

## Introduction to the Lucy Cranwell Lecture - 2 September 1998

Ewen K. Cameron

It is my pleasure to welcome you all here tonight and to introduce tonight's speaker, who comes all the way from Queenstown. Before I do that I'd like to thank Geoff Davidson of Oratia Native Plant Nursery for the attractive assemblage of native plants gracing the front of the lecture theatre.

Fourteen years, ago plus two days, Dr Lucy Moore gave the inaugural Lucy Cranwell Lecture to our Society, in the University Zoology lecture theatre, making tonight our 14<sup>th</sup> lecture in this series. This is our Society's special annual lecture and is held in honour of our patron, Dr Lucy Cranwell who resides in Tucson, Arizona.

Last month Lucy sent a letter to our Treasurer and enclosed a cheque for US \$1,000 for the Society which she felt was "long overdue". However, we have frequently benefited from her generosity, so it was certainly not overdue but was most welcomed. Lucy suggested her gift could be used in putting our *Journal* (and its predecessor, the *Newsletter*) in a "more permanent form" - noting that paper deteriorates within 30 years. We will investigate copying a set onto archival paper and storing it in the Auckland Museum library for posterity.

I met Neill Simpson for the first time earlier today and at once felt very much at ease with him and that I had known him for a long time. Neill was born at Wanganui and remained there for 40 years. There he joined the Wellington Bot Soc in 1967 and went on all their major expeditions. Here he learnt his botany alongside people like Tony and Helen Druce and many others. He started the Wanganui Botanical Group in 1968 and was elected a life member in 1991 (it is still going strong). He was an active volunteer at the Wanganui Museum and was instrumental in setting up the native gardens outside. These were so successful they had to be cut back about 6 years ago as some were causing problems inside the Museum. This garden was partly based on plants brought back in 1969 from an expedition to the Chatham Islands by Neill and others such as Bruce Hamlin and David Crockett (of Chatham Island taiko petrel fame).

Neill and family made a lifestyle change in 1976 when he joined the Tongariro National Park staff as a ranger for 18 months and then onto Springs Junction/ Lewis Pass Scenic Reserve for 4 years. In 1981 he moved onto Queenstown, still with the Department of Lands and Survey, where he supervised the formation of the controversial Remarkables ski-field and access road. During the 1980s upheaval of Government Departments Neill, was appointed District Conservator of the Lakes District in the newly formed Department of Conservation set up in 1987-88. In his own words "being something of a weed myself I managed to stick around when the District level became extinct and continued on as Field Centre Manager at Queenstown. In 1993 he welcomed the opportunity to leave his office desk and return to the field as Otago Conservancy Botanist. After 2.5 years in this position Neill retired in 1995.

Now with the new label "Conservation Consultancy Ltd" he's spent the last two years and more wandering the hills of Canterbury, Otago and Southland on various contracts, primarily with the Department of Conservation, surveying and monitoring vegetation. Recently he was surveying the threatened plants of Southland. Neill set up and organised the Wakatipu Botanical Group - an enthusiastic bunch of some 20 people. Neill and his wife Barbara and three adult sons are keen trampers and lovers of natural history. Last month Neill was on Pearl Island, off Stewart Island assisting with the kakapo feeding program while Codfish Island is being poisoned for kiore. But botany, especially alpine plants, is Neill's main interest and in the future he hopes to diversify his knowledge from higher plants to other plant groups such as mosses and lichens.

We're very pleased to have you, Neill, as our Lucy Cranwell speaker for 1998; Neill's topic is "Flora and landscape of the Otago and northern Southland mountains" - something we don't see easily from up here in Auckland. I ask you to give Neill a very warm welcome.