed, we had confirmation that this one was in fact the Australian tongue orchid, never found in New Zealand before. For us that was the beginning of a most interesting study of this plant. We collected specimens in flower and fruit and are still accumulating information.

All this led to Dr. L. Moore's visit on 15th August, 1976. She arrived early in the afternoon and away we went, with four children, to show her our swamp. Most of the tongue orchids were half under water at this time, but we saw plenty. This was not the spot where the original plants were discovered but another group which my husband and I found at the flowering period when we made specimens for the DSIR herbarium.

When the children had exhausted the area with "What's this's", "What's that's" and "Look at this's" we decided to move across to the little ridge where Thelymitra thrives so well. Here again the children jumped from one plant to another. Not every day do they have the chance to ask so many questions and to get ready answers! Presently they came across what is commonly known as Blue-Berry grass and Dr. Moore showed them how to make the leaves whistle. Sitting on the ground in a sunny space between bushes of hakea and kumarahou with two excited children leaning over her they made a very pleasant sight which I was enjoying immensely when suddenly our guest demanded quite sharply that everyone stand back. All sorts of awful things flashed through my mind -- spiders, wetas, etc. -- then it dawned on me that we had some other unusual plant. Unusual indeed -- Phylloglossum drummondii, a sort of living fossil that every botany student learns about but very few see alive. No one can imagine how it felt for me, just a farmer's wife, to see so rare a plant. There it was, in all its one or two centimetre glory, covering a crescent-shaped area of about two metres from point to point and about eighty centimetres across at the widest part. Later my ten-year-old son and I went back and counted about 146 plants in a 26 cm square. In parts the plants grew so close together that they overlapped which made it hard to tell exactly how many separate ones there were.

This was all an unforgettable experience for me. It is hard to believe that an area which looks so desolate could hold such treasures --

two rare plants just a few hundred yards apart, found within a single year. I am looking forward to more finds, and will continue looking with my eyes down, hoping always for my own splendid discovery.

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RAOULIAS ON MT. HUTT

M.J.A. Simpson

There are at least seven species of Raoulia on Mt. Hutt, in the ski basin or in the near vicinity of the upper part of the access road. I looked at seed development on a selection of plants on April 13th 1977.

Small cushions of R. mammillaris grow among rocks at c. 2000 m. An early snowfall on Easter Monday had covered the basin and a sharp wind on the 13th April made conditions icy. The hummocks of R. mammillaris were barely discernable but trapped air beneath the ice had kept the ripe seeds perfectly dry.

The attractive, white-flowered R. youngii also grows at this altitude, but on this date plants were quite hidden beneath the snow. Some plants of R. grandiflora had ripe seeds.

The vegetable Sheep R. eximia has a wide altitudinal range on Mt. Hutt but although many plants were studded with developing seed heads, none were fully ripe.

Large, flattened mats of R. hectori, (at its northern limit here?) at the top of the first ski tow had ripe seeds as did R. sub-sericea in grassland at lower levels.

On a small exposed saddle near the lower limit of R. eximia was a large patch of the common scabweed, R. australis, bright with yellow flowers. It seemed somewhat incongruous here, growing between a group of vegetable sheep and a scree supporting another alpine aristocrat, Ranunculus chordorhizos.

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