

NATIVE ORCHIDS IN ASHLEY FOREST

John Thompson

We have to thank the Forestry Department for the forming of walking tracks through the Black Beech portion of the Ashley Forest. There are a number of tracks to choose from, some quite lengthy, all commencing near one point.

After obtaining your permit from the Forest Headquarters, drive along the Ridge Road which later becomes the Mt Grey Road. The views along this road are superb, one should not hurry. After some 12 miles take the left hand road, down hill, marked Okuku. The picnic area will be found across the concrete causeway at the bottom of the hill.

A sign board provides information on the tracks, together with a map. The tracks we followed were well marked.

On the 23rd December, 1980 members of the Canterbury Orchid Society travelled part of the circular track in search of native orchids. This track abounds with ferns ranging from small filmy ferns, at least three species, to many specimens of tree ferns, mostly Cyathea medullaris. A delight to the eye.

The first orchids to be noticed were in the grass adjoining the notice board. Here were several patches of Pterostylis montana, the largest plants I have ever seen, easily identified by the beautiful brownish shade of the leaves and stems, and the sharply pointed leaves.

Not far along the track, on a clay bank grew a number of Thelymitra with very dark green stems and leaves. The flower buds were not developed enough to enable accurate identification but the plants were likely to be T. hatchii.

At many places along the track were seen the orbicular leaves of Corybas trilobus identified by an apiculate point on the leaf. As this orchid is an early season flowerer, no

flowers were observed but a number of fruiting stems, which elongate after fertilisation, were evident.

One patch of some 50 splendid specimens of Pterostylis banksii were noticed by the side of the path.

A little way along from the P. banksii two small patches of Caladenia lyallii were growing with the flowers not fully developed. The stem is covered with soft silky hairs and the leaves are lanceolate.

Growing on a rotted log were many plants of Chiloglottis cornuta, known in Australia as the bird orchid. These two leaved orchids were in full flower and with imagination could be said to resemble birds.

A patch of light green Thelymitra with wide strap like leaves proved on examination to be T. longifolia bearing white coloured flowers with dark green colouring underneath the petals.

On a bank near the concrete causeway over the river grew two species of orchids. One was a dark coloured Thelymitra not sufficiently developed to be identified. Below were a number of Microtis unifolia in full flower. A most attractive bank.

In shady places along the river grew patches of Corybas macranthus many with dark coloured flowers shaped like a helmet, the sepals and petals bearing long filiform points.

This very short visit has whetted our appetite for a much longer walk along these tracks next December.

[In October, 1981, John and Phyllis with Yvonne and self repeated this walk along the circular track. The Forestry Department had upgraded the track in parts and made it easier for walking, but some tidying up had been done and it would seem that some of the more desirable patches of orchids beside the renovated track had disappeared. John intends watching over the seasons and we hope that some may, in time, reappear.Ed.]