

Summer Trip Reports – Mt Cook to Omarama and more.

☛ Hooker Valley, Mt Cook National Park, 30 Dec – Chris Horne

What a wonderful setting for botanising! We were thrilled to be among the ice-clad peaks, with avalanches thundering off Mt Sefton, and Aoraki/Mt Cook standing sentinel near the head of the valley, with its three peaks often free of cloud. A glider slowly circling Sefton's summit added to the magic of our day among a wonderful range of alpine plants.

We followed the valley track through forest remnants and over moraine deposits, where the dead-looking *Helichrysum depressum* featured, and past a rock face with the strap fern, *Grammitis poeppigiana*, to the second footbridge. Here, thanks to advice from Jenny Christensen at Park Headquarters, we took the track towards Ball Pass. We were delighted at the extensive areas of the large spaniards, *Aciphylla aurea* and *A. scott-thomsonii*, some with inflorescences up to two metres tall. They themselves were striking subjects for photographs, and also made marvellous foregrounds for shots of the great peaks. *Celmisia coriacea*, with its large, stiff, grey-green leaves and showy white flowers, and *C. verbascifolia*, with purple-stalked leaves, were conspicuous, but the Mt Cook buttercup, *Ranunculus lyallii*, had almost finished flowering on the valley floor, so it was not until the following day above the Sealy Tarns that we saw numerous examples of this handsome plant in flower. *Acaena saccaticupula*'s crimson seedheads, *Parahebe liniifolia* in flower, the glaucous-leaved *Dracophyllum kirkii*, *Hebe subalpina* in flower, and the fern *Asplenium trichomanes*, were among the many other plants that attracted our attention.

Further up the valley, areas of *Hebe macrantha* in flower were particularly striking, as was evidence of the retreat of the Hooker Glacier because Hooker Lake is a relatively recent development, and Hooker Hut, perched high on the lateral moraine, is now hard to reach. No doubt alpine plants will colonise the moraine deposits as they lose their cover of snow and ice.

☛ Lake Tekapo Turf Plants, 1 Jan – Barbara Mitcalfe

This New Year's morning site was the sandy/silty flood plain of Lake Tekapo. The lake is subject to a 10m rise/fall, so the lacustrine flora has to adjust to periods of inundation and desiccation. It was a classic "... bums on high and lens to eye..." occasion as we struggled to identify some rather cryptic species, ourselves observed closely by a pair of banded dotterel nearby. *Leptinella maniototo* was plentiful, as were *Neopaxia* sp. and *Pratia perpusilla*, both in flower. Occasional, dimple-leaved *Epilobium komarovianum* were flowering, also *Raoulia* sp., *Carex berggrenii* and *Juncus antarcticus*. A plant that puzzled us at length until Neill pounced on its identity in the wetlands book was *Crassula sinclairii* in flower. Nearby in weedy pasture we came upon *Glossostigma elatinooides*, *Parahebe lyallii*, and the tiny, delicate, mauve-flowered *P. canescens* in flower and fruit.

A welcome distraction from this hands-and-knees prostration were five kakii, black stilts, wading in the shallows. Whether the (late), famous Mrs Bones was one of them is not