

Book Review

New Zealand Alpine Plants, by A. F. Mark and Nancy Adams.
A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1973. Price \$13.50 (paper),
\$19.50 (hard cover).

PUT together on a project a botanist with the competence of Alan Mark and an artist with the skill of Nancy Adams and you are bound to get something of the quality of *New Zealand Alpine Plants*.

Introductory chapters tell us in 17 illustrated pages about the origin and structure of mountains, the alpine zone, the alpine environment, the alpine flora and the alpine vegetation. The major part of the book is taken up with the illustrations and text relating to over 600 species of ferns and their allies, conifers, dicotyledons and monocotyledons. The plants are treated in families arranged in a more or less evolutionary sequence. Under each genus the origin of the generic name is explained briefly and followed by the main features of the group. For species, too, the origin of the name is given and there are notes on the general appearance, distribution and habitat. The importance of stating the source of the plant depicted is not overlooked. As far as it has been possible the text faces the illustrations on the opposite page. The book closes with a short glossary and an index in three parts — botanical names, common names and families. The double page map of New Zealand showing the mountain ranges on the inside cover of the book is repeated at the back.

Introductory sections are very much to the point and a necessary part of the book. After stumbling over such terms as "Kaikoura Orogeny" and "metamorphosed rocks" near the beginning the reader need have no fear of difficult words because there are none. The glossary barely seems necessary. The alpine zone is quite clearly and simply defined. The alpine flora section covers origins, distribution patterns, flower colour, unisexual plants and flowering behaviour. One deficiency here may be the omission of comments on growth forms.

Readers should not gloss over the section detailing the nine types of mountain vegetation because this is the clearest account I have seen of the plant communities above the tree line. The pencil sketches are important too because, apart from the frontispiece, these are the only illustrations of the habitats and natural aggregations of plants.

Annotations to the illustrations show Dr Mark's thorough grasp of alpine ecology. Notes on distribution may have come in part from other publications but his remarkably precise notes on habitats reflect very careful personal observation. Some comments

on taxonomy are volunteered but are not laboured. The reader soon appreciates that the last word on classifying and naming New Zealand plants has not been written. Complexities of nomenclature are avoided but the layman may be confused somewhat by the inadequate explanation on p. 38 of the different forms of buttercup going under the same name.

The maps show the mountain ranges adequately but the number of times Mt Hikurangi appears in the text warrants some indication of where it is. There is some advantage in having the map duplicated in the back of the book but the space could have been used to greater effect by giving a more detailed map of the alpine region of the South Island.

New Zealand Alpine Plants is a book full of colour. Plants are not given the "warts and all" treatment but neither are they glamorised. The artist has made a commendable job of portraying the plants as they appear in the field. Not too much of the natural posture of the plant is sacrificed to show the distinguishing features. For many of the snow tussocks, however, the elegance of the plant is not revealed by showing only the distinctive features of the leaf tufts. Some other species are treated a little unevenly. *Celmisias* and spaniards are delightful but *Ranunculus lyallii* lacks the lustre that we associate with this outstanding plant; and the beautiful detail of the stems of *Corallospartium* is not matched in the small cushions and mats which are difficult to portray. The pencil sketches blend very successfully with the water colours.

The dust cover made me want to open the book. If this is the test of a good jacket then this one scores. The book, unfortunately, is not comfortable to handle, mainly because of its weight and nearly-square format. With the high cost difference between the hard-bound and soft-bound alternative we could expect good binding, but in the review copy the last two pages were parting from the spine. The ill-fitting plastic cover was probably added by the local bookseller.

It is not the fault of the authors that the material would not fit into a book that could be carried easily in pocket or pack. The next step seems to be a tramper's edition compressed in size. One or several pencil or ink drawings could go on each page with the unchanged text. This could be encompassed in a book no larger than Vol. II of the *Flora of New Zealand*.

So much for the merits and minor demerits of the book. The next question is—What will be the outcome of having this attractive and authoritative book available? Without question it will give botanists and non-botanists alike a greater knowledge and appreciation of mountain plants. What greater purpose could the book serve?

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