

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CANTERBURY NATIVE FLORA SOCIETY'S BOTANICAL EXPEDITION TO THE HOHONU MOUNTAINS

JOHN THOMPSON

[This voice from the past is the abridged diary of an expedition to Lake Brunner and Hohonu, 20-22 July 1962, by the forerunner of the Canterbury Botanical Society, written by the leader John Thompson, who was then President of the Society. John's whimsical humour shows through.]

"This record of the C.N.F.S. expedition to the Hohonu Mountains is being written with all the accuracy and faithfulness to facts as are at my command. When relinquishing his office my predecessor stated that a term of two years as President . . . was as much as he could stand, though to give him credit, his phrasing was more delicately put than that. After taking part in this expedition, I agree that the strains connected with that office are considerable and would respectfully suggest that a presentation, on the completion of my term of office, of a generous supply of hair dye would help to reinstate one portion of my person to its previous glory.

The members of the Society undertaking this expedition were: Miss Alison Burns, Miss Ann Strong, Mrs Rose, Miss Margaret Hunter, Miss Nan Boyce, Dr Jack B. ... (Ballin) and the writer.

All members entered the West Coast rail car on the evening of the 20th July, together with Mr Rose, who with his wife proceeded to the other carriage. Your President was at this stage slightly worried over the fact that eight ... had entrained, though he had booked hotel accommodation for only seven. He was greatly relieved to find at Springfield that the party was by then reduced to seven, Mr Rose having apparently been dispensed with somewhere between Christchurch and Springfield.

I cannot fail to record the magnificent conduct of Dr B. on this stage of the journey, who not only gave up his own reserved seat to a mother with a baby, but by dint of his strong personality prevented another reserved passenger from taking his seat, thus providing (a seat) for a further mother with children. The only outstanding feature of the rest of the trip to Otira was the remarkable statement made by one of the party that she always became aware of the temperature of a room when (it) reached 85° exactly.

At Otira light rain was falling and this continued until the train reached Inchbonnie where the party alighted. Just as the railcar was about to leave it was noticed that Dr B. and Mrs Rose were not with us. A search party found them still comfortably seated in the train. Their engrossing botanical discussions were rudely interrupted. After considerable delay during which Dr B., the guard and a

few obliging passengers searched for Dr B.'s elusive luggage, the relieved guard waved his train on into the night.

The ladies were fortunate in having a car waiting to transport them to the hotel. The two male members . . . had to wait until a truck, which had broken down somewhere on the road, arrived. The luggage, together with a large dog, was placed in the back and the journey commenced. Mitchells Hotel was reached eventually. The welcome cup of tea which we had been looking forward to not having materialised we betook ourselves to bed.

Your President had some difficulty in persuading the bedclothes to remain in their allotted places. Indeed (the proprietor's wife) on bringing the tea in the morning found him covered by a shortened eiderdown, with the lower portions of his anatomy protruding.

An ample breakfast concluded, we set out under Dr B.'s guidance to investigate the flora of the lakeside (Lake Brunner) and to traverse the same to Drakes Point. We soon entered a bog and remained for some time . . . until we reached a deep creek full of unknown water plants. Not being interested at the time in wading chest-deep to obtain specimens . . . we retraced our steps.

The find of the trip was a specimen of *Gunnera* sp. which eventually proved to be something else. Most attractive were the numerous clumps of the jointed rush *Leptocarpus simplex* (now *L. similis*) which were in full flower.

The other side of the lake proved much more interesting. Our first new find was *Pseudopanax edgerleyi* in the adult stage. The juvenile form was found later. *Meliccytus lanceolatus* abounded, as did *Griselinia lucida*. The bush here was thick and contained many ferns. During this trip and the afternoon one, 40 different species of fern were found. Next day another five were added to the list (Appendix 1).

The afternoon was spent climbing up to the waterfall. Amongst the new plants found were a *Centella* and a *Hydrocotyle*. The first day had proved most enjoyable, with fine, sunny weather and plenty of . . . plants to look at. After dinner we sat in a circle and examined the specimens we had each brought. In most cases (we) were able to name them.

A light frost next morning indicated that fine weather was to be expected during the climb up the Hohonu Mountain. The climbing party was reduced to five ... Miss Burns and Miss Strong most sensibly remaining near the hotel.

After entering the bush the track climbed almost perpendicularly along the edge of a cliff. The further the track ascended, the higher became the cliff until . . . (we) . . . were overlooking (a precipice) some hundreds of feet high. The track eventually disappeared and the party climbed steadily and steeply upwards. The bush was of mixed varieties, the most plentiful being *Quintinia acutifolia*.

The object of the climb was to reach a height above the bushline. By lunchtime the bush was still luxuriant, with no sign of it ending. It was agreed that the

climb would be continued until 1 pm only, which would give ample time to return to the hotel and also that it was unwise to split up the party. By 1.10 pm Dr B. and Mrs Rose were ahead and continued climbing. The other three members decided to return.

Some little difficulty was experienced in finding the correct route back. At one point the sound of running water which should have been on the right came from the left. No (stream) was found on the left, the noise being apparently an echo. It was very confusing. The track along the cliff was found and followed. After some distance the party was met by the Alsatian dog and later by two small boys. Eventually (we) arrived at the hotel, tired but happy, at 4.30 pm. A bath and change of clothes were welcomed.

At 5.30 pm the sun had set and little light remained. Dr B. and Mrs Rose had not returned. Your President at this stage was a little anxious. Had they met with an accident? Would they arrive during the next 15 minutes before it became quite dark? If they did not arrive . . . what action must he take? The idea of leading a search party in the dark, through thick bush, was repugnant, more especially after the exertions of the day.

I walked to the entrance of the bush track, now quite obscured in the dark. A peculiar noise was heard that could only have eventuated from the throat of Dr B. After some cross-calling Dr B. and later Mrs Rose walked out of the bush, much to the relief of the President and probably of themselves.

Dr B. betook himself to the bar, where, after slaking his thirst, he spread out the very interesting specimens he had found above the bush line. It was pleasant to have all the party sitting down for dinner.

(On the way, in the dark, to Inchbonnie to catch the railcar) a short halt was taken to add the last of the ferns to the weekend's tally, this was *Cyathea medullaris*. The luggage had only just been unloaded when the railcar came round the bend.

Laurie Metcalf, who had been examining the Moana district, most kindly named the specimens which were unknown to us. The greatest surprise was the "*Astelia*" which grew abundantly near the hotel. This turned out to be a trunkless form of *Cordyline banksii*.

The trip to Christchurch was pleasant, hot and the built-in thermometer failed to work. And so concluded a happy and instructive weekend."

[It sounds as though the Society's field excursions in those days were somewhat more heroic than they are now!]

Appendix 1: List of Ferns Found on Hohonu Mountains Expedition (names altered to present-day usage)

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Asplenium bulbiferum</i> | <i>H. flexuosum</i> |
| <i>A. flaccidum</i> | <i>H. lyallii</i> |
| <i>A. polyodon</i> | <i>H. multifidum</i> |
| <i>Blechnum chambersii</i> | <i>H. rarum</i> |
| <i>B. colensoi</i> | <i>H. revolutum</i> |
| <i>B. discolor</i> | <i>H. sanguinolentum</i> |
| <i>B. fluviatile</i> | <i>H. scabrum</i> |
| <i>B. membranaceum</i> | <i>Hypolepis rufobarbata</i> |
| <i>B. penna-marina</i> | <i>Lastreopsis hispida</i> |
| <i>B. procerum</i> (aggregate) | <i>Leptolepia novae-zelandiae</i> |
| <i>B. vulcanicum</i> | <i>Leptopteris hymenophylloides</i> |
| <i>Ctenopteris heterophylla</i> | <i>L. superba</i> |
| <i>Cyathea colensoi</i> | <i>Lindsaea trichomanoides</i> |
| <i>C. medullaris</i> | <i>Paesia scaberula</i> |
| <i>C. smithii</i> | <i>Phymatosorus diversifolius</i> |
| <i>Dicksonia fibrosa</i> | <i>P. scandens</i> |
| <i>D. squarrosa</i> | <i>Pneumatopteris pennigera</i> |
| <i>Gleichenia dicarpa</i> var <i>alpina</i> | <i>Polystichum vestitum</i> |
| <i>Grammitis</i> sp. | <i>Pteridium esculentum</i> |
| <i>Histopteris incisa</i> | <i>Pyrrosia eleagnifolia</i> |
| <i>Hymenophyllum bivalve</i> | <i>Rumohra adiantiformis</i> |
| <i>H. demissum</i> | <i>Sticherus cunninghamii</i> |
| <i>H. dilatatum</i> | <i>Trichomanes reniforme</i> |
| <i>H. ferrugineum</i> | <i>T. venosum</i> |
| <i>H. flabellatum</i> | |