

MARGARET JANE ANNAND BULFIN
1920 - 1996

BRYONY MACMILLAN

Margaret Bulfin (née Simpson) was a warm and inspiring friend to many botanists throughout New Zealand. She came to New Zealand with her family from Scotland, aged 5, and grew up on the farm at Matata, Bay of Plenty. She graduated with a Diploma in Horticulture at Massey University, and a B.Sc. at Auckland University College before becoming a botanist with the Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1950.

In her formal botanical work Margaret is best known for her work on seeds - their morphology, identification, and germination requirements; and for her study of the vegetation and flora of Nelson Lakes National Park, which was begun in the late 1950s. She collected many specimens from the Park over successive seasons for the herbarium at Lincoln (now Landcare Research). Together with Janet Moss, who also provided her boat for lake travel, she explored the valleys and the mountain tops. The highest vascular plant found was a gentian on the summit rocks of Mt Travers (2337 m).

Not only flowering plants and ferns were recorded, but also mosses and lichens, which were published in collaboration with Ken Allison and David Galloway respectively. Two plants were named for Margaret from the Park, *Epilobium margaretiae* by W.B. Brockie in 1965, and *Pseudocypbellaria margaretiae* by David Galloway in 1982.

Margaret's earlier mountaineering experience had prepared her well for this work. For instance, in the season 1952-53 she made the ascents of eleven peaks in the Mount Cook district, with Ruth Mason, Eva Ridley and I. Wittlerova. Elie de Beaumont (3117 m) was climbed with the guides A. Mace and M. Cassidy (*N.Z. Alpine Journal* 15 pt. 40: 239-40, 1953). In 1981, following attendance at the international Alpine Gardens Conference, she botanised on Mt Parnassos, Greece.

A keen interest in history and biography led Margaret to research the lives and work of Etienne Raoul and Pierre J. St Croix de Belligny, the two French botanists who were stationed at Akaroa between 1840 and 1843 (*N.Z. Journal of Botany* 14: 199-202, 1976; *Royal Society of N.Z. Bulletin* 21: 65-70, 1984). Robert Brown of Christchurch was another early botanist whose life and thought Margaret studied sympathetically (*Dictionary of N.Z. Biography* Vol.2 1870-1900: 59-60, 1993).

Margaret had little time for taxonomy, or plant systematics. She felt that its practices resulted in frequent name changes, and that the conclusions of one revision were soon overthrown by those of a new method. Descriptive ecology on the other hand was a permanent record of the vegetation at the date it was done and allowed changes to be measured and the presence or absence of unusual plants recorded. She was however persuaded to name, with L.B. Moore, one species, *Myosotis brockiei*, from the Cobb Valley, N.W. Nelson (*N.Z. Journal of Botany* 11: 163-70, 1973).

Margaret's many friendships derived from her wide range of interests; her university and mountaineering days, her botanical associations throughout New Zealand and her participation in the work of visiting botanists. Membership of the Alpine Gardens Society and the Federation of University Women also resulted in lasting friendships as did her husband's family, and her participation in the life of the Lincoln township. Next to gardening, music was probably her chief relaxation. She enjoyed piano lessons with Maisie Kilkelly, who died about a month after Margaret's death, and latterly she very reluctantly gave up regular attendance at Chamber Music Federation concerts. Margaret once described to me how her circles of friends often did not intersect, and when, in her retirement, we botanists sought more of her time for on-going projects she firmly pointed out that she was now going to share out her time more evenly.

Field work with Margaret was always an adventure when botanical, human and geographical discoveries were made, and provide lasting memories. My first was a traverse of the Banks Peninsula summit track on Queen's Birthday weekend, 1956. Margaret led Ruth, Jenny, Betty, Offa and me through the swirling mist, with glimpses of the bays beyond gaunt trunks of whitened totara. I slept through heavy rain cosy in the tent between Ruth and Margaret, on a slope somewhere above the eastern arm of Port Levy. On later expeditions to the Peninsula Margaret was researching the seed biology of *Hebe lavaudiana* (*J. Royal Horticultural Society* 97: 461-62, 1972), and searching for *Raoulia* in its type locality (*Canterbury Bot. Soc. J. No 6*: 4-6, 1973). Our ascents were achievements of alpine proportions in the interest and enjoyment we shared with her.

Margaret returned to the Mount Cook district in February 1967, by ski plane to the Tasman Glacier from where she, Tony Archer, Graeme Champness and I crossed the lateral crevasses and climbed to the Malte Brun hut (1710 m). Here we were based for several days to study the soils, vegetation and flora of the snowgrass terrace on which that venerable hut precariously perched (*N.Z. Journal of Botany* 11: 23-48, 1968). I have always marvelled at Margaret's kind handling of the situation when on the first morning I asked what was that

huge mountain which towered above us in the south west! With Margaret's encouragement, Tony and Graeme climbed Malte Brun (3155 m). Later she herself was able to provide comfort for the rescue party who came in to carry out the bodies of two climbers who had succumbed to a storm on the mountain.

Derrick Rooney has given many examples of Margaret's uncanny abilities in spotting alpine plants and their likely habitats (*The Press* 1 May 1996). In January 1983 Ruth and Mavis and I were with her on the Carrick Range-Old Woman Range crossing, Otago. As we passed a green hollow perhaps a hundred yards away, Margaret said "you must collect that sphagnum". Sure enough the hollow contained *Sphagnum squarrosum* which had only been found in three sites in the South Island at the time. Margaret, I believe you will always be with me when I am botanising - and the memories of all the good times we had with you.