

Flora of Blue Mountain Station, Marlborough

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Who would guess at the natural wonders to be found just 10 km or so up the Waima (Ure) River? 'Blue Mountain Station' is the home of Mr and Mrs David Buick and here a small party of enthusiasts camped for three days in December 1991. Beyond the homestead the Waima River narrows into a most spectacular gorge. It is deeply incised into tertiary limestone with occasional outcrops of similar age greensands, basalt extrusives and tuffs of the Cookson Volcanics (Lenson 1962) which overlie the basement greywacke.

We were soon to find that a rich flora thrived here. Some of the many plants seen were: *Carmichaelia astonii* in flower, *Helichrysum intermedium* (either spp "a" or "b", Druce & Williams 1989). *Olearia coriacea* and of course vast amounts of *Pachystegia insignis* clinging to the sheer cliffs. Although some *Pachystegia* was in flower most was still in bud. Most spectacular of all, though, were the frequent sightings of the pink broom, *Notospartium carmichaeliae* (including *Notospartium glabrescens*, Druce & Williams 1989). To come suddenly upon this plant in full flower, hanging from the valley sides was a sight not easily forgotten.

Clinging to the rocks at the entrance of 'Saw-Cut Gorge' we had our first glimpse of *Wahlenbergia matthewsii*, not in flower. Occupying a similar habitat, though on wetter sites, was *Parahebe catarractae*.

In the odd patches of bush within these gorges were *Macropiper excelsum* and titoki, *Alectryon excelsus*, all of which indicate a mild climate. There was the usual assortment of shrubby plants including *Pseudopanax anomalous*. *Celmisia semicordata* was fairly common and flowering.

On day two, three members of the party left early to explore Isolated Hill (1039 m). It is not called this for nothing, for it is almost entirely surrounded on all sides by precipitous bluffs and gorges along the Waima, Isolation and Brian Boru Creeks. Access was finally gained from the head of Isolation Creek. A steady climb took us through mainly beech/podocarp mixed broadleaf forest with some large trees of *Nothofagus fusca*, matai and totara. Perched high above a bluff we saw the largest *Olearia paniculata* any of us had ever seen. Festooned with ribbons of old loose bark, it was estimated to be about 1.2 m in diameter. The final ascent, now in limestone, was through dense thickets of mountain totara, with abundant mountain holly.

Our final day was spent on Blue Mountain (1243 m). Although not very high, this mountain is so placed that it affords spectacular views for a full sweep of the compass. Mt Tapuaenuku, Manukau, the Clarence and Awatere Valleys, and Lake Grassmere lay before us.

On south facing slopes of Black Angel Creek, an almost monotypic forest of Hall's totara is making a strong and rapid come-back. Similar regeneration can be seen in neighbouring Headache Creek.

On a nearby greywacke outcrop, we found an interesting assemblage of ferns, *Asplenium flabellifolium*, *Asplenium terrestris* ssp. *terrestris*, *Asplenium trichomanes*, *Cheilanthes distans* and probably *Pellaea* sp. nov. (Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth 1989). We had hoped to find *Pleurosorus rufifolius* here as had the Nelson Botanical Society at Labour Weekend 1991 (Jane 1991).

Weeds do not appear to be a problem on the limestone country but *Buddleia davidii* forms thickets in the upper Isolation Creek. A few plants of *Tussilago farfara* were seen in the Waima.

For those who do not mind getting wet feet in a good cause, this is the place to see many plants not found in Canterbury.

References

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