

## **SOUTHERN RATA ON THE SOUTH-WESTERN SIDE OF THE BIG BEN RANGE**

**Mandy and Paul Burrows**

North Rakaia Road, Mead, Rakaia

Recently we explored Benmore Stream, a tributary of the Acheron River about 6 km east of Lake Coleridge. We climbed the ridge south of the stream to about 1,300 m, then dropped down into the mountain beech forest-clad valley aiming to follow its course back to the Acheron. The stream in the gorge is a difficult travel proposition; there are numerous waterfalls, some like chutes.

A surprising find partway down, close to the stream, was a scattered patch of southern rata (*Metrosideros umbellata*) of shrub size (1.5 – 2.5 m high) with gnarled stems. The plants seemed to be growing vigorously despite their dwarfed size. The substrate they grow on here is shattered, steep greywacke. There was no sign of flowering.

Southern rata grows in several places on the shores of Lake Coleridge. It is more abundant in steep valleys on the southeast side of the Mt Hutt and Winterslow Ranges. It is also at Mt Somers and Peel Forest. This Big Ben Range location resembles scattered Canterbury occurrences of southern rata, often found in gorges, for example near Flock Hill in the Waimakariri, at several places in the upper Rangitata catchment, at Mt Cook and west of Mt Cass, near Waipara. The gorgy sites are, presumably, frost-free.