

COLOUR AT ARTHUR'S PASS

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For those who are fortunate enough to have time to spare for a week or more at Arthur's Pass in the latter part of November or early December there are many rewards awaiting them in this area of botanical wealth. From the non-academic angle it is a time of absorbing interest and much gratification provided by certain colour displays at this time.

For those with limited time available there will be a natural inclination to view at once the superb show of Ranunculus lyallii and Ourisia macrodonta to be found over a considerable area round the summit of the Pass, with their less conspicuous neighbours, Angelica, Anisotome, Hebe (Subalpine, odora, etc.), Celmisias (discolor and bellidioides) and the ubiquitous but not less attractive Helichrysum bellidioides. Surrounding this amazing profusion of gold-centred white on soft green is the overall cover of reds, russets and tawny yellow provided by the usual subalpine Coprosmas, tussocks, Dracophyllums, ferns, Olearias and numerous others amongst which the yellow-greens of Dacrydium (biforme and bidwillii) stand out conspicuously. The orchid group is well represented by Pterostylis and the occasional dainty white Caladenia, usually single or in groups of two or three. Dracophyllum longifolium in flower is worthy of close study as are the ground plants such as Drapetes, Cyathodes, Pimelia, Raoulia (grandiflora) and others.

It is not necessary, however, to go so far afield in search of colour. Nearer at hand, within less than half a mile of the township, varying shades of red are readily encountered. A short walk along any of the well-tended tracks (Scott's, Bridal Veil, Punchbowl, etc.) brings to notice at least three outstanding sources of colour. Firstly, the occasional flowering beech with its brilliant red flowers giving the entire tree a russet-red colour noticeable here and there when the bush is viewed from a distance. The colour lasts several weeks and then quickly fades when the pollen is produced. Less striking but of an equally intense red are the male catkins of the Phyllocladus alpinus, less than a centimeter in length, in clusters of three, four or five placed terminally on the twigs. The colour changes briefly to bright yellow as pollen forms. An observant eye is at first necessary but as most of the trees are low-growing they soon become appreciated for their contribution of colour. Next, a less well known, is Archeria traversii. This tree could, and probably is, readily mistaken for manuka by the uninitiated but it is certainly a striking feature of the bush in this region. The terminal racemes are at first inconspicuous and it is only when they merge slowly

from creamy-yellow to pink, and finally, magenta that they attract attention. Beech, Phyllocladus and Archeria can be seen without leaving the road but are best appreciated when seen in the more remote areas reached by the tracks.

Mention could be made of many other flowering plants to be found at this time. One of the more interesting would be the Pittosporum crassicaule with its almost minute flowers (5 to 6 mm), purple to black in colour. The bushes are characteristically straight and narrow to a height of a metre or more - untidy, tortuously branched and scarcely attractive. Astelia nervosa is flowering with its striking stems of purple and gold fruits twining gradually to dull brown and green. Most appealing among the whites, and found especially near the stream beds are the "waterfall" Celmisias (bellidioides) changing to seemingly bare rock above running water. Nearby are found Ourisia caespitosa in abundance. Geums are plentiful but not yet in flower.

Adverse weather, including rain and wind, the latter up to gale force, seems to have little effect as a rule on any of these tree and plant flowers unless unduly prolonged. It is remarkable that what would appear to be a vulnerable plant like Ranunculus lyallii shows little, if any, signs of damage to either flowers or foliage after exposure to several days of weather that would lay waste the average domestic garden.

The list is far from complete being merely intended to convey to enthusiasts generally and amateurs in particular the value of a visit to this interesting and captivating area at any time in the pre-Christmas weeks, say, from mid-November onwards.
