

THE OCTOBER EXCURSION.

On Sunday, October the 8th, a small party spent the day at Slievehaun, Mrs. Samson's Silverstream property. The weather was kind, except that a dull morning kept some members away, and a drenching shower caught us as we hurried to the return train.

From the station we crossed the line and, taking several turns to the right, came after about 20 minutes to a valley running roughly parallel to the railway line and to the east of it. This valley, still in the original forest, and the scrub-clad hills immediately surrounding it, were all we had time to explore - only a small portion of the whole 50 acres.

On the road up to the cottage the most showy plant was Clematis indivisa in full and very generous flower. Builders of new houses had saved the vines when they cleared the tall manuka from their sections, and were being well rewarded for their care by masses of flowers, sometimes as much as three feet through and six to eight feet high. Clearia vincta as a six-foot tall bush in manuka beside the road attracted some attention.

By judicious clearing and planting, Mrs. Samson has made a very attractive garden about her own house - all of natives, of course. Two fine specimens of the elastic palm (Cordyline indivisa) might be specially mentioned. From the back door an apparently interminable flight of steps, cut in the steep clay hillside, led up to "Heaven", the highest part of the property, but it is doubtful if anyone was sufficiently energetic to climb to the top to see if the name was appropriate.

The main valley is narrow and steep-sided with a rapidly-trickling little stream running down it. The forest is tall and very wet on the western side, but seemed drier on the east where there are several fine beech trees. The wetter parts have a great wealth of filmy ferns and bryophytes, probably as good as any to be seen in the wet Tararua foothills.

Above, the forest merges into manuka scrub covering the dry hard clay ridges that we have come to regard as typical of Hutt Valley hills, though they were tree-clad to the tops not so many years ago. As is always the case in spring-time, the manuka slopes had a good show of orchids and in all some ten species were noted, the more interesting being Pterostylis graminea, P. foliata, Cyrtostylis oblonga, Corysanthes rotundifolia, and a few plants with immature flowers of Corysanthes oblonga.

On the ridges themselves there is a fair amount of gorse, and an interesting demonstration was given of the aggressiveness of this weed. In a plot wire-covered to keep out opossums, tomatoes were grown until after the outbreak of war in 1939. Now gorse growing through the wire is ten feet or so tall, with stems - or trunks - a good four inches through.

Returning to the house we met the "heavenly" steps mid-way, and found their dry clay sides adorned with a fine growth of lichens of many species. We caught a glimpse of the pair of native pigeons that have long lived and nested in this small valley.

Tea served by Mrs. Samson was much appreciated, as was also an invitation to return at some later date. Most of those present regarded the day merely as an introduction to a very delightful place - a valuable remnant of the old Hutt Valley forest.

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D'URVILLE AND STEPHEN ISLANDS.

In the Records of the Dominion Museum (vol. 1, pages 193-227) published in October last, Dr. Oliver deals with the vegetation and flora of these islands. A summary of Dr. Oliver's lecture on this subject appeared in our Bulletin No. 7. In the taxonomic notes the following are of special interest: Pyrrhosia serpens (Forst. f.) Oliver for Polypodium serpens or Cyclophorus serpens; Isolepis (unfortunately misprinted Isolepsis) for certain species of Scirpus; Hymenanthera alpina (T. Kirk) Oliver for H. dentata var. alpina; Hebe urvilleana Oliver n. sp. bearing a general resemblance to Simpson's and Thomson's H. lapidosus and H. fruticosi, but differing in the relative sizes of the flower parts.

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