

WESTPORT CAMP 1985 - SNIPPETS

Stan Reid

Follow the downward flow of Charming Creek in West
 coast rain, past remnants of mine and mill,
 Sleepered track of silver pine softly coal-carpeted,
 hedged by youthful beech and native pines,
 Red and silver, yellow and white with totara, cedar,
 and mikimiki merging to green luxury.

Beyond the tunnel and 'long the overhang, Morgans
 daisy flowers startling white in the semi-dark,
 Where Ngakawau in spate is released from its
 rock-walled narrows,
 To thunder o'er the falls and swallow our
 gentle creek.

Was it but yesterday we revelled in late sun's
 warmth 'mid Fredericks mountain flowers,
 To overlook a sweep of ocean blue and surf-rimmed
 coastal plain sinking into shadow?
 Inland the grey and tortured coal-'riched plateau and
 gentle upper waters of that same Ngakawau.

VENUE. Westport might well have been chosen to contrast most markedly with the Central Otago scene during the previous summer in regard to climate, topography, geology and vegetation. But in retrospect the contrasts within the Westport area covered by our field trips were almost as great, except for climate. "Barren heath" could be a suitable description for the Denniston and Stockton plateaux and for some man-induced pakahi, while "all-pervading greenness" could be applied to the forest in its many variations, especially as one approaches Karamea where weather intervened to preserve the sanctity of a certain spot where Lindsaea viridis grows to perfection. Bot. Soc. Journal No 9, 1976 contains Dr. Lucy Moore's "The Land of the Epacrids" written following the Society's summer camps at Westport

some 10 years ago; this paper should have prepared us for a number of surprises during our visits to the coal-bearing plateaux, including a resemblance noted in their topography and that of the flat-topped Central Otago mountains. My snippet on the plants seen by us reflects the particular corners into which we poked. The dry comfort afforded by C. U. Geology Dept. field station was fully appreciated by the party whose small numbers invited the warm degree of friendship; a varied programme reflected the work put in by Philippa and Margaret, along with that of Ian to whom the Westport area has been home for a lifetime and the source of unfailing interest in the plants and especially at expert level in certain insect groups.

K DENNISTON AND STOCTON. On a fine day that invited extensive coverage of the Denniston plateau, a locked gate only a short distance above what remains of the town, and of the foundations of the school where Dr. H.H. Allan had his first teaching post, had the effect of focussing our attention on plants growing by one of the dams and adjacent higher ground. The natural poverty of the soils and the exposure probably account for the absence of many of the semi-alpine plants commonly found elsewhere at similar altitudes, but in that area, so changed by man's mining and related activities, one might have expected to see more aggressive adventives. Near the dam on damp sites the native herbaceous species included Euphrasia disperma and Utricularia monanthos (both flowering attractively), Donatia cushions, Hemiphues and Mitrasacme; on drier bare ground a pinkish-flowered Thelymitra (not open enough to identify) was abundant. What looked like little orange and red toadstools turned out to be capsules of an uncommon moss (Pleurophascum grandiglobum).

At Stockton, and to a lesser extent at Denniston, much of the surface is bare rock, but the characteristic vegetation elsewhere reminded me of what one sees on harsh sites overseas e.g. ultramafic (mineral belt) areas in New Caledonia, high latitude N. Hemisphere areas with a meagre soil layer over ice-scraped rock and leached, high altitude tropical soils. Plants on such sites must obviously have the capacity to survive in a hostile environment, and certain similarities may be seen. Conifers are common, to all these sites, those in New

Zealand, New Caledonia and New Guinea being mostly from primitive families; the Denniston plateau conifers are Dacrydium spp. along with some Phyllocladus alpinus. Other "survivors" in such sites include Lycopodiums, sedges and woody dicotyledons belonging to either of the heath families (epacrids in Southern Hemisphere), the beech family represented by Nothofagus in Southern Hemisphere, the myrtle family with Leptospermum and Metrosideros (the latter is well-known as a pioneer) and Araliaceae (Pseudopanax, 3 spp) with some reservations. In mentioning Nothofagus one has to concede that its Northern Hemisphere counterpart is Betula in its own family. A striking feature of Nothofagus in New Caledonia where all five species grow on ultramafic sites is that at least two species grow also on more "normal" sites. It may be remarked that the plants referred to are dominant on the hostile sites because more vigorous families do not compete.

On our way up to both plateaux there was plenty of botanical interest to be noted in the forest belts which are as rich in species and luxuriance as the plateaux are poor. Metrosideros parkinsoni eluded us on the Denniston zigzag but a handsome small flowering tree, growing with southern rata near the top of the incline seemed to fit the description. A rock overhang where the road approaches the Stockton plateau was Ian's chosen spot for seeing Gleichenia flabellata. Scrub nearby consisted mainly of southern rata, manuka, gorse, Quintinia, three species of Dracophyllum on rock, Cyathodes empetrifolia and a divaricating Pittosporum, with Gleichenia circinata ground cover.

Our day at the Stockton mining area was grey in the rock and grey in the weather with rain at times, and there was no revised map to show whence the familiar roads had gone. As the cloud lifted in early afternoon a newly-formed road was followed southward and upward apparently to a blind end from which many of the party headed off on foot. Plant photography is anti-social and my clamber up to an ill-defined knob had all the joys of finding a wealth of flowering alpine, some of uncertain identity, on an unfamiliar site in warm windless conditions - except the joy of human company. Celmisia

hieracifolia, C. dallii and one of two other Celmisia species or hybrids grew with Forstera mackayi whose large twinned flowers were particularly fine, among flat rocks with closely appressed blue-green Dracophyllum pubescens. Flower-studded rounded mats of manuka provided another variation in plant form. Limestone-like (actually quartz sandstone) in its creviced and sculptured tabletop summit, the hill became identifiable as a subsidiary of Mt. Frederick where my companions were visible and audible in their excitement about the abundant flowers and the views in all directions. Mt Augustus had been one of our objectives - a worthy one as described in Dr Lucy Moore's paper- but Mt Frederick with its slightly greater height and slightly different flora was entirely satisfying. The purpose of the road reaching almost to the summit is somewhat of a mystery, and even foreboding, as we should like the mountain to give as much enjoyment to other plant lovers as it gave to us. A species list for the mountain would show its wealth in comparison with the grey plateau below, with at least seven Celmisias, and a good representation of other sub-alpine and alpine genera: it would have asterisks against Astelia subulata and A. linearis which Margaret and Ian found growing together. But the list would do scant justice to the beauty of that place, to the plant form and colour contrasts amid the emergent rock masses.

A SORT OF PAKIHI. The presence of Metrosideros parkinsonii near Denniston was noted. Later the trip over the Karamea bluff on the coast road confirmed the presence of northern rata as large trees; for both species the southern distribution limit given in the "Flora" is latitude 40deg 30min i.e. in the vicinity of Greymouth. Our southern-most excursion was when Ian took us a little south of Charleston (about latitude 42 deg.) to what was described as a partially man-induced pakihi. This was on "broken country" near sealevel with a scanty clothing of low scrub (manuka, gorse, tall Gahnia) with bare ground, the main point of interest being the return of some forest species especially shrub size southern ratas which at 2 m height carried epiphytic orchids Dendrobium (in flower) and Bulbophyllum plus Lycopodium billardieri. But also of interest was

AN EX-EDITOR'S WANDERINGS

John Thompson

LATE FLOWERS. one does not expect to see many native shrubs in flower late in the season. On a visit to the Ellesmere Spit on 13th April. 1985 we observed numerous shrubs of Muehlenbeckia complexa in full flower. They were unexpected particularly at the end of a long season of drought. One shrub of Coprosma propinqua attracted attention by reason of the Parsonsia heterophylla which grew in the centre of it bearing 5 cymes of freshly opened flowers protruding from the top of the bush. A week later we saw a few flowers of both species in the Orton Bradley Park.

Pneumatopteris pennigera. The waterfall gully in the above park contains many plants of this fern growing at the edge of the stream. Two huge specimens grow in a shady gully a little below the first fall. It is worth the effort in climbing the gully just to look at these giants. Whilst you are at the second fall don't forget to look at the orchid, Corybas macrantha, which grows on the cliff over the falls. You must expect to have a little water dropping on you from above.

CONTINUATION of Westport Camp 1985 - Snippets

the dispersal of slightly smaller terrestrial northern rats among the sister species. Lower growth consisted of Phormium, Astelia, Gleichenia spp, Lycopodium ramulosum and L. cernuum, terrestrial orchids, Thelymitra sp and Orthoceras (in flower) and abundant Schizaea fistulosa.

To "ring the changes" our lunchtime stop was at Four Mile river bordered by dense podocarp-beech forest with abundant conifer regeneration of rimu, miro, kahikatea, Hall's totara, mountain toatoa, silver pine, pink pine and cedar (Libocedrus) seedlings. Beech trees were red, silver and mountain: undergrowth was varied and dense except in Sphagnum patches. Some of our party braved the river crossing to go up the limestone gorge in good bush, while others travelled by road up the Nile to a viewpoint commanding the broad basin with its extensive pakihi of the Four Mile above the gorge. Rain obscured the Paparoas. On the homeward journey further variety was added by stopping at a dam where Margaret found a rarely seen Utricularia growing as floating threads with Isotoma (flowers like small violet stars) and Myriophyllum. Gumboots should be worn.