

AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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The first News Letter of 1956 finds the Society already with two out of Auckland excursions to its credit. The first - the most ambitious the Society has so far undertaken - was to Arthur's Pass. It is by no means easy to arrange for an excursion at such a distance but by hard work and careful planning our Secretary managed to smooth out all the difficulties that such a venture inevitably encountered, and as will be seen from the description with which she has so kindly supplied us, the members were able to get the maximum of pleasure and profit from their short stay.

ARTHUR'S PASS

by: P. Hynes.

January, 1956.

Our party of 34 members spent a happy week in mid-January at Arthur's Pass, the best known part of the Southern Alps. Arthur's Pass was chosen for this study of alpine flora on account of the high number of species growing there, access to them is comparatively easy and also because accommodation was available in the village for a large group.

The weather was good and every day was used to advantage. Through the kindness of Miss P. Sexton some copies of a species list taken from 'Vegetation of the Upper Bealey River Basin' Laing and Oliver, Trans.N.Z. Inst. Vol. 59. 1928, were distributed and these were most helpful with identifications in the field and thereby arrested the desire to gather plants which are very necessarily protected in that area.

After an exceptionally mild winter there was very little snow on the tops and due to an early summer many of the flowers on the lower levels were almost over. The small everlasting daisy, Helichrysum bellidioides, which forms a gay border of blooms all along the roadside was then bedraggled and the so-called mountain lily, Ranunculus lyallii was almost finished. We had also missed the mass of blooms of the large daisy, Celmisia coriacea, in the Senecio Meadow. Overhead we occasionally saw the scarlet mistletoe, Elytranthe colensoi, but the red debris of fallen petals under the beech trees told a story of their past beauty. However, we found recompense in the lovely Gentians, Euphrasias, Curisias, Parahebes etc. which adorned the wayside and later we found that the season was just right for the higher alpiners.

Visits were made to Margaret's Tarn on the Bealey Glacier Track and to Lake Misery at the top of the Pass, both of which are fascinating boggy spots carrying a wealth of interest to the botanist.

Avalanche Peak was climbed and a surprising number reached the top, 6,000 feet. For this we followed the well defined track through the beech forest which later became stunted and 'Goblin'. Beyond this was a belt of interesting low growing shrubs and amongst them the lovely Hebe macrantha in full bloom. Soon the tussock and alpine meadow was reached where members scattered and exclamations of joy were heard as they found cushion plants covered in flowers or colonies of the many different species of Celmisias. Every few steps something new would catch the eye and even on the fell-field with the summit rocks towering above us the interest was just as intense as we searched for the small botanical treasures which crack and crevice shelter from the bitter cold and scorching sun.

A trip to Temple Basin and then on to Temple Col was another highlight, for there we found that the vegetation was even richer than that of Mt. Avalanche. It was a new joy to reach the scree and see Haastii sinclairii, its grey woolly leaves blending in with the shingle which it demands for its home, and higher still, at 6,000 ft. to see one of the buttercups, Ranunculus sericophyllus, its large yellow flowers and green leaves making a striking contrast to the glistening snow nearby.

The vegetation of Westland differs greatly from that of Arthur's Pass which is in Canterbury, and it was principally to see the mountains of the western side covered with the crimson glory of the southern rata Metrosideros umbellata Cav., that members undertook the 10 mile walk through to Otira returning by train through the tunnel.

The ferns are poorly represented at Arthur's Pass, no doubt due to the high evaporation. Mecodium villosum was abundant but Cystopteris fragilis and Polystichum cystostegia were to us the only interesting finds there. Two small parties made short trips into the bush on the Otira side and there in the Podocarp-Rata-Quintinia forest found some interesting plants including the wee fern Craspedophyllum armstrongii, Mecodium rufescens, Cyathea colensoi, Apteropteris malingii (growing on a dead kaikawaka) and two orchids, Townsonia viridis and Lyperanthus antarcticus.

The time came for us to say goodbye to our peaceful little village and once again we heard those remarks 'not long enough'. Certainly the Otira side deserved more of our time and our programme did not allow for a river-bed trip, which can be very interesting especially towards the Waimakiriri. However, after dispersing, most of the party visited other scenic places in the South Island and we trust that the week spent at Arthur's Pass would help them to recognise and appreciate more fully some of the flora of the middle Island.

Our thanks are due to Miss J. Dingley and Dr. J. Rattenbury for help in the field and to the Ranger, Mr. Cleland, and to Mrs. Pope, a local resident, for many kindnesses and to Dr. and Mrs. Nelson for the farewell party.

On a smaller scale but no less successful was our excursion to Ponui Island. This beautiful privately owned island was the scene of an excursion last year—an excursion so much enjoyed that it was decided to repeat it if possible in 1956. Dr. Hastings has kindly forwarded an account of this year's trip.

PONU I ISLAND REVISITED

by: V.E. Hastings

Last year's trip to the Island was so successful that another week-end excursion was planned for this year. Mr. and Mrs Chamberlain kindly gave us the use of the new woolshed as our late home - the barn on the beach - was being used for more mundane purposes than harbouring botanists.

Although our trip was only one week later than last year we were surprised to find that instead of arriving at the Island in daylight Mr. Chamberlain's launch was scarcely out of Kawakawa Bay before darkness was already settling over the water. The billy of tea supplied by Mrs. Chamberlain was greatly appreciated and soon afterwards all were in bed.

The following morning we set out over the hills for Green Bay where members had a refreshing swim. Being unable to lure the two boys away from their underwater spear fishing, we left them to it and climbed up the hill to the bush. From here we followed a track which led along the backbone of the Island itself and its surroundings. We made our way quietly past a big black, and in our eyes, a thoroughly nasty-looking bull-fortunately sound asleep. Beside the track was a fine *Kohokohe* (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) bearing an exceptionally large crop of fruit.

Soon we made our way into a steep gully where we found one of the objects of our trip - some healthy specimens of King Fern, (*Marattia salicina*). These were all confined by the steep banks of the stream so that they were growing almost in the water. Along the same stream were *Blechnums* which on the whole were more typical of *Blechnums norfolkianum* than those found in a different gully last year.

On the home trip we found nothing of note in the mile or so of swamp that lay between us and our prospective cup of tea. But, perhaps because once our feet had reached bottom we were more interested in pulling them out again than in the botanical wonders which threatened to - and in some cases actually did engulf us.

The next morning some of the members took a trip along the coast while others returned to the King Fern Gully to make a further examination of the ferns. Then they climbed to a ridge where the *Pseudopanax* hybrids were found last year. So a leaf was gathered from each tree found and put in the bag to be taken back to Auckland for a fellow botanist who has an insatiable appetite for such things. The return trip was made along the seashore where a number of plants of *Pomaderris rugosa* were found. We all thoroughly enjoyed our week-end and were grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain for allowing us another delightful holiday at the Island.