

REVIEW

FERNS OF THE PORT HILLS: PHOTOGRAPHY & FOSSICKING

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Never having walked in the Port Hills and only having driven through it once, in a dry summer, it was easy to dismiss the area as not having much to offer to those interested in ferns, apart from *Pellaea calidirupium* and *Pleurosorus rutifolius*. What a surprise to find that it has a respectable flora of 63 native ferns and fern allies!

I'm not sure who coined the phrase "ordinary housewives" (the authors being modest?), but it deserves the bracketed ha ha in Hugh Wilson's foreword. There is nothing ordinary about *Ferns of the Port Hills* – it is a richly detailed and well documented study of a plant group that can be challenging for beginners – or about the authors, whose commitment is inspirational.

The arrangement of species is sensibly straightforward and alphabetical in two series, ferns and fern allies. The inclusion of the derivation of genus and species names is a nice touch that complements the Māori and European common names, and the descriptions, though short, are more than adequate for identification. The inclusion of previous scientific names is useful for those who wish to refer to earlier publications. The anecdotes are fun and interesting – what happened to those small plants that may have been *Asplenium lyallii* at Mount Pleasant Bluffs? – and the garden notes useful for those interested in growing ferns in that part of the country.

The photographs are one of the highlights of the book, not just the beautifully framed and lit shots of the plants in habitat, but also the details evident in the close-ups of scales and sori. Those of the filmy ferns are particularly informative. The picture of *Hymenophyllum minimum* on page 66 shows the teeth of the pinnae and indusial flaps to perfection (Fig. 1, page 59). It is my favourite illustration of the book. The illustrations must have taken a long time and a lot of skill to assemble, and the kit sounds as if it would be quite heavy and awkward to carry around, with the SLR, the lenses and the tripod.

There is only one quibble: a map of the Port Hills, showing the reserves, tracks and landmarks mentioned, would be a very useful addition for those readers who are not familiar with the area. Now that I know how fern-rich

the Hills are, I'd like to go fern hunting on foot next time I'm down south, rather than just driving through.

The book is available from Scorpio Books, 113 Riccarton Road, Christchurch and at Re-start Cashel Street, City Mall. Also from MW Press www.mwpress.co.nz and the authors: kollers@orcon.net.nz and sally.tripp@xtra.co.nz.



Figure 1 *Hymenophyllum minimum*, below Cass Peak, Port Hills, Christchurch.
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