

ASTELIA GRANDIS IS APTLY NAMED

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Members may remember that on the 21st February 1976 trip to Eaves Bush Mr George Pointon presented the party with an enormous Astelia leaf later measured at 330 cm (10 ft 10 ins) long. A few weekends later we decided to find the plant and following Mr Pointon's directions we eventually discovered it in the bed of a small valley. It was unmistakable, being considerably larger than any of the common Auckland Astelia species. The large leaves stood almost erect to well over 6 feet before bending over near the tip. Older leaves were lying more or less flat on the ground having given up the struggle to remain upright. Five leaves from one of the tufts of the colony were measured: the longest being 348 cm, or over 11 feet long. The plant keys out as Astelia grandis, a plant of swampy regions in the North and South Islands. Interestingly the type was collected by Thomas Kirk in Ponsonby Road, Auckland in 1866. Distinctive features of the leaves are their large size and stiff erect habit, drooping over only near the tip. The adaxial (upper) leaf surface is light green, the abaxial (lower) covered with a fine buff tomentum. One vein (costa) on each side of the main vein is very prominent on the adaxial surface but on the abaxial surface the costae are not easily visible. No flower or fruiting structures were present.

Measurements of 5 leaves at Eaves Bush

	Mean (cm)	Range (cm)
Length	315	235 - 348
Width at $\frac{1}{2}$ way	10.3	8.5 - 11.4
Width 15 mm from tip	3.0	2.9 - 3.0

The longer leaves are considerably longer than the 250 cm maximum quoted in the "Flora of New Zealand".

This particular plant was growing in very damp squelchy soil more or less in a stream bed under shade of tall Leptospermum ericoides. Associated plants included Rhopalostylis sapida, Cyathea medullaris, Carpodetus serratus and Geniostoma ligustrifolium. Unfortunately suitable habitats for this magnificent plant are diminishing. L.B. Moore (N.Z. J. Botany 4: 201-240) states that the only remaining stand in Canterbury is in Riccarton Bush, although she considers that it was probably widespread in swampy forest before European settlement. Ponsonby Road is not the sort of wilderness it was in Kirk's time and the plant is uncommon around Auckland today. Ornithologists (and duck-shooters!) can appreciate the need to preserve areas of swampland. The existence of swamp dwelling plants like Astelia grandis demonstrates that there are also sound botanical reasons for such reserves.