

WALTER BOA BROCKIE 1897 — 1972

Mr Brockie died in Nelson on December 17, 1972. A formal obituary notice, prepared by Margaret Simpson (*N.Z.Jl. Bot.* 12 (1974): 149-156), tells of his early training in Scotland, his service in World War I, his coming to Dunedin in 1921 and his horticultural career in Christchurch (1929-1946) and Wellington (1947-1962); it includes also a list of his many popular and technical publications. Here the emphasis is rather on his connections with our Society.

Mr Brockie came to our attention as the author of *New Zealand Alpines in Field and Garden* (Caxton Press, 1945, 32 pages, 26 photographs) which was enthusiastically reviewed by Mrs Samson (*Bull.* 12:7, July 1945). At about the same time we nominated him for the Loder Cup which was awarded to him in 1945; we commended him (*Bull.* 14:2, August 1946) especially for: (a) the development of the Cockayne Memorial Garden in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens; (b) his booklet on alpine plants; (c) his botanical explorations in Canterbury mountains; (d) his activities in bringing native plants into cultivation in private gardens; (e) his efforts to preserve rare species in their natural habitats, in particular *Ranunculus paucifolius*.

It must have been soon after he took up his appointment as Curator of the Otari Open Air Native Plant Museum that he entertained the Society there; this, the first of many such visits, was on 6 September 1947. The report (*Bull.* 17:7, October 1947) describes the rockery near the top gate and its newly established plants. On this bleak spring afternoon Mrs Brockie's hospitality was "warmly appreciated", as it was to be through the years by local and overseas botanists alike; her continuing kindly interest is displayed in a photograph (*Bull.* 32, December 1961) of the Society's twenty-first birthday cake which she decorated, most appropriately, with a life-size model of one of Mr Brockie's many artificial hybrids — *Ranunculus lyallii* × *insignis* — raised at Otari. Something of subsequent progress at Otari is also recorded in our Bulletins (21:16, August 1949 and 26:12-17, February 1953), the later article illustrated with some of Mr Brockie's own attractive photographs.

From November 1946 to May 1947 Mr Brockie served as a meteorological observer on Campbell Island and he talked to the meeting of November 17, 1957, about the vegetation there. It is fortunate that his full script was reproduced (*Bull.*, 18:2-9, March 1948) as it combines a lively narrative of the expedition with a reliable technical account of the plant cover as it was at that time; it is also a good example of the author's pleasing style and his ability to involve the reader in his experiences — for instance, he writes of tussock-clad uplands wreathed in scudding fog where he rambled about in a "cold, soft-walled world".

Equally valuable is his article (*Bull.*, 29:4-6, August 1957) on the Gouland Downs, based on camps there in 1954 and 1956 for a total of 24 days. This appears to be the first, and until now the only record of the vegetation of this now-so-popular corner of New Zealand. A dwarf *Bulbinella* discovered there was later named *B. talbotii* Moore in honour of Mr H. Talbot to whom Mr Brockie was indebted for botanical companionship on this and many other expeditions and, quite importantly, for transport too as he himself was never a car-driver.

While printed words attest to Mr Brockie's long and useful links with the Society, they indicate only a small part of his total contribution to its welfare and give no inkling of his generous help to individuals in solving botanical problems. All students of the flora owe a debt to his skill and dedication in bringing together native plants from diverse parts of the country to be compared and contrasted at all seasons and many stages of growth. I myself have perhaps more reason than anyone else to acknowledge this debt. Without the fine collection of *Hebe* growing at Otari and the gentle guidance and wide knowledge of Mr Brockie this "most difficult and perplexing" genus might well have remained a permanent obstacle to the completion of *Flora of New Zealand*, Volume 1 (1961).

Mr Brockie's most serious research was a study of the bio-systematics of *Epilobium*. Some of us watched the progress of this work at Otari and recognised the almost insuperable practical difficulties to be faced. Carefully planned experiments led to results that were skilfully analysed and clearly presented in two papers that will always stand as classics in botanical literature: "Breeding systems in New Zealand species of *Epilobium*" (*Trans.*



R. Soc. N.Z. 87 (1959): 189-194) and "Artificial hybridization of New Zealand species and varieties of *Epilobium*" (*N.Z. Jl Bot.* 4 (1966): 336-391). Peter H. Raven, in an article on "Evolution and endemism in the New Zealand species of *Epilobium*"* wrote "Thanks to Brockie's efforts, the New Zealand species of *Epilobium* are probably better known, in terms of the crossing relationships, than any groups of plants of comparable size anywhere in the world".

Older members of the Society may recall an incident on an excursion to the western hills. It happened that Mr Brockie was the first to reach a gate on the windy crest of a ridge. Without a moment's hesitation he vaulted over — and it was a standard five-barred gate! Few men of 60 years would have done this so effortlessly, even with his lithe build. It was perhaps symbolic of his whole outlook which remained youthful even when in later years his physical strength failed. To the end of his life he was observing, learning, and pointing the way to new lines of investigation.

L. B. MOORE

* In *Taxonomy, Phytogeography and Evolution*. Ed. D. H. Valentine. 1972 (pp. 259-74). Academic Press.

