

BOOK REVIEWS

Meanings and Origins of Botanical Names of New Zealand Plants by Marie Taylor. Published 2002 as Auckland Botanical Society Bulletin 26 (ISSN 0112-1332, ISBN 0-9583447-2-8). Available from Auckland Botanical Society; contact Kerry Bodmin by e-mail (Kerry.Bodmin@waitakere.govt.nz) or writing (P.O. Box 60-516, Titirangi, Auckland). Price NZ \$27 (including postage and packaging). Please make cheques payable to: Auckland Botanical Society.

The book incorporates “The botanical names of the flora of New Zealand” (Wall and Allan 1950), which has been extensively revised, updated and expanded to include some names of lower plants. The 1950 book contained 1324 plant names over 92 pages; this new publication has over 3500 entries on 200 pages. The late Marie Taylor listed names published up to 1999. The final editing and layout of the book was completed by Roderick Bieleski, who notes that “although this book is on plants native to New Zealand, I have included some names that have been superseded or of plants that are no longer considered to be native”.

Botanical or scientific names of families, genera and species are widely used to ensure accurate communication between people interested in plants. These names have meanings that enhance our understanding of plants, and help to make them easier to remember. Ewen Cameron’s foreword says that “In 1995 Marie immersed herself in the task of revision giving it all her free time in four years. She enjoyed the linguistic and detective work involved. She has added new vascular plant names, and included many of the main moss, liverwort, lichen, seaweed and fungal names. The finished result is Marie’s final legacy to the people interested in the New Zealand flora. Sadly she never saw it completed but we know it will be appreciated, and like its predecessor it will be treasured for many years”.

This dictionary on the meaning of botanical names is easy to use. The family, genus and species names are listed alphabetically. A useful addition is that, for each genus, the group of plants that it belongs to is shown by an acronym, for example, FUN for fungi, FER for ferns, FLM for flowering plant monocotyledon, FLD for flowering plant dicotyledon, CON for conifer and so on. There is often useful information about meaning of generic names, e.g. *Adiantum* meaning ‘unwetterable’ as it remains as if dry when plunged in water, *Agathis* meaning ‘ball of yarn’ because ‘the reproductive

organs (the seed cone scales) are collected together in a ball-shaped arrangement; *Dendrobium* meaning ‘tree life’ because it grows on trees, although it is an epiphyte and not a parasite; and the fern *Cheilanthes* meaning ‘flowering on the lip’ because the fertile sori are on the edge of the leaf.

The reader should be prepared to learn and understand the links that occur between plant names. Similar names may contain the same Latin meaning, for example ‘acer’ or ‘aci’ meaning pointed shape as in *Aciphylla* or ‘sharp leaf’; also ‘albus’ meaning white as in *albicans* and *albiflorus*. Many other examples occur and through them you can gain a knowledge of Latin and Greek applied to botany, and from the name deduce some of the important characteristics of the plant.

It is interesting to note the number of genera where the name is based on that of a prominent early botanist either overseas or in New Zealand. Examples include *Dicksonia*, *Avicennia*, *Baumea*, and *Cheesemanina*. The same applies to the names of many species.

The bibliography contains 37 references for further study, and it is good to see included a biography of the late Marie Taylor. She contributed much to the study of macro-fungi, and to the education of botany students at Victoria University, in schools in the Oamaru area, and at the University of Auckland. Some Canterbury Botanical Society members may recall meeting her at Fungal Forays held at Boyle Lodge, the Catlins, and at Lake Rotoiti.

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REFERENCE

Wall, A.; Allan, H. H. 1950: The Botanical Names of the Flora of New Zealand – their Origin, History and Meaning, with Hints on Pronunciation (2nd edition). Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch. 92 pp.