

A DAY WITH THE LEVIN FLORA CLUB.
(17.6.45.)

It was raining when the train left Wellington, the southerly still raging, but before reaching Levin we ran into beautiful weather. With my host and hostess I set out for the dunes in the cool calm of a bright morning. At the rendezvous the party assembled; by carloads, by bicycle and one by horse. There were of us fifteen men, five women, a lad and a lass. The lad led at a good pace, and soon the party was stretched out over a quarter of a mile. The way was up a dune valley, up the crest over springy pasture, down into a cosy valley covered thick with the square stemmed twig rush, on up another ridge, the path obscured by lupins, but the President with his slasher could be seen clearing the way for the ladies. Then we saw another dune-hollow with bracken, manuka and taumangi, and an occasional wild irishman. Beyond a low intervening ridge was a higher slope clad in forest and crowned with kanuka. Soon the fire was made, the big billy boiled, knapsacks opened, and, our backs comforted by the warm sand, our fronts in the full glow of the sun, we ate and drank and chatted.

Then we were led to the forest itself, soon to separate into small groups, which ever and anon reformed as group met group and parted and met again. Cheery it was to hear the cries from all around as one interesting thing after another came into view. For this little forest was a most interesting combination of species, so unlike the stately dune-hollow pukatea forest of Himitungi, and the kohekohe groves of Waikanae, that it seemed as if Nature had said "Let us here show how many sorts of trees can flourish on dune-sand".

Charming were the outskirts with red mapau shading slender kanuka, close-grown Coprosma rhamnoides, its small black fruits shining like the eyes of some shy but alert little bird, twiggy taumangi full of its rich red or occasionally white fruits (the lass of the party proudly displayed a pink-fruited specimen), a Carmichaelia (we must await Mr. George Simpson's monograph before we dare to name it) in plenty and a beautiful sight it must be in its season; Taking pride of place were well-shaped bushes of Corokia cotoneaster, queening it with a glorious display of red fruits. How Gene Stratton Porter would have rejoiced to have this and the taumangi on her "bloodied slope" in her famous garden.

Some of these accompanied us into the forest itself. Here were lancewoods, juvenile, adolescent, mature, puzzling us with their varied forms. Here were matai, hinau, totara, miro, kaikomako, ngaio, titoki, kohuhu, rewarewa, porokaiwhiria, rororo - and more. I missed the kowhai, which has, I was told, exceptionally large flowers. Clematis hexopala and Parsonsia capsularis were the most prominent lianes and must brighten the grove in flowering time. Epiphytes were not lacking, including Farina mucronata, the creeper fern (we must learn to call it Pyrrosia serpens I suppose), and that interesting orchid Sarcocochilus adversus. Asplenium flaccidum hung from the crotches and also trailed over mossy banks.

Shrubs and ferns were plentiful on the forest floor, young ones coming up copiously. Struggling against the attacks of cattle were bitten down hangihangi. Pale Pteris tremula showed out against the darker bracken and shield ferns. Asplenium bulbiferum and A. lucidum were also suffering. A. hookerianum nestled in corners, and several puzzling forms may be crosses with A. bulbiferum. If only cattle could be fenced out, what a riot of growth there would be. Such an unusual type of forest should surely be preserved and cared for.

Most appealing of all, perhaps, were the mossy breadths besprinkled with Pterostylis trullifolia, Acianthus sinclairii, Corysanthes triloba, all in full flower, while Arthropodium candidum made grass-green patches. But no, the fungi were equally enticing, blues and reds, browns and purples and yellows, most diversely shaped, for which I could only invent names for my own pleasure. Alas, the collector tripped and fell (was it the yard-long stalks of Carex lucida that caught him?) and the fragile specimens were spoiled. Glancing over the late Miss Dalrymple's delightful booklet, "Fungus Hunting in Otago" I thought I recognized some of them.

Altogether over ninety species were noted in this little forest and its outskirts. A careful search is bound to add still more to the list that the Club is building up.

And all the while the sun was shining, the sky clear, the air still; and we could now and then catch broad glimpses of the white wastes of sand, diversified with patches of grey tauhinu or the darker manuka and bracken, and watch the breakers rolling in to the long stretch of coast. Again a spell for refreshment and talk over the adventures of the day, and it was time to pack up,

clean camp, and return to record another day of pure delight, to sit by the roaring fire and recall what each had seen and thought. The next day gloomed as we approached Wellington, and at the station a shower of hail greeted me.
H.H.Allan.

(Taumangi is Cyathodes acerosa; koku-hu is Pittosporum tenuifolium; rororo is Olea montana. Corysanthos triloba displayed at the June meeting was labelled C. oblonga in error.)

PLANT COLLECTING DO'S AND DONT'S.

We are all proud of our New Zealand vegetation for the many beauties it presents in single species of outstanding appearance and in a plant cover of great beauty for all parts of the country. We are proud, too, that so many New Zealand plants are true New Zealanders, found nowhere else. Three quarters of our flora is endemic. The great variability of many species, the common occurrence of 'juvenile' forms and widespread natural hybrids are features of especial interest, possibly related to the high percentage of endemics. Certainly we have a flora worth knowing, and one to stimulate our botanical studies.

One good way to get to know our plants is to grow them. By watching them and caring for them in a garden we may find out quite a lot from them; but we must remember that the best place to study plants is in their own environment. We can hope to unravel some of the problems of our native plants only by studying native vegetation, where many plants grow together in a delicately balanced community. Collecting for gardens therefore, must be done with the utmost caution. We must be vigilant to maintain what little natural vegetation is left. We want to study it as it is, ourselves, and those who come after us will certainly also want to see it.

In order to preserve the bush that we know the following rules should be noted: -

Collect no plant unless you are sure that you can grow it. Take nothing that has a chance of succeeding where it is.

Take nothing that can be got from another garden or nursery. Best of all, raise your own plants from seed or cuttings.

If you do collect in the bush take only very small plants, and immediately they are pulled up tie some moss or damp leaves firmly round the roots. Look especially along the track or roadside. The slashing and tramping that keeps the track clear opens a space of bare soil to the light and here many seedlings come up. Those may not mature if the track is kept open, so they may as well be removed to a garden. Similarly, on the roadside where cuttings and drains are regularly cleaned many seedlings are found and may be rescued before the roadman gets them. A few yards of road is a more fertile ground for seedlings than a mile of dense bush. Along a river-bank also, many seedlings will be found on the bush borders which are swept clean by floods.

Small plants from one to six inches high are the only ones worth taking. Larger plants will probably fail and should be left where they are. It is a dismal sight to see folk despoiling the bush of plants which would have grown well if left in their proper place and which will likely die in a foreign garden. Too often, people who start with enthusiasm for the native vegetation get collectors' mania and become dangerous enemies of that which they pretend to love. Before you collect anything in the bush hold your trowel and consider if it is really legitimate to take the find home.

Greta B. Cone.

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MEETING PILULARIA NOVAE-ZEALANDIAE.

Travellers' Valley must have been well-known in the eighties when it lay on the main land route from Nelson and Marlborough to Canterbury. Today the cattle man does some mustering thereabouts, a deer culler looks the place over perhaps every couple of years, and an occasional trumper trudges through. Only very rarely does a botanist get to this remote corner where W.T.L.Travers long ago did the pioneer collecting.

An almost imperceptible watershed separates the upper Wairau River a little above its gorge, from the series of tarns that lead to Travellers' Valley.