The Secret is out..... *Allison Knight*

.....and Neill Simpson was the last to know. When his mother flew down from Auckland with his sister from Wellington and his 3 sons converged on Queenstown Neill thought that was a wonderful surprise. Then when they all went out to dinner to celebrate his 70th birthday and arrived at a hall full of people Neill was almost overwhelmed. But he soon warmed to the occasion, with around 100 friends, colleagues and relations gathered to wish him well, a live band, a blazing fire and mountains of celebratory food. The presents were especially appropriate – a towering kauri in a pot, and a very good likeness of Neill in a very unlikely botanical setting, painted by a local street artist.

Next morning, when I admired Neill's own botanical artistry, transforming the council's weedy roadside verge into a spectacular showcase for native plants, it reminded me how richly he deserved the Allan Mere awarded to him by the New Zealand Botanical Society for services to botany. And when he instantly gave me permission to chip an interesting *Physcia* from his lichen-swathed rocks I was even more convinced. May there be many more years of happy botanising, Neill!

Botanical Diary

Premier Event

Don't miss the BSO Premier talk of the year, jointly sponsored by the Botanical Society of Otago and the Department of Botany, University of Otago:-

29 October, Wed 5.20 pm **2nd Annual Geoff Baylis Lecture**. Distinguished guest speaker **Dr Peter Wardle** *New Zealand's forest limits and the vegetation above them, compared with South America and other regions.*

Abstract: Species introductions and climatic comparisons show that hardy trees from the northern hemisphere can grow well above the altitudinal limit of native forest in New Zealand. Instead of the subalpine conifer forests of the northern hemisphere we have a belt of tall tussocks, shrubs and large forbs, occupying an environment very similar to that occupied by deciduous beeches in the southern Andes. While this tall-tussock belt is essentially unique to New Zealand and its subantarctic islands, it does share features with vegetation on tropical high mountains. As well as large tussock grasses, these features include temperature climates with muted seasonal variations, and large-leaved rosette plants, some of the tropical examples being arborescent. On the tropical high mountains, this vegetation zone also contains low forest which has been reduced by fire, and as in New Zealand it is receptive to introduced tall-tree species. The term *tropicalpine* has been used because this vegetation does not fit the altitudinal zonation that has been derived for north temperate mountains; to recognise the similarly special nature of New