

"A FIELD GUIDE TO THE NATIVE EDIBLE PLANTS OF NEW ZEALAND"

Andrew Crowe. Collins, Auckland. 194pp. \$19.95.

Reviewed by R.O. Gardner

This book is the first in the prestigious Collins Field Guide series to deal with a part of the native flora. The author, a newcomer to New Zealand botany, became interested in edible wild plants through a concern about survival in the bush. What he has written, though, is much more than a bushcraft manual - it is a careful and comprehensive survey with special attention given to the use made of each plant by the pre-European Maori. Students, teachers (and librarians in "project" season) will find it a handy and reliable book, and archaeologists and anthropologists might well get from it a good idea or two.<sup>1</sup>

What seems to be all the edible native higher plants (including eleven ferns!) are examined as are quite a number of seaweeds and fungi. A few common adventives are included too and there is a short chapter on poisonous plants. Students would probably have appreciated more detail on the four food plants introduced and cultivated by the Maori.

Mercifully little culinary information is given, most N.Z. food plants apparently being 'unpalatable' or 'unsatisfying' (and the native truffle, alas, is both rare and hard to find).

The reference list shows how conscientious the author has been in his historical research, and he corrects several mistakes copied through the popular literature.

Two taxonomic errors are noted below.<sup>2</sup> Taxonomists are well repaid by the suggestions (Crowe, Colenso respectively) that Maori cultivars of Calystegia sepium and Arthropodium cirratum should be searched for.

Within the main section of the book the plants are arranged rather eccentrically - a family by family treatment according to one of the modern systems where phytochemistry carries weight would have facilitated discussion of edibility and toxicity. Also, family names appear only incidentally, which compels repetition in the text and is not helpful to students.

It is perhaps a mistake of the publishers not to have commissioned more-sophisticated illustration. Nevertheless this is adequate for identification and has the virtue of being all the author's own work.

One can readily imagine a companion work on the wider topic of non-food uses of plants by Maori and settler. Such a future Field Guide has been set a good standard.

1. Why did the Maori make so little use of the palatable coastal plants Apium prostratum, Lepidium oleraceum, Salicornia australis and Tetragonia tetragonioides?

2. The native Oxalis with large yellow flowers (as in Plate 16) is the dune and coastal cliff plant O. stricta sensu auct. N.Z., not O. corniculata (the small-flowered plant of p.101).

And (p.94) it probably was the native form of Geranium solanderi whose fleshy radish-shaped root was eaten by the Maori, not the diffuse-rooted adventive G. dissectum.