

This year marks the centenary of the death of Dr. Andrew Sinclair in 1861. Our thanks to Muriel Fisher who commemorates the services of this distinguished botanist in the interesting article that follows.

DR. ANDREW SINCLAIR

Most Aucklanders are familiar with that handsome tree Meryta sinclairii, but how many of us know anything about the man after whom it was named?

The exact date of Dr. Sinclair's birth is not known but was probably in the year 1796 in the Scottish town of Paisley. He studied medicine at Glasgow and like so many of our other botanical explorers, became interested in plant life. In those days much emphasis was laid on the study of botany in the course of medicine.

In 1822 Dr. Sinclair was appointed Assistant Surgeon in the Royal Navy and from then on he did much collecting, not only plants, but shells and insects which he sent to the British Museum. In the middle 1830's Sinclair was on the ship "Sulphur" which explored the coasts of South and Central America. It is known that the year after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, Dr. Sinclair visited the Bay of Islands and collected with Hooker there.

At this stage it is interesting to note that Meryta sinclairii, certainly one of our rarest trees, was first observed by Colenso, growing at the Whangaruru Harbour. It was strictly tapu and the Maoris would not permit specimens to be taken. Eventually, however, Major Mair succeeded in getting foliage and fruit which he sent to Dr. Sinclair, who in turn gave it to Hooker.

Sinclair then returned to England, but having seen something of the remarkable flora of New Zealand he was anxious to return. Thus he applied for a position under Captain Fitzroy either "in a medical capacity or to explore the Islands".

It transpired that Captain Fitzroy was greatly impressed with the doctor and offered him the position of Colonial Secretary. This he reluctantly accepted feeling he was inexperienced for such a responsible position. In 1844 however, he commenced duties. As Colonial Secretary he was very thoughtful and helpful for the times were difficult in the growing colony.

The Admiralty tried hard to entice Dr. Sinclair back to sea, but at the end of six years he decided to forfeit his naval privileges and stay on in New Zealand.

All leisure time was spent collecting and after eleven years' service in the Colony's interest, Dr Sinclair retired and went back to England.

It was always his desire to find a new fern or plant and so, although he was over 60 years of age, he made up his mind to return, still hoping that one day he might find something new.

Thus in 1858 he boarded a small schooner which brought him back. He landed at Coromandel and it would seem that he made his head-quarters around Auckland - now and then tripping off to some remote corner to do some more collecting. He has described the bush around Auckland at length and of the Manakau forest says, "This great forest is of inexhaustible interest to the Botanist. In it are found nearly all the timber trees of New Zealand and amongst them the chief is the Kauri, although not quite so large in size as those growing on the banks of the Kaipara and in the forests of the north. The trunks of the old trees are clothed and festooned with Astelia, rata, orchids and ferns. The deep hollows are penetrated with difficulty from the supple-jack, rubus and Lygodium. In no forest I have ever visited even those on the north-west coast of America, have I seen Cryptogamic plants in such abundance and such beauty."

In 1861 Julius von Haast was exploring the Southern Alps and Dr. Sinclair went with him. The party stayed at Samuel Butler's station and from there decided to explore the sources of the Rangitata River. One man of the party had to return to Butler's and Dr. Sinclair decided to return with him, for he had a large collection of plants which he was anxious to press.

They had only one horse and it was their custom when crossing rivers to take it in turn - the one going over first would send the horse back for the other. On this occasion, Sinclair went first and the river was divided half way across so that there was a little island. On reaching this spot the horse had had enough and refused to go back. Dr. Sinclair waded in after it and was swept away. His body was recovered and the burial took place at Butler's station.

To quote Von Haast's words, "Near the banks of the river, just where it emerges from the Alps, with the perpetual snowfields glistening in the sun, amid veronicas, senecios and covered with celmisias and gentians, there lies his lonely grave."

Sir Joseph Hooker notes in his 'Flora', "The late Dr. Sinclair a man of great attainments in many ways, certainly ranks second to Mr. Colenso."

I am glad to say Dr. Sinclair's wish did come true for up the Dun Mountains he found a native buttercup and celmisia which bear his name - also there is a little orchid and an alpine daisy, Haastia sinclairii.

Now, I wonder how many Aucklanders are aware that there is a memorial stone to Dr. Sinclair in the Symonds Street cemetery? Right alongside the footpath on the left-hand side coming down Symonds Street there is an ageing stone bearing the following inscription:

TO
THE MEMORY OF
ANDREW SINCLAIR M. D., R.N.
LATE COLONIAL SECRETARY OF N. Z.
WHO WAS DROWNED IN THE RANGITATA RIVER IN THE
PROVINCE OF CANTERBURY
ON THE 26TH. MARCH, 1861

R E Q U I E S C A T I N P A C E

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We have pleasure in publishing a further instalment of Mrs. G.F. Allen's article, "A Journey in Africa" (Part 3).

I went through a patch of forest, very like Malayan jungle and saw many interesting ferns. Cyathea were common, a Dryopteris and a Rumohra (in the New Zealand sense, and very like adiantiformis) and mixed with them were Elatostema and Balsams. On the outskirts were Hypolepis, Histiopteris incisa, Blechnum and Pteridium aquilinum. Although only a few miles from the equator, I was delighted to see in cultivation, Rambler roses, Irises, Fuchsia and Foxgloves, to mention only a few.

Regretfully we left and descended again into the Rift Valley where the road wound round the steep sides. On these rocky crags was the Cape Chestnut (Calodendron) with the lovely lilac flowers,