

Plant profile: *Acaena tesca* B.H. MacMill. By Kelvin Lloyd

Acaena tesca (Rosaceae) is a rhizomatous herb with attractive glaucous foliage and red-spined fruit. First described in 1991 by Bryony MacMillan, *A. tesca* is endemic to the uplands of Central Otago and northern Southland. It is a mat- or cushion-forming perennial with sessile capitula comprising approximately 10 florets, which may be hidden in the foliage. Stipules are triangular and entire, with hairy margins and tips. The broad-ovate to orbicular 2.5-5 × 2.5-4 mm leaflets occur in 3-5 pairs, gradually decreasing in size to the base of the rachis. Leaflets are hairy and have 6-9 dull red, weakly penicillate teeth on their margins. Leaves are up to 5 cm long and 1 cm wide.

A. tesca is commonly found near streams and seepages, at the bases of rock tors, and in intertussock spaces in natural and modified tall and short tussock grasslands. It can become quite abundant in these habitats, and has been observed competing vigorously with the exotic grass, *Agrostis capillaris*. The specific epithet *tesca* "wild region" refers to the wild and desolate habitats occupied by the species. *A. tesca* is easily cultivated and is non-aggressive. Its abundant glaucous foliage makes a colourful addition to the garden, and is best displayed in a rock garden setting. Fruits of section Microphyllae species of *Acaena* are unbarbed, so the fruits of *A. tesca* are unlikely to become entangled in socks or cat fur.

In 1991 the known distribution of *A. tesca* included the Crown, Pisa, Dunstan, Ida, Old Woman, Old Man, Garvie and Umbrella Ranges. However since then the range of *A. tesca* has been extended to include the Nevis Valley, the upper Mararoa catchment west of L. Wakatipu, and uplands in the upper Taieri and Teviot catchments (Rough Ridge, Rock and Pillar Range and Lammerlaw Range). It is likely that the known range of *A. tesca* will increase as the species becomes more familiar to botanists.

Reference:

MacMillan, B.H. (1991) *Acaena rorida* and *Acaena tesca* (Rosaceae) – two new species from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 29: 131-138.