

MERCER 15 February 1964 - - - K. Wood

The February trip to the Mercer swamps was held at the most appropriate time of the year, for then it was possible to venture on stable ground, inaccessible at other times. Efficiently led by Professor Chapman, we were introduced to the various methods employed in making plant surveys and shown the different techniques adopted by Europeans and Americans. The use of various apparatus was demonstrated and proved of great interest. However time did not permit us to adopt the quadrat, or "knitting needle" pointer system for our investigations so we busied ourselves in scattering over the peat swamp examining the plant associations, comparing our finds with the names on the list provided and incidentally adding some more names to the list.

The growth consisted of low-growing Leptospermum scoparium, rushes and sedges such as Hypolaena laterifolia, Cladium, Schoenus and Juncus species, occasional Phormium tenax, young Coprosma areolata, extensive patches of Gleichenia, sphagnum moss and a surprising abundance of Drosera binata. We were greatly interested to find juvenile and adult forms of the European introduction, Osmunda regalis. This beautiful pale green fern is known commonly in England as Royal or Flowering Fern, the latter name referring to its fertile fronds, which are so densely covered with brown clusters of capsules that it resembles the flowering spikes of some species of dock. A lover of damp and peaty places it has made itself very much at home here. Another thrill was finding the tall slender stems of the orchid Spiranthes lancea, with its pretty little rose coloured flowers spiralling round its crown.

Later we visited another swamy area of different character and lunched seated on Carex - crowned humps beneath the shade of willows and Coprosma propinqua. We crossed a dried up bog carpeted with yellow flowered Jussiaea diffusa, and on the edge of a small lake where we surprised a bittern, we examined various aquatic plants including the tall Alisma plantago-aquatica, some members of the Cyperaceae, and the swamp grasses Glyceria aquatica and Isachne australis. Botanising beneath the Mangatawhiri River bridge, we saw more fine specimens of Alisma and the various floating plants, Myriophyllum, Potamogeton species, and the oxygen plants Elodea, which were flowering profusely. A member who had thoughtfully brought a canoe on his car, was most helpful in gathering plants and specimens for enthusiasts. Our grateful thanks are due to Professor Chapman for conducting a most enjoyable and fruitful outing.

Friday 17 January 1964, saw 27 members out of a party of 38, gathering at the Auckland Railway Station to board the 7.30pm express to Wellington, to commence, under the care of Mr. Warren, the long awaited trip to the South Island. All fared reasonably well on the journey down, although one carriage was particularly hot (uncomfortably so), but the jigs and jerks throughout the night were suffered cheerfully.

Blue skies heralded the dawn of Saturday, 18 January, and led later to a day of glorious sunshine. Upon our arrival at Wellington, we were joined by 4 more members, including Mr. Lediard, who took over leadership of the party. Having breakfasted at the Station, we took a bus to Days Bay via the waterfront drive, past Petone, and on round the harbour. It proved a delightful spot, with beach, lawns, bush walks and young pohutukawas in full bloom. A short walk up a steepish road to obtain the views led us past houses set in native bush and, much to our surprise, we came upon several vines of Clematis hookeriana, some in flower. On our return to the beach, we lunched at the Kiosk. Coming from the shade of the Kiosk, we found that it had become really hot, and the scene by now was quite gay with picnic parties and bathers. Taking a path from the beach up to a native reserve, Williams Park, where a stream gurgled in a gully amid tree ferns and undergrowth, we passed through mixed coastal bush to meet after a short distance beech trees Nothofagus truncata and solandri var cliffortioides. This was indeed a surprise, but later we were to learn that a little higher up N. menziesii was also to be found. Wood pigeons were seen feeding on the berried trees and soaring away through the leafy bowers.

A side track led us through more bush, where we observed several specimens of that, to us rather unusual orchid, Gastrodia cunninghamii. The track led us to a road where stood amongst trees the home of Dr. and Mrs. Falla. Turning in to visit these good people, we found to our surprise on the back lawn, sunning and stretching himself, a yellow-eyed penguin standing about 2 feet high. This bird, whose natural habitat is Otago Heads, had been found some months previously, on the rocks thin and battered. Under Dr. Falla's care he was now in much better health. Many cameras clicked to record this novelty. Walking a little higher into the beech forest, Dr. Falla chirped bird calls to entice the local feathered population to settle lower for us to view them. Whiteheads were plentiful, and answered his calls continuously.

A short distance along the road lay the delightful garden of Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham, which we were privileged to visit. This small landscaped area, with very green lawns, stone walls and steps, small trees (flowering cherry and fruiting peach), roses and a glorious purple clematis

showering over a trellis, proved a wonderful sight. On the gentle slopes at the back, native plants intermingled with vegetables, but all so well that neither lost their quality. All this, combined with hundreds of cacti set on stands around the walls of the buildings, and a beautiful baby in a play pen, comprised the garden of these two energetic young people.

Returning to the city, we dined and boarded the ferry steamer 'Hinemoa'. So in the soft light of an evening sky, with a new moon and the calmest of seas, we steamed out of the harbour amid a swirl of seagulls. Wellington City and suburbs twinkled their lights to bid us goodnight and a fair crossing. We entered Lyttleton Harbour on Sunday morning, with the excited calls of coastal birds following in our wake, and blue skies above. The boat train was waiting for us on the wharf, and off we sped to Christchurch. Here our coach, a special one allotted to us throughout our sojourn in the south, awaited us, and we covered the remaining 13 miles to Lincoln College and a very welcome and substantial breakfast. The original college is a fine red-brick building with slate roof, founded in 1878, and with other very modern buildings is set in spacious lawns and graceful trees. A world of interest lies in the various gardens, which specialise in different species of native and introduced flora. One can wander for hours enjoying the borders and corners which lead round the main outer buildings.

At various times during the day we welcomed the remaining 7 members of our party, bringing it up to its full complement of 38. Once established in our different accommodation blocks, and again well fed in the beautiful college dining hall, we set off to walk to the nearby property of the Botany Division of D. S. I. R. - their new quarters built three years ago. We were met on our arrival by the Director, Dr. Godley and 4 members of his staff - Dr. Lucy Moore, Miss Mason, Miss MacMillan and Mr. Sykes, who helped to make our afternoon a very happy and informative occasion. They had graciously given up their Sunday to help us gain knowledge from their Division. Three of these good people being fellow members of our Society, it gave us greater pleasure than ever to meet them.

We viewed the library and then the herbarium, in which we were treated to a demonstration of the method of pressing specimens. In the experimental gardens and glasshouses we found much to interest us. Young kowhai trees, now in their fourth year, were examined closely and discussed. Some of these were from the Chatham Islands, some from Southern Chile, one from Gough Island in the South Atlantic Ocean, and others from different localities throughout New Zealand. A break for afternoon tea came, but most could not tear themselves away, groups going here and there across the lawns to see the growth of healthy specimens of native flora now well established. We sincerely thank Dr. Godley and his staff for a most pleasant and fruitful afternoon.

FIRST DAY - Monday 20 January brought brilliant sunshine. Our destination was Porters Pass, some 50 odd miles away on the road to Arthurs Pass. The coach speedily traversed the long straight roads to the foothills and then began the winding climb to our point of interest. Here has been the hunting ground of many a highly esteemed botanist, and here plants must be kept preserved for parties of the future to study and enjoy. We stepped out into a very strong wind, a little cool to those from the somewhat warmer north. So donning windbreakers or parkas, and with Miss Macmillan of D. S. I. R. as our guide and adviser, about two thirds of the party set off up the mountain slope. The less agile of our members kept to the lower levels, finding however much of interest there. Slowly and surely the main party advanced up the mountain, poking here and there finding something new to them, and discussing the finds while still ascending. It was all full of delight. Most of the tiny alpine were either in flower or full of berry. We trust that the many cameras taken up will reward us with a record of these.

When well up the mountain, we crossed the scree slopes where the wind blew really hard. In fact the wind was so strong that it was easier to go up hill than across or down. It was here that we saw those interesting plants that blend their colour so well with the scree that it is difficult to see them until one is almost on top of them. A few hardy souls continued up the slope in pursuit of vegetable sheep, but soon gave up to follow the others who, having reached another ridge, were continuing their researches before commencing the descent. The views of plain, mountain, lake river and sea from that altitude were magnificent. To the east was Lake Ellesmere and the ocean, and across the plains the large Waimakariri River. To the west in the valley, lay the deep green waters of Lake Lyndon where later, on the shores, we found several more interesting plants.

Then we were homeward bound for the college and tea, after which yet another treat awaited us. Dr. Lucy Moore came to visit us, and help identify our findings of the day. Members were keenly interested and very much appreciated this wonderful gesture. It put a good finish to a glorious day. Plants seen or collected during this trip included Pratia macrodon, Coprosma petrii var stropurpurea, Senecio haastii, Anistome filifolia, Hebe epacridea, H. pinguifolia, H. odora and H. lycopodioides. Epilobium glabellum, E. bycnocachym, Euphrasia laingii, Galium perpusillum, Brachycome sinclairii, Acaena glabra, Senecio glaucophyllus subsp discoideus, Geum parviflorum, Corallospartium crassicaule, Pimelea traversii, Craspedia uniflora, Cassinia fulvida, Stellaria roughii, Cotula strata, Ranunculus haastii, Lycopodium australianum, Grammitis pusilla, Carmichaelia monroi, Cystopteris fragilis, Aciphylla monroi, another Aciphylla (possibly crenulata) and the penwiper plant Notothlaspi rosulatum.

(here Miss Todd takes her leave and Mr. Butler takes over)

SECOND DAY - 21 January. It is a misfortune and disappointment to Miss Todd, who was reporting this trip for Newsletter, that she had to return to Auckland because of her Mothers indisposition and we all hope that Mrs. Todd will make an early recovery.

At 9am after an excellent breakfast, we left Lincoln by bus with Dr. Lucy Moore as leader, for the Harper River via Kirwee and Hororata to the Rakaiia Gorge, and thence through the foothills. Our well informed driver Mr. Raines pointed out various areas of historical interest such as the Deans Station, a very old Canterbury holding. Upon reaching the Rakaiia River we followed it for several miles before veering northwest towards the shores of Lake Coleridge, of which now and again we caught glimpses. The country round here is largely covered by the tumatukuru or wild irishman (Discaria toumatou), and several species of tussock. Passing the Lake Lyndon turnoff and crossing the Rytou River we came upon Lake Selfe and also started to run into light rain. We moved along the southern shore of Lake Selfe then carried on to Lake Georgina and wound down to the bridge over the Harper River where it has been diverted into Lake Coleridge. We drove a short distance out onto the wide stony river bed and alighted for a scramble. Although it was blowing and raining we really enjoyed raking round in the shingle for numerous plants most of us had never seen before. We found Epilobium melanocaulon, Melichrysum depressum, Plantago spathulata three or four Raoulia - australis, glabra, haastii and tenuicaulis, Parahebe lyallii, Senecio bellidioides, Vittadinia australis, Schizella haastii, and Cyathodes fraseri.

We left the river flat, came back over the bridge and had lunch under some pine trees which sheltered us from most of the rain. Driving slowly back we stopped several times while Dr. Moore pointed out various plants visible from the bus. At the eastern end of Lake Selfe some of us wandered along the shore finding among others the following - Aristotelia fruticosa, Muehlenbeckia complexa and axillaris, Hebe traversii, Nothofagus solandri var cliffortioides, on the waters edge some Isoetes and quite a crop of Bulbinella hookeri.

Regaining the bus we travelled out of the rain, back to the Rakaiia Gorge, alighting there in a howling gale to examine an island between the two bridges which span this deep and swiftly flowing river. Our finds on the island were well worth braving the wind. Hoheria angustifolia and Criselinia littoralis, both of which occurred very frequently on our outings, were in some instances extraordinarily large, Coriaria sarmentosa, Coprosma brunnea, crassifolia, linariifolia and rotundifolia, Parsonsia capsularis, Olearia avicenniaefolia and paniculata, Corokia cotoneaster, Rhagodia triandra, Cyathodes juniperina var oxycedrus, Linum monogynum, Pseudopanax ferox, Melichrysum glomeratum, Carmichaelia flagelliformis,

We returned to Lincoln for dinner and at 8pm, in the Little Farmers Hall, were given a lecture by Dr. McCaskill, Director of Soil Conservation, with coloured slides of several parts of the South Island. Our thanks to Dr. McCaskill for a most enjoyable evening.

THIRD DAY - 22 January. We left Lincoln at 9am for Banks Peninsula, Miss R. Mason guiding us through Tai Tapu and along the shore of Lake Ellesmere upon which we saw a number of black swans. Turning off a side road to Kaituna past the quaint little old church of St. Kentigern, we stopped at a small reserve with a different kind of bush, Titoki and Podocarps with a large quantity of Urtica ferox (of which the writer is WELL aware) for undergrowth. Coprosma rotundifolia was predominant and we also saw Asplenium hookerianum. Leaving Kaituna we took the next side road which led us into Prices Valley, and here we found among others on the roadside, Lophomyrtus obcordata, Helicytus micranthus, Rubus species, Coprosma polymorpha, areolata and rotundifolia. We would have liked to stay longer as Teucrium parviflorum has been found here but we had to move on to the Shingle beach at Birdlings Flat - a huge bank of flat-surfaced stones which blocks Lake Ellesmere from the sea. We found here Muehlenbeckia ephedroides, a queer plant straggling amongst the stones. Then on a few hundred yards to Waikakahi Beach finding Convolvulus verecundus, Australina pusilla and Galium perpusillum.

Following the Akaroa Road along Lake Forsyth to Little River we had a break for lunch in the War Memorial Gardens. From here we drove uphill for several miles to the summit called Hilltop, not far from Montgomerys Bush, where we stopped for a stroll through the tracks. We noticed that the bigger trees, totara, kahikatea and matai had their branches within 20 feet of the ground. It would seem that they had but little competition and were not drawn up as they usually are. We found Senecio saxifragoides, and a large leaved rangiora which had been planted there. Also an unusual Pennantia corymbosa in flower, with very soft flimsy leaves quite unlike those we are used to in Auckland. Along this high road we had some wonderful views of both sides of the peninsula. This was the finish of our days botanising so we carried on sightseeing down the hill to DeVauchelles Bay, past Robinsons and Childrens Bay to Akaroa. It was noticeable that all the street names were French (Rue), the first English street being of all things Smith Street. We spent half an hour in Akaroa then returned via the lower road to Hilltop, thence home by the way we came. While travelling both Miss Mason and the bus driver told us a lot about the history and geology of the peninsula. After dinner in the evening we saw Mr. Beevers slides of the Waipoua orchid (Yonia - if such it is - australis) and some of Mr. Lediards slides, including 2 of an unusual Thelymitra found by Mr. Warren and myself in the Anawhata area being worked under Miss Crookes scheme.

.. FOURTH DAY - 23 January. The Peel Forest excursion led by Dr. Godley left at 9am, first stop outside Woolworths in Ashburton, then over the Rakela Bridge one and one tenth miles long, to the turnoff at Hinds, passing many fields of oats, barley, wheat, linseed, lucerne and clover, in various shades of yellow and green. Irrigation ditches with control gates lined the twelve mile straight road to within a short distance of the Rangitata River, which we crossed then followed west to the forest on the side of Mount Peel. After looking at a patch of low bush on the roadside where we found Helicytus micranthus carrying 2 parasites, Korthalsella lindsayi and Elytranthe tetrapetala (we also found a species of Loranthus), we had lunch and proceeded up a track into heavier bush where a marvellous view opened up. Looking up the Rangitata we could see Mount Whitcombe through a gap in the foothills. Back down to the road, then up another track to a really large totara. Hoheria sexstylosa, Metrosideros umbellata in flower, Cyathea smithii, Olearia avicenniifolia, several Elechnum species and numerous Fuchsia excorticata in berry were to be seen. We travelled back over the same road and arrived at Lincoln a tired and hungry but happy crowd, just in time for dinner. In the evening we held a small party for Mrs. Hynes and Mrs. Moore, whose birthdays had occurred the day before. Mrs. Burns and Dr. Lucy Moore attended the gathering. The table was beautifully arranged by the College Matron, Mrs. Lenham, and decorated with superb roses from the garden. Two cakes were cut and handed round - a very enjoyable little 'do'.

FIFTH DAY - 24 January. Many members wished to see Christchurch and do some shopping, so it was decided to spend a while in town during the morning and do a trip over the Port Hills in the afternoon. On the way in we stopped at Prebbleton and had a look at the pretty church of All Saints. A very large oak tree in the churchyard spanned close on one hundred feet. We paused for a few minutes to view the prize Royd Street in Fendelton, then on into town to see the old Provincial Chambers, a most interesting and wonderfully decorated early Canterbury building. After a couple of hours round the town we met at the Museum where Mr. Turbott showed us the Herbarium, and later lunched in the botanical gardens under some beautiful trees. We then set off through Heathcote for the Port Hills, stopping several times to see what sort of vegetation was offering. We scrambled round over the lava rocks on the edge of the huge crater which forms Lyttleton Harbour. There were wonderful views from most of these stops. Kennedys Bush was disappointing for our old enemy Urtica ferox, the very fierce nettle, made things most difficult. Having no leader on this trip we had to ferret things out for ourselves, but with the help of Mrs. Hynes and others we found - a juvenile Hoheria angustifolia, Plagiathanthus betulinus, Asplenium hookerianum and flabellifolium, a yellow flowered Senecio, a small silver backed Celidisia and Hebe laudiana. We returned to Lincoln via Tai Tapu in time for dinner and spent the evening packing ready for our departure the next day.

SIXTH DAY - 25 January. We left Lincoln at 9am and drove to the Station to check our luggage, then met Mr. Mitchell at the Botanical Gardens and spent the morning strolling through the native section. A beautiful place with everything set out in attractive order, we saw many plants we had not seen before. Back at the bus at eleven thirty we were kept waiting by some of our delinquents who got lost in this big area, but we managed to return to the College not too late for lunch. Some of us spent the afternoon at D. S. I. R. and Dr. Moore showed us through the glasshouses. We returned for dinner and after saying goodbye to the good people at Lincoln College, left at six twenty for the boat train. The 'Maori' left Lyttleton at 8pm and arrived in Wellington after a calm trip at 7am on Sunday.

SEVENTH DAY - 26 January. Had breakfast at the Station in Wellington, then went by bus to the Otari Gardens which were very interesting, and afterwards to the Botanical Gardens where some beautiful Begonias were seen. After lunch we repaired to the Dominion Museum where the Botanist Mr. Hamlin treated us to some educational pictures of plants and animals in South Africa which provided a delightful finish to a glorious trip. We caught the Limited at seven thirty and arrived back in Auckland at eight fifty on Monday morning, feeling very tired but extremely happy.

We are very grateful to Dr. Godley and his staff - Dr. Lucy Moore, Miss Ruth Mason and Miss MacMillan, for their unstinted help on this trip. Without their assistance we should have been under a great handicap. Let us hope we can help them in some small way in return.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING -- 4 March 1964.

The existing administrative section was re-elected with virtually no change. Mr. Lediard and Mr. Butler exchanged places as President and Vice President, and Mr. James took Miss Segars place on the committee. Miss Crookes was made a life member in recognition of her 27 years of service to the Society, and presented with a rather nice silver tray, suitably inscribed, as a memento. Her record is indeed remarkable. Foundation member; Editor for 20 years; three times President - the only lady member to hold that honour.

Three series of slides were shown. Mr. Beevers excellent shots of Yoonia australis from the taraire forests at Glorit; a most interesting and picturesque run of scenes in Europe, from Germany to Norway, shown and explained by Mrs. Wood; and finally some colourful Australian wildflowers described by Mrs. Prickett. E. D. H.

NEW PUBLICATIONS - - - May I draw your attention to an excellent little book. Plants of the New Zealand Coast by Lucy B. Moore - splendidly illustrated by Nancy Adams. Pauls Book Arcade 15/-