

Profile of a Botanist: John Scott Thompson and Thompson's Lichen Collection in OTA.

By Jennifer Banister

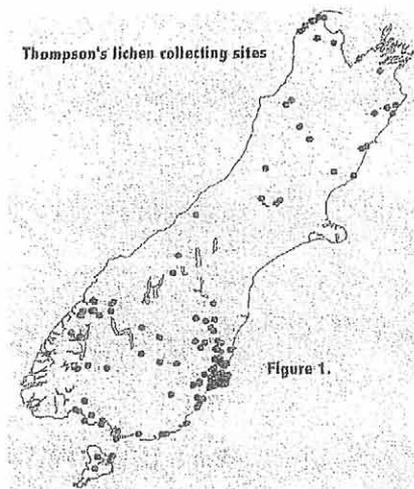
John Scott Thomson was born in Dunedin in 1882. His father, Alexander Thomson, had started a mineral water and soft drinks manufacturing business using water from mineral springs he had bought at Wairongoa outside Dunedin. The family home was Ferntree House, which Alexander had renovated and extended. John, known usually as Jack and sometimes as Scott, trained as an industrial chemist and worked in the family business all his life eventually becoming managing director. He was a keen botanist and gardener and became honorary botanist to Otago Museum. Other interests included mountaineering and photography.

Jack became good friends with George Simpson, who shared his botanical interests, and they made many tramping and botanical expeditions together. By 1925 they were collaborating with Leonard Cockayne, who named the two friends 'The Firm', and H. H. Allan, Director of Botany at the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. In 1927 the Swedish botanist, Einar Du Rietz and his wife Greta, visited Dunedin and identified some lichens for Jack from Bethunes Gully and the Silver Peaks Forest where 'The Firm' had been investigating the occurrence of silver beech in the Dunedin area. Their visit started Jack's interest in lichens. H.H. Allan was already collecting lichens in the North Island and he suggested to Jack that he should collect lichens in the South Island to form a representative collection of lichens for the DSIR. However Jack retained his interest in flowering plants and continued writing on botany for the rest of his life. In 1936, Jack and George Simpson won the Loder Cup for their botanical work in the South Island.

In April 1933 he started the lichen collection that, by 1941, would reach over three thousand specimens. Two thirds of the lichens were collected between 1933 and 1935. In 1933 alone he collected

1380 lichens, collecting on 57 days. Many lichens were collected in the wider Dunedin area from Mount Watkin, Lee stream, Waikouaiti, Akatore, Trotters Gorge, Wairongoa; some from trips into Southland, Bluff, Riverton Bush, Pahia Point. He also collected from further afield on annual summer trips with George Simpson, these often involved strenuous tramping and mountaineering. In 1934 they visited Mt Tapuaenuku, the Chalk Range and Keckerengu Valley in Marlborough and he collected 50 lichens. In 1935 he collected 60 lichens when they travelled to Takaka Hills, Wakapuaka, Westhaven (Whanganui Harbour) and Lead Hills in Nelson and Tasman. The February 1936 expedition visited the Kelly Range, Hurunui, Maruia Saddle, Lewis Pass, Mt Trovatore and Alocs Knob in Canterbury and Westland and 70 lichens were collected. In 1937 they visited Pakawau, Mangarakau, Patarau Gorge, Te Rata, Big River, Kahurangi and the Ure (Waima) River in Tasman and Marlborough, 100 lichens were added to the collection. One of his last trips in March 1941 was to Stewart Island where he collected 150 lichens from Herekopere, The Neck, Freshwater Valley and Table Hill. In all he collected lichens from approximately 145 sites in the South Island (see fig 1).

In the words of William Martin:
"No attempt was made in any area to make a comprehensive collection of all species present, this being impossible in the short time usually available; nevertheless no other collection, other possibly than that made in 1926 by Dr and Mrs E Du Rietz, has been made on so extensive a scale (by any single individual) and, though determinations were not as a rule made by him, his work greatly enlarged our knowledge of the lichen flora."



Jack noted details of the collections in his logbooks, each lichen was given a number and placed in a tobacco tin along with a small scrap of paper with the number, locality and the name of the plant it was growing on, or the type of rock, written in pencil. Part of each specimen collected was sent to Allan who identified them or sent them overseas for expert determination. Many specimens were sent to Zahlbruckner in Vienna who published the results in 'Lichenes Novae-Zelandiae' in 1941. Zahlbruckner added 93 new taxa from the South Island and practically all these lichens were collected by Jack. About 33 packets of type material have been found so far in the OTA collection and there are probably more to be found. The lichens sent to H.H. Allan are in the Landcare Herbarium at Lincoln, CHR.

He died in 1943 and 28 wooden cases containing his lichen collection were sent to a storeroom at the Thomson factory. In 1952 William Martin discovered the lichens in excellent condition. It was decided that the best way of caring for the collection was for it to be gifted to Otago University. James Murray, a lecturer in Chemistry, who was working on New Zealand lichens, stored the crates in the Chemistry Department. When Murray was tragically killed in a car accident in 1961, the crates were moved to the Botany Department for safekeeping. Between 1963 and 1970 nearly a thousand specimens were transferred to numbered Herbarium packets but only some were identified at that time. The remaining tobacco tins, about two thousand, remained in the department until 1996 when a National Heritage Lottery grant was obtained to curate, identify and make a database of the whole collection. At this stage the crates were breaking up, the tobacco tins covered in the grime of years with spiders webs and even the odd rat dropping so that the tins had to be cleaned before their contents could be removed. Each lichen was placed in a cellophane bag for protection and then the cellophane bag was placed in a herbarium packet with Jack's label. These packets were boxed and the long process of

incorporating them into the herbarium collection started. This project is still under way.

Jack's own accession numbers reach 3145, about 30 numbered specimens were discarded by him and some specimens have been lost during the years of storage, but there are probably 2800 packets of Jack's lichen collection in the herbarium. This collection has made a very important and significant contribution to our knowledge of South Island lichens and their distribution.

Sources:

NZJB Newsletter Biographical Notes 23, by E.J.Godley.

John Scott Thomson FLS, FCS, Hon. FRNZIH (1882-1943)

J. Scott-Thomson's Contribution to NZ Lichenology. An Appreciation, by William Martin. (Unpublished)

Information from David Galloway.

Calendar review:

By John Steel.

Something a little different possibly, has been the release of a 2000 calendar by Judith Curnow and Heino Leps featuring Australian Cryptogams photographed by Heino. The twelve A4 sized photographs comprise a selection of fungi, mosses, liverworts and hornworts, with numerous small photographs interspersed among the calendar pages. Most of the species portrayed occur also in New Zealand. As one would expect from Heino, the quality of the photographs is excellent and each is accompanied by an unobtrusive but informative text. For those struggling to get started with these often difficult groups, the calendar provides a pleasant addition of reference material ... and of course, one could always use it for its other purpose. The calendar costs \$NZ15 and can be obtained by contacting Judith at Judith.Curnow@ea.gov.au who will advise on how payment can be made in New Zealand to avoid exchange costs.