

NATURE WATCH À LA BEALEY SPUR

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Down stream a few hundred yards from Bill Sutton's painting of the "Bruce Creek" bridge where the delta of the Bruce butts on to the "Waimak" River bed is a barren spot. It is exposed, it is vulnerable to floods and frosts, sometimes wild and buffeted from the west and cold and bitter from the south and sometimes calm and crystal clear, the mountains moods and panorama are all exposed from here. It is a forlorn and desolate spot where people dump stuff and road contractors grab their road-fill but there is always something going on here.

The plants persist, both native herbs and pasture escapes, only the tough survive. None are showy; all have their niche. They thrive and persist, not reckoned in productivity and stock-units but as pioneers and agents for change. The flat growing *Raoulia hookeri* establishes itself on the moving river bed stones and provides a niche for other plants to grow.

Each visit turns up something to marvel at. *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*, a prostrate shrub gives a great scent when flowering. The hares, not always there, rest up among the stones; when disturbed they circuit and with patience return while you wait. The birds – chaffinches use the briar all winter, going up to the bush edge as soon as the days are warmer in the spring. Some years the banded dotterel pair are successful and their fledgelings chase about together for a month perhaps, but most years the stoats get them. Walking up the riverflat grass near the cliffs the shrubby *Helichrysum intermedium* clings to the rock.

Black back gulls rise in the thermals over the stoney river bed. Terns chase each other I know not where; a family of Canada geese, sometimes four families, warn each other across the stones, something to astonish the quiet walker.

The Bruce delta ends abruptly, it is a quarry and the road makers will never be short of aggregate!