

**BOTANIZING, BIRDWATCHING AND SIGHTSEEING:
CASS CAMP, JANUARY 1988**

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Lagoon Saddle & Mt Bruce

The weather was fine and the botany field trips most diverse. On New Year's Day a group went to Lagoon Saddle over Burnt Face and up Mt Bruce. In the beech forest were several species of *Pterostylis* and overhead *Peraxilla tetrapetala* (mistletoe) with numerous rifleman flitting about. Bellbirds chorused all the way to the tussocklands. Out on Burnt Face and in particular Lagoon Saddle were numerous swathes of *Herpolirion novae-zelandiae*. At the top of Mt Bruce (1639 m) cameras clicked catching the panorama of the Waimakariri peaks. At our feet *Leptinella atrata* - a black daisy about the size of a 20 cent piece with rich golden stamens.

Lake Kaurapataka

The only West Coast lake in Arthur's Pass National Park. Early morning and late evening sunlight in the Otira Gorge cause rata blossoms to light up like a precious jewel. Leave your car at the Aickens Forest Research Institute base, cross the Otira River and follow the Taramakau River up stream to Pfeifer Creek. Lake Kaurapataka is well signposted, particularly if you keep close to the forest rather than near the main flow of the Taramakau. Trampers; 3 hours from Aickens. Botanists; 5 hours! (one way).

Lake Kaurapataka is surrounded by a warm welcoming feeling. It is tranquil and peaceful. No sandflies and none of our city rubbish. The area teems with birds that we seldom see on the east coast. We returned to camp with a list of 19 birds and over 130 plant species including 6 genera of orchids.

There are several tracks up the Taramakau River bed but the track by the edge of the bush has rich pockets of ferns interspersed with kahikatea, rimu, totara and miro. At Pfeifer Creek is a beech-kamahi forest with a generous collection of trees, shrubs and perching orchids. The understory is covered with ferns all the way to the lake.

Tmesipteris tannensis commonly grows on rimu and tree ferns. In the forest beside Pfeifer Creek we also found it growing on *Weinmannia racemosa* (kamahi).

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With another group of botanists I returned to the lake in mid February. This time the perching orchids were flowering and the long-tailed cuckoos were calling their sweet melodious tune instead of their harsh rasp-like one. If you would like to go to Lake Kaurapataka and have no one to go with, please write to me. - I'd be delighted to accompany you. There is so much to see and next time would someone please take note of the host plants of the perching orchids. Dr Brian Molloy of Botany Division, D.S.I.R., Lincoln is collecting this information.

Upper Otira track, Warnocks Knob and Mt Philistine

While at summer camp, we had a field trip to the Upper Otira River and to the foot of Mt Rolleston. The Rolleston cirque is where the rare rock wrens and blue ducks can be found. On the day we were there *Ranunculus lyallii*, *Dolichoglottis*, *Celmisia*, *Anisotome pilifera* and *Ourisia* waved their heads amongst the snow tussocks. *Leucogenes grandiceps* (edelweiss) spilt out over the rocks.

At lunchtime I contemplated the opposite hillside. How do people get to Warnocks Knob I wondered? Mt Philistine 1951 m. [6500 ft] was simply out of the question. The collection of castle-like rocks looked most formidable.

In February 1988 I returned to the Upper Otira. We crossed the bridge and turned downstream. We made our way up and across a stable shingle scree. Once out on the ridge I could see Warnock's Knob. It was far below us and I was on my way up Mr. Philistine!

These troublesome-looking rocks are not as difficult as they appear from the valley floor. Although they are steep there is an easy natural staircase-like track through them and up into another alpine meadow. Geums, gentians, edelweiss, *Celmisia*, *Drapetes*, *Pimelea*, *Forstera*, *Ourisia*, *Donatia*, several *Dracophyllum* species and the most sweet smelling of them all, *Pratia macrodon*. All are there in plentiful supply.

From the alpine meadows we could see into the Rolleston cirque and far below us was the fragile Otira road. At our feet was a picturesque tarns surrounded by pure white dainty gentians. Because of a sudden drop in temperature and a menacingly gusty wind we turned back. These rocky outcrops are very exposed and irrespective of the time of year, care is needed.