

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 linariifolia* 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

known at the time of writing. Nearby on a bouldery slope were *Convolvulus verecundus* subsp *verecundus* and some impenetrably dense cushions of *Carmichaelia uniflora* with fat, yellow, sigma-shaped pods bursting through their *Phyllachne*-like crowns: a strange sight. After lunch eaten in our vehicles because of heavy rain, some of us went looking for more wetlands on the east side of Lake Ohau. A chance conversation with an itinerant musician on a bicycle led to our creeping past about 50 assorted caravans and tents (whose occupants were sleeping off their New Year's eve spent in Twizel), to explore another indigenous, lakeside turf. This area of about 30 x 20 metres was weed-free and so densely vegetated that no soil was visible, however there were no species additional to those which we had seen in the Tekapo turf.

📍 Temple Stream Nature Walk, 2 Jan – Neill Simpson

A blustery nor'wester with rain squalls brought in shift day, our move from Pukaki Downs to Glen Mary Ski Club Lodge at Lake Ohau. By the time we packed up, cleaned up, stocked up at Twizel and settled down at Ohau much of the day had gone. The nature walk at the Temple Stream road end, at the head of Lake Ohau proved an ideal finish to the day. The road ends at a patch of mature mountain beech where several large trees were laden with scarlet mistletoe (*Peraxilla tetrapetala*) with the flower remains carpeting the ground. Three tracks start from this picnic area, the North and South branches of Temple Stream, the latter with a "forest" of the rare and threatened, small tree, *Pittosporum patulum* at its head, and the nature walk.

The nature walk climbs through dry mountain beech forest briefly before zig zagging up in fire-induced, open grassland with patchy forest showing good regeneration. Numerous native herbs, orchids such as *Aporostylis bifolia*, and shrubs were found as we listened to the riroriro, a flock of chattering brown creepers and bellbirds and swiped the numerous sandflies. A falcon flew overhead and large dragonflies whizzed about.

At the highpoint of the loop track there is the option of climbing directly uphill through steep, *Dracophyllum* shrubland and beech forest for excellent views to the south. The many who did this found many more plant species, some in flower such as *Celmisia sinclairii*, *C. verbascifolia*, *C. densiflora*, *Forstera sedifolia* and yellow flowered *Brachyglottis haastii*. The Hebes, *H. salicifolia*, *H. subalpina* and *H. buchananii*, were present as was snow totara (*Podocarpus nivalis*) and many other shrubs. It was a warm, balmy evening now and we were reluctant to leave this pleasant place. The numerous mistletoe, some still in flower, were the most notable feature of the loop back through the forest to the vehicles.

📍 Ohau Ski Field, 4 Jan – Barbara Clark

Twenty two people departed at 9:10 am for Ohau Lodge to check whether the ski road was open to all vehicles and pick up the gate key. Lake Ohau was choppy and a southerly was blowing but the sun was shining after heavy rain the previous day. The rocky road up to the skifield was negotiable despite a few slips. Allie's car had a