

AN ORCHID WALK IN NORTH CANTERBURY

by L.B. Moore

Choose a bright morning in mid-December to drive over the upper Waimakariri bridge and at the top of the terrace carry straight on along Harman's road through pleasant flattish farming country. After crossing the south branch of Cooper's Creek turn right, pass View Hill school, then turn first left and again first left. Less than a mile along the little road you are now on there is a ford over a brown pebbly creek and here you leave the car. To your left is a swampy flat below rather steep slopes covered partly in a remnant of forest, partly in "rough grazing", that is long grass, scattered scrub with some gorse and blackberry, and a few small healing landslips. Not very exciting you may say, but this is good country for ground orchids, and it is easy to select a grassy route up the slope.

The first orchid, probably on a little clay bank, is likely to be Thelymitra longifolia, one of the so-called sun-orchids. The leaf may be long, as the name implies, but often it will have been bitten short during the spring. It is rather like a narrow strap of green licorice, bending under its own weight and with several equal ridges along its under surface. The flower stalk stands erect and carries up to half a dozen flowers, one above the other. Buds tend to be greenish or purplish, but the open flower is usually waxy white, in the shape of an evenly six-pointed star perhaps three quarters of an inch across. An important part to look at is the small column in the middle. Its top is brown to almost black, sometimes tinged with yellow and it arches forward like a little hood or bonnet. A lens will show two tiny pompoms of white hairs tucked under this bonnet, and if your hand is steady enough you can pull these away and see underneath the pollen and the sticky stigma. This is the species that prompted the Forsters, two hundred years ago, to coin the name Thelymitra because the stigma, the female part (thelus) is covered by a little hat or mitre.

Next, perhaps on a rather drier bank, you may find another Thelymitra that has flowered a few weeks earlier. Its leaf and stem will be narrower, and by this time quite a deep pinkish colour as they begin to harden off. Any flowers not too far gone will show shades of lilac inside while the top of the column has a centre-parting, so to speak, and on each side is a tallish tuft of white hairs. This is T. pauciflora; it is not necessarily few-flowered, though that is what the name means.

A third Thelymitra on this slope seems to prefer slightly more shaded banks. Its leaf tends to be narrower and less drooping, and more V-shaped in section usually with only one central rib down the back. The flower colour is quite strong, in the range between pink and blue and to me reminiscent of lavender flowers. Here the reddish column top is not hooded over the stigma, but stands straight up rather like a stiff collar with a yellow border. The little hair

tuft on either side is paler yellow and fully in view. This is T. hatchii which for a long time was confused with other species. It received its name only in 1968, as a tribute to Mr E.D. Hatch of Auckland who has grown and written about New Zealand orchids for almost 25 years.

At the top of this first slope you should bear to the left above the bush and presently you will be approaching a shallow valley with a boundary fence running through it. This is a good place to see a fourth species of Thelymitra which likes damp peaty ground. This T. pulchella lives up to its name in being a little beauty, though not necessarily the prettiest of all. The flowers are again in subtle shades between pink and blue but this time marked with stronger blue stripes. The column is usually rich dark red, only slightly hooded, and the hair tuft on each side is represented by a few filaments of golden yellow, or by reddish or white teeth on an irregular little flap or lobe.

You may find other kinds of Thelymitra in this general area, perhaps a different species with striped flowers, or one with blue spots on the petals. Remember to look at the details of the column, and to keep a note of the colours of the various parts. In the 75 acres of View Hill Reserve, stretching south west of the boundary fence, 15 species of orchids have been recorded, many of them in forest. The only other one to be mentioned here is a Pterostylis or greenhood that can easily be seen on this grassland walk.

A high rounded windy hilltop lies somewhat to the north of the T.pulchella place and in a flatish depression on its near slopes scrub is burnt off from time to time. Here plants of Pterostylis montana can be found in some numbers in a good season. The smallest are in the most open places and stand only two inches high at flowering, their leaves a sickly yellowish colour, but where grass grows longer in the protection of a shrub a fine green plant may be six inches tall. The flowers are much smaller than those of the more familiar P. banksii and of a plump chubby shape without any elongated tips.

Having paid your respects to these small but aristocratic flowers, and perhaps photographed them, you will find the way back to your car short and easy, and you should return empty-handed.

ACACIAS NEAR BURNHAM

by C.W.H. Dunn

The recent interest in dyes from plants reminded me of the efforts of my grandfather John Dunn during the eighteen-seventies at Burnham. He bought land half a mile West of Dunns Crossing on the main South Railway Line at Weedons.

John Dunn applied for this crossing to be formed as it shortened the journey to his cousins, Days of Days road in Springston, by way of what is now known as Dunns Crossing Road.