

## SMALL COASTAL PLANTS On South Taranaki Coast

BY L. S. MACKIE

There is a wealth of material of interest to the Native plant enthusiast along the South Taranaki Coast. In this informative article an experienced collector tells us what to look for.

WE read a lot in garden papers and plant and flower catalogues of wonderful flowering shrubs with large flowers and gorgeous foliage; of our gigantic forest trees, such as the rata and pohutukawa, making a blaze of scarlet on our sea cliffs and mountainsides.

New Zealand flora does not run to brilliancy of colour in flowers, but we have a wealth of small flowering plants that make a beautiful picture when seen in masses in the summer and autumn. The mountains are not the only places

where these beauties may be seen. Some parts of our sea coasts show a wealth of miniature plant life which presents a pleasant picture to those who care to observe.

Let us take an afternoon stroll to certain parts of the South Taranaki Coast, visited in summer by thousands of trippers, the great majority of whom only see sand, salt water and perhaps a charming composition. The coastline is mostly precipitous, being composed of sandstone, clay and early river deposits, the cliffs in some places being from

cal, others terraced and sloping and various patches of shingle slides. Springs abound and in the course of time have worn out clefts and recesses and it is on these areas that the botanist finds a wealth of treasures.

Immediately one reaches the brink of the cliffs from the level pasture lands a number of plants catch the eye. *Sellera radicans*, a pretty shining-leaved carpet plant with underground stems and numerous short-stemmed white flowers, which all appear as if some of the petals had been eaten away on one side. Growing in company with this is a similar plant with masses of white starry flowers about half an inch across. Sometimes patches of these plants may be found covering a space of a yard in diameter with not more than an inch between the flowers. This is *Samolus repens*. Close alongside, growing in cracks in the clay, is the minute *Myosotis pygmaea*, the smallest Forget-me-not in the world, the whole plant very often only two inches across growing flat to the

ground. This is *Ranunculus repens*. The whole plant is less than two inches across and its pretty green and brown-mottled leaves grow flat in the form of a rosette and close down in the centre of the plant are two or three pale yellow buttercup-like flowers less than half an inch across. Near the water in a patch of stiff mud is another small *Ranunculus*, *R. acaulis*. This forms dark green carpets in damp places, never more than an inch or so high and the pale yellow buttercups borne on very short stems. Occasionally on a sheltered mossy slope tufted plants of *Euphrasia cuneata* may be found, the nemesis-like white flowers showing purple markings.

Along the shore on sand banks just beyond the tide mark are masses of *Euphorbia glauca* with silvery grey foliage and small reddish-purple flowers. On steep, water-soaked cliffs may be found growing among the mosses a pretty compact little plant called *Craspedia uniflora*, which sends up a thin stem 3 to 4 inches high, on top of which is the flower head, which ripens into a white ball about half an inch in diameter. Alongside is a damp peat-like formation covered with a bright green carpet of *Nertera depressa*, studded thickly with its scarlet berries. Nearby in clay and rubble is *Plantago brownii*, forming big rosette-like plants, and alongside is another, *Plantago masonae*. This is a gem as it forms a small rosette of

August 5, 1935.

N.Z. FLOWER GROWER.

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eight of an inch across, set close to the stem.

Trailing down a steep bank or carpeting a slope is *Mesembryanthemum australe*, showing a mass of satiny-pink flowers. Close alongside growing in a rocky crevice is a clump of *Linum monogynum*, in the springtime forming a ball of pure white flowers up to an inch across. Another attractive trailing plant on a steep face is *Pimelea prostrata*, its long trailing stems sometimes reaching a length of four feet. The greyish leaves are small and closely set, and resemble a trailing *veronica*. In the summer these plants have a profusion of small white flowers to be followed later by pure white berries which look like grains of rice and are quite palatable. Further down on a steep slope we find a sprawling shrub *Coprosma acerosa*, with very small leaves of a yellowish-green colour. The flowers are inconspicuous but in the late summer some plants may be found with a profusion of whitish-opal coloured berries rather smaller than a currant. These are quite pleasant to the taste, not being bitter like the berries of the common bush varieties of *Coprosma*. This plant is a good sand binder and grows in large carpets on the sand dunes, and to see the beauty of the berries one has to lift the carpet from the surface and look underneath. Another carpeting *coprosma* growing in similar places is *C. Kirkii*, and is similar to the above except that the stems and leaves are larger, and the berries smaller, and not so numerous.

Down into a small gully cut by a stream we come on to gravelly slopes carpeted by the above plants, and by looking very carefully a pretty plant may be found, although

not common. This is *Ranunculus repens*. The whole plant is less than two inches across and its pretty green and brown-mottled leaves grow flat in the form of a rosette and close down in the centre of the plant are two or three pale yellow buttercup-like flowers less than half an inch across. Near the water in a patch of stiff mud is another small *Ranunculus*, *R. acaulis*. This forms dark green carpets in damp places, never more than an inch or so high and the pale yellow buttercups borne on very short stems. Occasionally on a sheltered mossy slope tufted plants of *Euphrasia cuneata* may be found, the nemesis-like white flowers showing purple markings.

Along the shore on sand banks

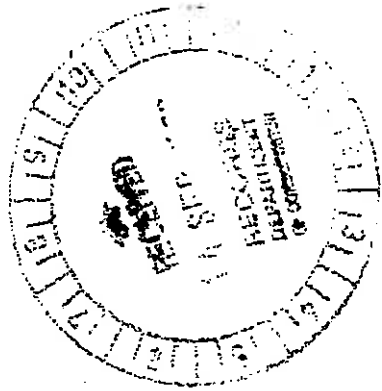
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(Continued on Page 17.)

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stated that the good and poor forms *have* sprung from the same seedling by vegetative propagation. There is always the chance (and a very real chance, too) that a very similar daffodil has been thought to be Lord Roberts, and so the poor type has originated.

Concerning the statement that in spite of not controlling pollination of the irises 95 per cent. of the offspring were true irises, I think that is a case for the superior brain of "Sherlock." I would suggest, however, that he might find the other 5 per cent. to be cauliflowers!

I hope, Mr. Editor, that the friendly argument will be continued.—I am, etc., "PHENOTYPE."

Coastal Plants—Ctd. from page 9. closely-packed fleshy-pointed leaves of a brownish-green colour. These are also found growing on dry, hard, windswept clay areas, the whole plant forming a ball about as large as a walnut. On damp sandbanks are patches of *Salicornia australis*, a succulent plant with upright fleshy stems but no leaves, rather reminding one of some of the desert plants in miniature.

In a shady recess only a few feet above high-water mark, masses of that quaint orchid, *Corysanthes triloba*, grow in carpets of saturated moss. Higher up in dry places are to be found *Thelymitra longifolia* and *Microtis unifolia*, neither of which is very conspicuous, but very pretty through a lens. In a sheltered spot amongst scrub patches of *Pterostylis banksii*, with its large greenish, quaint-shaped flowers may be found. On wet sand and shingle slips near sea-level is found *Gunnera arenaria*. This is a flat-growing plant, rooting at the stem joints and forming large carpets of dark

green, pretty serrated leaves. In late summer their patches are ornamented by the bright red, fleshy, erect seed stems with bunches of lemon-yellow drupes. In similar situations grow numerous plants of *Apium prostratum*, which resembles a small celery plant to which it is related. Another allied plant is *Hydrocotyle Novae-Zelandiae*, with creeping stems and round leaves of kidney shape. Other common small plants are the *Epilobiums* and *Cotulas*, but so common as to be almost classed as weeds.

Among the scrub formed of *Coriaria ruscifolia*, *Coprosinas*, *Melicytus* and flax are to be found; numerous ferns, some of the prettiest being some divergent forms of *Asplenium flaccidum* and *Asplenium lucidum*. These are sometimes found growing in rock crevices only a few feet above high-water mark, and are often drenched with salt water. In these situations they grow very stunted, but in shady places some fine specimens may be found with fronds up to three feet in length. Another common fern on the sea coast is *Blechnum banksii*, very seldom seen more than a few hundred yards from salt water. On the open sand dunes and windswept areas are to be found *Leucopogon Fraseri*, a small creeping-rooted plant with bronzy foliage and sweet-scented heath-like flowers followed by large orange berries. *Pimelia arenaria* grows in the hot sand and has very pretty grey woolly foliage and clusters of small white flowers at the tips of the long wiry stems, with red or black berries in the autumn. *Oxalis corniculata* is another small plant that adapts itself to almost any situation, especially in gardens, being like most of that family, a most difficult weed to get rid of.

John - it seems my news item written early '92 was about 57 years late! Interesting to see what Mackie picked up - incl. Myosotis 'minutiflora' (or did he see real M. pygmaea??), Ranunc. acens, Euphorbia, Pinulea renaria (we don't know this on S. Tar coast now), Even Drace doesn't list Euchrasia cuneata - I'll send him a copy of this article for comment. Mackie doesn't mention Hebe elliptica (he could it we missed it - presum. he didn't ink it notable), nor Crassula (= Tillaea)

p. But he must have  
 a) had a good botanical eye  
 b) done a lot of exploring of the coast.  
 I'll send a copy of all this to Rudy & Matt.

Colin  
 14/9/93



