

## *Chordospartium stevensonii* in George Stream, 19 December 1991

Neil O'Brien

94 Maidstone Road, Christchurch

George Stream is a tributary of the lower Clarence River. From the Department of Conservation hut to the stream itself is but a short walk through a reserve of regenerating lowland forest. Further progress upstream is for the nimble-footed; boulder-hopping the mode of travel.

Sometime later we found ourselves in the steep rugged country. The Kekerengu Fault which passes through the upper reaches of the valley must account, at least in part, for the shattered nature of the terrain.

Here, in this formidable place, we found the weeping broom *Chordospartium stevensonii*. Many of the larger specimens were perched on bluffs or on eroding remnants of terraces. Several specimens which we inspected and photographed were at least 5 m tall; all displaying the characteristic weeping habit. Unfortunately, we were too early to see them in flower (a tree in our garden at a similar stage of bud development, flowered about two weeks later).

Graham Hutchins (1981) tells the interesting story of how *Chordospartium stevensonii* was first discovered in Cuckoo Creek.

"It was here in December 1904 that George Stevenson, who had recently acquired the property Waiautoa Station, first saw the Tree Broom. He had been out inspecting a fence line at the junction where Cuckoo and Calf Creeks joined to form Bob Stream. He wrote:

'It was a single splendid specimen about twenty feet tall and distinct from any species of the related *Carmichaelia* or *Notospartium* with the shape of a perfectly proportioned Weeping Willow tree. The branches were grooved and bare of leaves, the flowers hung in hundreds, about two inches long, each raceme carrying about twenty pale lilac pea-shaped flowers with purple pencil lines on the upper petals.'

Some three years later on the November muster of 1907, snow flattened a fence near to where the original tree had been found. George had reason to enter his neighbours property after some stray sheep. Some half a mile south at the source of Cuckoo Creek in a sheltered basin he found a small grove of *Chordospartium* in full bloom, some of them were 25 feet tall and magnificently proportioned. This basin is about 3000 ft altitude, the highest position that the tree has ever been found.

The *Chordospartium* was pronounced a new species in 1911, the name meaning 'Cord' Broom on account of the whippy branches. The specific name *stevensonii* in honour of the discoverer George Stevenson. It is an interesting fact the seed of this broom had been sent by Mr Humphrey Weld to England and was in flower at Chideock Manor, Dorset before being named in New Zealand in 1911."

It had taken us the best part of five hours to reach this place in the upper George Stream, and with the prospect of another three to four hours of boulder-hopping ahead of us we reluctantly headed for the cars. The weeping broom must surely be one of our most valued botanical treasures; it was most satisfying to see it holding its own in this wild place.

### **Reference**

Hutchins, G. 1981. *A Plantsman in New Zealand*. Wentshaw Printing Services, Fairseat, Kent.