

# Goulard Downs

W. B. Brockie, Wellington

GOULARD DOWNS is an area of red tussock country, perhaps twenty square miles in extent and at an elevation of about 2000 feet, situated about midway along the well-graded Heaphy Track which was formed over sixty years ago as a means of communication between Collingwood and Karamea. In January, 1954, Mr. H. Talbot and I were at the Downs for ten days, and again in January, 1956, for a fortnight. Taking packhorses, we went in from the Collingwood end of the track at Brown's River, a tributary of the Aorere. The track winds along the thickly forested mountain slopes for about twelve miles, rising almost imperceptibly to Perry's Pass, where there is open tussock land. From there the track descends again through bush for a few miles, then, almost suddenly, the broad open Downs come into view. After another two miles the Blue Duck (Cave Stream on our map) is forded to reach the comfortable four-bunk hut which is maintained by the Collingwood County Council.

Besides botanising on the Downs we also climbed Mt. Perry at the northern end of the Tasman Mts., and Mt. Goul, which is separated from Mt. Perry by Perry's Pass and directly overlooks the Downs to the west. Silver beech forest clothes the sides of these mountains and in a few places fires several decades ago have burned long strips from the base upward. These strips are now clad with an almost impenetrable growth of *Dracophyllum traversii*, *D. townsoni*, *Metrosideros umbellata* and *Archeria traversii*; higher up *Olearia colensoi* adds to the tangle.

Some of the plants on Mt. Goul not seen on the Downs were a form of *Astelia petrici*, the young leaves white with short hairs, *Geum uniflorum*, *Aciphylla polita*, *Carex acicularis*, a large-leaved species of *Celmisia* which is common on Lead Hill further east, and a single patch of *Mitrasacme novae-zelandiae*. The nearest location previously recorded for the latter is Hills Peak, Arthurs Pass, but it is a small moss-like plant and is easily overlooked. Where *Celmisia laricifolia* on dry, stony places closely adjoined wet ground holding *Celmisia armstrongii*, hybrids between these extremely diverse species were fairly plentiful; no good seeds were found on them and they are probably completely sterile. On Mt. Perry there is what looks like a swarm of triple *Dracophyllum* hybrids involving *D. filifolium*, *D. densum* and *D. pubescens*. Besides *Oreobolus strictus*, which is plentiful everywhere, another undescribed species with much broader leaves arranged in rosulate fashion was found; it is especially abundant on Mt. Perry. Some years ago I found this at Arthurs Pass without flowers and it had puzzled me.

One can travel for miles on the Downs through the tall red tussock (*Danthonia rigida*) and the uneven surface lends itself to a considerable variety of habitats ranging from almost bare, stony knobs to lowland swamps and upland pakihi, the latter containing mostly *Cladium glomeratum*. Distantly separated from each other a few small clumps of beech appear like islands in the sea of tussock, though towards the west they are much closer together and give a parkland aspect to the scene. Further west and separated from the Downs by a few miles of forest there is an area which a member of another visiting party aptly called "The Queer Country"; narrow, tussocky flats form an intricate, diverging pattern among numerous small hills covered with a scrubby type of bush.

Some of the more conspicuous and commoner plants on the Downs other than the tussock are *Hypolaena lateriflora*, manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) in some places reduced to a carpet, *Epacris alpina* and several species of the ground orchid, *Thelymitra*, with blue, mauve and whitish flowers. In the drier parts of stony knobs and slopes *Exocarpus bidwillii* is plentiful among the dwarfed manuka; where such ground is wetter, *Actinotus suffocata*, *Donatia novae-zelandiae* and *Danthonia australis* are also present. *Celmisia dalii* and *C. Spectabilis* grow together in some steep-sided valleys. One plant of what appeared to be *Celmisia dallii* X *armstrongi* was seen. *Dracophyllum palustre*, two species of *Hebe*, *Pittosporum anomalum*, *Dacrydium bidwillii* and several other shrubs frequently border some of the streams.

The only species among thick tussock growth not noted elsewhere was *Ranunculus geraniifolius*; only a few small colonies were seen. Open spaces among the tussocks commonly contain numerous species forming a close turf, some of the more noticeable constituents being *Carpha alpina*, *Anisotome aromatica*, *Craspedia* sp., *Senecio bellidioides* var. *angustata* and *Plantago brownii*. Bronze-leaved *Carex dallii* and a short-culmed form of *C. carsei* occupy many wet places. Here, too, may be mentioned a new species of *Chrysobactron* which has narrow, spreading leaves and flowering stems only an inch or so high; it is fairly abundant in many places. Pools on the flat between the Shiner Stream and Big River, which cross the Downs, contain *Liparophyllum gunnii* and *Myriophyllum pedunculatum*. A species of *Ourisia* with subcordate leaves up to an inch long and purple underneath, forms large patches on some shady, moist banks of Big River; it is present also on Mt. Goul. *Celmisia parva*, rarely found on the Downs, is abundant on the mountains.

Behind the hut is a strip of beech forest (*Nothofagus menziesii* and *N. cliffortioides*) covering a limestone hummock about twenty acres in extent. The limestone is hollowed with pits, caves and tunnels, and is the home of a few kiwis and wekas. Beneath the forest canopy is a varied and patchy underscrub of numerous species including *Griselinia littoralis*, *Pseudopanax lineare*, *Pittosporum rigidum*, *P. anomalum*

*P. crassicaule*, *Gahnia procera* and several common small-leaves species of *Coprosma*. Curiously, *Dracophyllum traversii* is absent, though in the bush covering a similar limestone relic a mile or so away it is plentiful. *Asplenium anomodum* drapes the walls of shaded pits; *Blechnum membranaceum* is also present and *Jovellana repens* was seen in one place. Mr. Talbot discovered *Ourisia modesta* in front of a cave near the hut and later we found it in several places in the bush; it is especially plentiful in a deep, shaded hollow alongside the track which crosses the limestone. This widely creeping species had previously been recorded only from Stewart Island and the Fiord District. On the sunny, north-western side of the limestone we found three new species of herbaceous plants—a small, tufted, broad-leaved *Carex*, a species of *Craspedia* and, confined to a small area, a small glaucous-leaved *Anisotome*, most nearly related to *A. cnysii*. *Epilobium gracilipes* and a small-leaved form of *Hebe albicans* also grow there in full sun.

Species that appear to be specially rare on the Downs are *Myosotis pygmaea*, *Geum leiospermum*, *Gratiola nana*, *Triglochin striatum* var *filifolium* and *Montia fontana*. The genus *Aciphylla* is completely unrepresented, and of the even more ubiquitous *Wahlenbergia* none were seen either on the Downs or on the mountain tops except one small patch of *W. albomarginata* beside the Shiner Stream.

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Mt. Kaiparoro, looking S.E. from Schormann Track.

