

Hylocomium aff. *splendens* on Ohutu Ridge, N.W. Ruahines

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Anniversary weekend trip 1992 was based at a secluded camp site on the north end of Ohutu Ridge, N.W. Ruahines, a grassy clearing in kaikawaka-pink pine forest at 1200 m. The Aorangi-Ohutu-Makirikiri country is coquina limestone overlain by andesitic Tongariro ash and was forested until about 430 years ago.

I was hoping to see a handsome mountain moss, *Hylocomium* aff. *splendens*², which has been found in New Zealand above the bush line on Mt Kaweka, Kaweka Range, on the Ruahines (two localities), on the Tararua Range (Mt Hector, Field Peak and Mt Holdsworth) and on Mt Hikurangi, Raukumara Range. The species is widespread in the northern hemisphere and a plant of acid substrates although growing in base rich habitats where the soil is leached. These localities are the only ones known in the southern hemisphere. On emerging from the tent in the mist on the first morning in camp I saw *Hylocomium* a few paces away between the red tussocks.

The moss grows in loose, flat patches. Its leaves are straw coloured but the red stems give an underlying pinkish glow to the patch. Using a hand lens the leaves are seen to be doubly nerved at the base and the stems bear abundant branched filaments or paraphyllia between the leaves. That the soil is leached I can well believe because the region has an annual rainfall exceeding 1500 mm and water poured through our camp site following heavy rain on the night of our arrival.

Further exploration showed *Hylocomium* to be locally common in a boggy stream bed between red tussocks (*Chionochloa rubra*), with two other cushion-forming mosses, *Hypnum cupressiforme* and *Drepanocladus aduncus* (Fig. 1). It also grew among vegetation on top of a limestone slab with *Hebe odora* and *Halocarpus biformis* (Fig. 2), and at the higher margin of the bog in a stand of *Hebe odora* and *Coprosma* sp. "p" aff. *parviflora*.

Our route lay southwards along the ridge top to Titapu and during a leisurely lunch brew at 1240 m *Hylocomium* was found growing on the eroded edge of a runnel, under a low growth of *Coprosma* sp. "p", *Phyllocladus alpinus* and *Cassinia*. Here the associated cushion moss was *Hypnum chrysogaster*. Perhaps *Hylocomium* will prove to be widespread in the Ruahine Range.

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² Specimens are held at the Museum of New Zealand (WELT) and Landcare Research (CHR).



Fig. 1. Habitat of *Hylocomium* aff. *splendens* on Ohutu Ridge, a boggy stream bed between red tussocks.



Fig. 2. *Hylocomium* aff. *splendens* growing among vegetation on top of a limestone slab with *Hebe odora*.

FURTHER REFERENCES

- Druce, A.P. 1987: Checklist no. 57 (unpublished, Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research Library).
Rogers, Geoff 1992: Trip report 17-21 January 1992 (Wellington Anniversary Weekend). *Newsletter Wellington Botanical Society* April, p. 10.