

Mt Burns, Fiordland

John Smith-Dodsworth

Mt Burns is one of the higher points of the Hunter Mountains in southern Fiordland. On the north side it rises almost vertically to 1634 m from the Left or South Borland valley, to a relatively level, but narrow, broken and jagged summit ridge, sloping more easily towards the south and Lake Monowai. Access is easy, via the Borland hydro road, now open to the public in summer. This runs to the South Arm of L. Manapouri and the Percy Saddle, from the Borland Lodge near L. Monowai. It is a popular botanising ground because of its great abundance of southern alpine plants, which benefit from a lack of grazing animals; hares are scarce and I have seen little or no sign of deer during three or four visits over recent years. Indeed, even when this area was part of a block that I was deer-culling for the Government in 1956, deer were very scarce, unlike the neighbouring Mt Cleughern, which held them in large numbers.

Access is from the Borland Saddle near the bush-line, which is mostly open, swampy tussock. A short climb through *Nothofagus* bush brings one out onto the open tops; we continue up through tussock, mostly *Chionochloa crassiuscula*, and large *Celmisias*, *C. coriacea*, *G. petriei* and *C. semicordata*, and *Dracophyllum*. Here we get onto an undulating ridge dotted with many small tarns, with good views westward across the Grebe valley to the Townley and Wall mountains. A few hundred metres along, we turn left across a small, steep sided basin at the head of a branch of the Left Borland. The whipcord *Hebe hectorii* ssp. *hectorii* is common in the small gullies, and the small speargrass, *Aciphylla lyallii* is very common, although inconspicuous in the tall tussock. Across the basin there is a steep climb for about 50 m up a tussock-covered bank, where *Euphrasia australis* is common, along with the occasional *Celmisia traversii*, a long way from where it also grows, in North-West Nelson. At the top of this bank we come out onto a large, very open and gently sloping, swampy basin with mostly very short vegetation; and easy going. Here, along the creek side, the brightly coloured speargrass, *Aciphylla pinnatifida*, is common, as also the eyebright, *Euphrasia integrifolia*, almost invisible unless it is in flower; it has narrow pointed leaves. Towards the head of the basin the ground becomes more rocky, with *Ranunculus lyallii* common. Here I have found a

hybrid *Ranunculus*, smaller than *R. lyallii*, with rounded, deeply lobed leaves, and a pale yellow flower, most likely a cross between *R. lyallii* and *R. gracilipes*, which is the only other species in the immediate area.

The wide summit of the saddle is very rocky, and here, two other southern speargrasses are common, *Aciphylla congesta* and *A. crosby-smithii*, both growing in patches of many tufts together, *A. congesta* has softer leaves than the hard, rigid leaves of *A. crosby-smithii*. Both species continue up to the summit ridge. *Hebe imbricata* is occasional here (I have seen only two plants) with its distinctive erect, blunt-ended stems and yellow striped leaves. *Celmisia hectorii* is very common, growing in large mats among the rocks. The west ridge to the summit is easy and smooth, but a stiff climb, with wide views to the west across the Grebe valley, and south to the Princess range across L. Hauroko, and immediately below to Black Lake creek and Lake Monowai. The jumbled, rocky and jagged summit ridge, is quite easy, in good weather, but needing care, and a number of interesting small plants grow here, such as *Ourisia confertifolia*, *O. sessilifolia* var. *sessilifolia*, *Celmisia hectorii*, *Abrotanella rostrata* and *Euphrasia integrifolia*. From here there are good views north directly down onto the upper Left Borland flats, and across to Mt Titiroa. On descending the rocky slope on the south side back towards the tarns on the saddle, we see such plants as *Parahebe plano-petiolata*, *Ourisia remotifolia*, and *Ranunculus buchananii*, with its large white flowers about New Year. Occasionally we see *Hebe petriei*, *Anisotome capillifolia* and *A. flexuosa*. Other southern plants I have seen in the area, are *Celmisia holosericea*, on the roadside below the Borland Saddle, and *Chionochloa ovata*, along the creek-side off the road below the Borland Saddle. There too reputedly, growing in the swamp is *Mitrasacme novaezelandiae*, although I have not seen it. This covers only a few of the more prominent and interesting plants of the area, interesting at least to northern eyes. The roughly three-hour walk to the summit, preferably in good weather and at botanising speed, is well worth while. For anyone wanting to get to know a good selection of the south Fiordland plants, here we can do so without having to walk a great distance.

