

Plant Profile: *Porella elegantula* (Mont.) E.A. Hodgs.

John Steel, Botany Department, University of Otago

Order: Jungermanniales

Family: Porellaceae

The name, *Porella* (with the emphases on the first and last syllables), is a diminutive from the Latin, *Porus*, meaning a pore, hence little pore. It was the source of some fairly heated discussion in the scientific literature of the 19th century. The Latin suffix, *-ula*, generally means small, but in *elegantula* it refers to its less common usage as “very”, therefore “very elegant”. It was first described by Dillenius and his description was taken directly by Linnaeus. Dillenius’s description caused some confusion, some taking it to refer to a missing specimen of *Selaginella*. The arguments ended without agreement but the name *Porella* has stayed with us

Porella is a worldwide genus with seventy to eighty species found mainly in tropical regions. This is the more common of the two species found in New Zealand and is a very beautiful little plant. An endemic, it occurs throughout the country from sea level to 1220m. Generally epiphytic, it can be found on a broad range of forest trees and shrubs and I have found it growing on a concrete wall in Leith Valley.

Considered large (by liverwort standards!), it can occur in flat clumps several centimetres across. The individual stems, up to 10 cm. long, are irregularly pinnately-branched. The leaves, up to 2 mm across, are tightly imbricate, with the margins decurved, especially when dry, giving it an almost scaly appearance. The colour ranges from reddy-brown when dry or in more exposed sites, to a beautiful, olive green-brown when in moist, less exposed habitats and this is when it is at its most recognisable.

The collections in OTA are mainly from Fiordland, as an epiphyte on beech, forest floor and limestone, with a few from Dunedin and Otago, from stream boulders, podocarps and assorted broadleaved trees and shrubs. This is probably due to its being overlooked rather than as an indication of rarity. Unfortunately, a x10 magnifying glass will be required to begin to appreciate this little beauty.

Moss Foray, 22 – 27 Nov, 2001. The 17th John Child Bryophyte Workshop will be held at the Tauherenikau Race Track, near Featherston, an hour north of Wellington. More details on Botany Dept noticeboard or contact Barbara Polly, email: barbarap@tepapa.govt.nz, address: Te Papa, PO Box 467, WELLINGTON