

Cobb Valley — Easter 1969

THE official leaving time came and went. There were rumours of our being diverted to Blenheim, but two hours late, we finally flew into the gloom of Nelson. Apart from our pushing the bus through a muddy stretch of unformed road at the head of the Cobb reservoir, the journey was without further incident. It was a wet 2 a.m. by the time the thirty-odd persons had piled into the two-roomed, eight-bunk, Trilobite hut. Its sides fairly bulged; in fact there was hardly room for a horse's hair.

Next morning, tents sprang up all around like multicoloured toadstools. Thirty-nine mouths were counted for breakfast. Later most of the party ventured up valley to inspect the interesting marble bluffs which could be seen above the bush line.

Along the bush edge we were able to study the differences between three divaricating *Pittosporum* species. *Pittosporum anomalum*, with its very shiny seed capsules, differs from other pittosporums in having non-sticky seeds. *Pittosporum crassicaule* and *divaricatum* are very similar in appearance but the former has a rough seed case compared to the smooth capsule of the latter. *Chionochloa conspicua* var. *cunninghamii* with its large toetoe-like flower heads and *Olearia avicenniaefolia*, in full flower, were conspicuous along the Cobb river. Not so obvious was a small group of young *Pittosporum patulum* plants with their distinctive bluntly-toothed linear leaves.

Not far below the bluffs we emerged into a large boggy clearing. It was dominated by two large tussocks, *Chionochloa conspicua* var. *cunninghamii* and *C. rubra* var. (unnamed), together with some hybrids between the two. Several small trees of *Hoheria glabrata* in flower dotted the clearing.

Other interesting plants were seen in the bush, including *Ranunculus hirtus* var. *stoloniferus*, looking like *R. hirtus* but creeping and rooting at the nodes, and *Schizeilema colensoi*, not previously recorded from the South Island. *Astelia nivicola* var. *moriceae* was compared with *A. nervosa* and the differences noted. The wheat-like, drooping heads of *Cockaynea gracilis*, a beautiful bluish colour, were seen at the bush edge just under the marble bluffs.

Rain curtailed our exploration of the bluffs, both this day and two days later, but we did see such plants as *Epilobium gracilipes*, *Helichrysum selago*, *Ranunculus insignis*, *Anisotome haastii*, an unidentified *Hebe* ("Occlusae" group), the two ferns *Asplenium anomodum* and *Cystopteris fragilis*, as well as numerous specimens of *Aciphylla glaucescens*.

Saturday's weather was perfect. We left early for Mt Peel via a good track which leads on to Balloon hut and the Mt Arthur

tableland. Near the upper edge of the beech forest *Cyathea colensoi* was seen showing a typical prostrate trunk. Out in the tussock—mainly *Chionochloa pallens* var. with areas of *C. australis*—were large patches of red and white snowberries, *Gaultheria depressa* var. *novae-zelandiae*. We could see how this variety differed from *G. depressa* var. *depressa*, also found up here, which is distinctly setose on the leaf margin. *Coprosma cheesemanii*, with masses of orange berries, was prominent. Scattered throughout the tussock were many clumps of *Gentiana gracilifolia* thrusting up beautiful flowers from loose clusters of narrow, linear leaves, and several fine specimens of *G. corymbifera* were also seen.

From the ridgetop spread a commanding panorama stretching from Lake Peel, across the tableland—a patchwork of bush and tussock—to Mt Arthur and the Twins, then sweeping north to where the hazy coastline curved towards Nelson. Below, the four-mile-long Cobb reservoir lay glass-like, while beyond rose the many ranges of N.W. Nelson.

The track now crossed the ridge and sidled around to Lake Peel. On rock debris below bluffs near the lake flowered *Traversia baccharoides*, *Aciphylla glaucescens* and the tiny, seldom seen *Gentiana filipes*, endemic to this area. The occasional flower appeared on *Celmisia traversii*, *Celmisia dallii* and *Senecio adamsii* but the curious *Cheesemania latesiliqua*, with its neat rosette of narrow, coarsely serrated leaves, showed only the remains of a long, branched seed-head rising from its centre. *Celmisia bellidioides* grew also on the rocks.

Around the lake grew the orange whipcord *Hebe ochracea*, *Gentiana patula*, *Astelia nivicola* var. *nivicola*, *A. petriei*, *A. linearis* var. *linearis* and higher up *A. graminea*. Here grew also the rarely seen grass *Agropyron ensyii*. Climbing up under the bluffs of Mt Peel we came upon *Hebe macrantha* var. *brachyphylla* and an unnamed species of *Hebe* ("Subdistichae" group). On the wet cliffs were *Ourisia caespitosa*, *Ourisia sessiliflora* var. *simpsonii* and *Senecio bellidioides* (in flower). Near the top, the bluish clumps of vegetable sheep, *Raoulia rubra*, clung to the rocks. Looking very much like the tussock in which it grew was *Aciphylla anomalum*.

The summit of Mt Peel at 5,352 ft (almost 1000 ft above Lake Peel and 2,700 ft above the Cobb reservoir) is broad. Extensive screes spread from the top down the southern slopes, while tussock and herbfield predominate on the northern side. Here were the cushion plants *Celmisia sessiliflora* and *Anisotome imbricata* var. *imbricata*. From the summit, the scree and rock spread south and westwards to where the straight line of marble bluffs previously visited appeared to thrust up through this older rock (roughly 550 million years old). Blending well with their surroundings, the scree plants were not easy to see. *Epilobium pycnostachyum*, *E.*

margaretae, *Notothlaspi australe*, *Haastia sinclairii*, *Parahebe cheesemani* and the curious little *Lobelia roughii* grew here. On more stable rock grew an unnamed gentian with neat, folded leaves and compact habit.

Although the list for this area was already long, it was surprising what new species were still pulled out of a bag that night from "just back of the hut". This included the rare *Ourisia modesta*, not previously recorded from the Cobb.

Sunday was once again wet but in spite of this everyone was still out botanising. One party returned to the marble bluffs, another walking up valley to Chaffey's hut and a third ascending to the bush line on Iron Hill across the valley. This last party brought back specimens of the large-leaved *Senecio hectori*.

On the last full day the party split again, one group going to the head of Myttons creek and another to Lake Cobb at the head of the Cobb valley. The pace of this latter party was very fast for a start and it was fortunate that there were several interesting plants to see and investigate. The tiny orange-fruited spires of *Gunnera dentata* were found along the river bank, contrasting with the comparatively large berries of *Coprosma petriei*, a translucent blue with darker stripes. A gentian with pink-striped flowers (apparently unnamed) was also seen along the river's edge. Several twiggy plants of *Coprosma dumosa*, with thick white stems and dark red berries grew on the tussock flats.

Near the head of the valley the tussock was interspersed with patches of beech forest where *Gentiana spenceri* was prominent. Cobb hut was a neat little building with four bunks. From here the track climbed a small saddle to Lake Cobb, set amongst beech forest in which *Dracophyllum traversii* featured, *Pittosporum lineare* was here also. The lake was a gem, surrounded by bush above which rose the tussock tops, and with a narrow beach forming the shoreline. It was an idyllic spot.

To the west of the lake towered a large rocky peak which we were soon climbing. Pushing through a narrow belt of thick scrub we emerged into a fairyland of stunted, gnarled, old beech edging pretty tussock clearings dotted with tiny tarns. It would be hard to imagine a more suitable place for dwarfs or goblins. The rock was schist, seemingly rounded and smoothed by glacial action and rising in tiers, each bench or shelf having something new to see. Growing amongst a cushion of *Donatia novae-zelandiae* was the rarely seen *Mitrasacme novae-zelandiae*, while *Celmisia gibbsii* straggled in loose mats over the rocks. The stiff, narrow leaves of *Astelia skottsbergii*, with coarse hairs like hoar-frost, were also found. From higher up we could see the spectacular, saw-toothed ridge of the Anatoki range to the north-west. We were sorry that more time

could not be spent here and considered that another trip based on Cobb hut would be most rewarding.

The last morning was rather wet again as everyone packed up and walked the five miles down to the dam. Here the Electricity Department provides a shelter for the general public with hot water and even hot showers, if you are quick. In the daylight, we could appreciate the narrowness of the road and some of the big drops and hairpin bends. Several brief stops were made on the way home; at the Cobb power house; at an orchard; at a winery; and at Stoke, where fish and chips were added to the apples and wine. It was indeed fortunate that the flight back to Wellington was smooth.

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A preliminary list of Cobb Valley plants has been prepared and is available to members from the Secretary.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

A list of recent books and bulletins about plants and vegetation in New Zealand.

The Natural History of Canterbury, edited by G. A. Knox. A. H. and A. W. Reed, \$13.50. (1969)

Neuseeland: Beobachtungen und Studien zur Pflanzengeographie und Ökologie der antipodischen Inselgruppe (New Zealand: Observations and Studies on the Plant Geography and Ecology of the Antipodean Group of Islands), by Ulrich Schweinfurth. Bonner Geographische Abhandlungen Series, Vol. 36. (1966)

Guide List to Plants: The Otari Open-air Native Plant Museum, Wellington, New Zealand, by R. H. Mole. (1967)

Forestry in New Zealand: The Shaping of Policy, by A. L. Poole. Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, in association with The English Universities Press Ltd., London, \$3. (1969)

The Synecology of the Tararua Indigenous Forests, by D. A. Franklin. Technical Paper No. 53. New Zealand Forest Service, Wellington. (1967)

New Zealand Mosses, by S. Natusch. Pegasus Press, 50 cents. (1969)

Biogeography of the Southern End of the World, by P. J. Darlington Jr. McGraw-Hill Book Co., \$2.95 (U.S.A.). (Paperback ed. 1968)

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