A HOBBY FOR RETIREMENT

By: Eileen Fairburn

Twenty years ago I bought some two acres of hill slope eighty miles from Christchurch, at an altitude of 2,100 feet, facing north. Climatic records are unreliable. Estimates of the normal average rainfall over a period of years, vary from 92 inches to 65 inches annually, spread evenly over the months, but this does not rule out times of no rain for two months as occurred in February - March 1971 nor a cloudburst on Boxing Day some ten years ago which broke roads, bridges and railway lines throughout the district. Mean monthly temperatures taken over some years, are January 14 c, July 2 c. Snow falls during both sou-west and nor-west storms, but, except in mid winter, does not lie long because the slope lies to the sun.

The section had a long frontage, a depth of about two chain and was well fenced except at the back where access for sheep and cattle was easy. Since their exclusion regrowth under the beech has been most encouraging, though one of my earliest planted beeches now thirty feet high, still shows in its hour-glass shape, the last ruthless tongue-lick of a steer disturbed while browsing in 1956.

Except for a piece levelled years ago for the hotel tennis court, the slope is steep, crossed by three small, intermittent rills whose sides give soil richer and damper than the leached glacial till of the intervening small spurs. The valley side for miles has a surface of bare rock or glacial till, at one time heavily forested with, principally, mountain beech. Many years ago this was burnt for grazing, the big trees in the hollows escaping destruction. The rest had been invaded by broom, briar and bramble, a giant tangle by 1953; and on the drier slope, two strips of manuka scrub, dead from the prevailing manuka blight, formed a fire hazard which I, and a sudden nor-wester, turned into a near tragedy. The fire burnt dead manuka but did not harm many trees. Pteridium has invaded the cleared ground, it checks, but does not eradicate broom seedlings, makes useful shelter for young beeches, if they are not choked at birth, and, by dying back after winter snow and frost, gives the young trees a chance to come away in the spring.

One curious result of this fire was the sudden blooming of two species of Thelymitra, supposedly due to the rapid increase in sunlight stimulating photosynthesis, a phenomenon observed in other bush orchids in South Africa. Unfortunately flowers are fewer each year, but the idea of letting undergrowth persist for a few years, and then lighting another fire, is not seriously contemplated.

At first I hastily planted any native species to keep out the broom, briar and bramble; some flourished, small Hebes of doubtful parentage, Cassinia only too well; some like lowland Ribbonwood, after flourishing to thirty feet, were killed by one sou-west storm. Now I plant only those which are within wind or bird dispersal distance, and concentrate on re-planting from thickets of seedlings on the section, five to eight year old beech, many of which are already ten to twenty feet high. I plant about eighty a year. The mortality rate is lower than the Forestry Department expect. There is only one planting month - October - after snow and frost are over, and before spring droughts and blazing sun take their toll. The success of Autumn planting depends on rain falling during those critical months, for beech roots are very fragile, refusing exposure to the air for more than a few minutes. As partial shade for these young transplants, I use Hebe salicifolia cuttings, planted a year before the beech. They root easily, are native to the section and by their seeds, are attractive to birds. Tomtit, Bell-bird, Rifleman, Fantail, Warbler, now seem established.

Even in such a small space there are varieties of site, soil, drainage, slope, sunshine, wind. What have survived in these "micro-sites", give a key for future planting. The list of originals which follows is not large, but is what one might expect from beech forest ruthlessly burnt, cut for firewood, and then overwhelmed by broom, bramble, briar and grazing animals; an unexpected delight comes from uncovering say a clematis, buried in a tangle of ten foot high broom, and supplying it with more aristocratic support.

There remains a piece of level shingle, which might with care, become a "stable river-bed" association but an artificial one obviously. Raoulias, acaenas, epilobium, parahebe, Muehlenbeckia have rooted well, but are easily choked by more vigorous clover and grasses. Perhaps, as has been said, the true riverbed association, should have moving underground water beneath, and the play of flood water intermittently.

The future? An endless war on ever recurring broom and bramble; further beech plantings; and the development of one boggy hollow, where blechnum is at present overwhelmed by californian thistle.

Certainly retirement has its compensations.

PLANTS NOTED IN 1971 BEALEY CRAG:

Acaena novae-zelandiae
Acaena microphyllum var. robusta
Clematis australis
Coprosma propinqua
Coprosma parviflora
Corokia cotoneaster
Gaultheria antipoda
Griselinia littoralis
Hebe salicifolia

PLANTS NOTED IN 1971 BEALEY CRAG (Continued)

Hymenanthera alpina
Nothofagus solandri var. cliffortoides
Leptospermum scoparium
Olearia ilicifolia
Olearia avicenniaefolia
Phyllocladus alpinus
Pteridium aquilinum var esculentum
Pittosporum anomalum
Pittosporum tenuifolium
Pseudopanax crassifoliom
Rubus schmidelioides

ORCHIDS:

Microtis
Prasophyllum
Thelymitra

FERNS:

Blechnum capense
Blechnum pennamarina

SEDGES RUSHES

PLANTED SINCE 1954:

Aciphylla colensoi
Cassinia fulvida
Cassinia vauvilliersii
Cordyline australis
Dracophyllum longifolium
Hebes
Kowhais
Hoheria glabrata
Hoheria sexstylosa
Phormium tenax
Phormium colensoi
Podocarpus totara
Podocarpus nivalis

PLANTS OF SALT MEADOW AND SAND DUNES AT THE WAIMAKARIRI ESTUARY AT BROOKLANDS

By: Bryony Macmillan

On a walk from the end of Anfield Street, Brooklands, to the waters