WHAT GROWS UNDER THE FOREST AT HANMER

Y. Elder
L.B. Moore

It was a fine still sunny afternoon when we took the Forest Walk at Hanmer. In mid-November orchids might be expected and we left the beaten track to look for them where there was little growth under the tall trees. A patch of green a metre square attracted our attention. It turned out to be Corybas trilobus, literally hundreds of small leaves, evenly spaced and each representing a single plant. Later on we came across a few very similar patches and in only one was there any sign of flowers - just a few bitten off stumps of stems were left. We could not help wondering how and why these plants were so numerous where they did occur, and why the patches were so far apart.

White flowers against the brown needles caught the light - a dozen strong healthy little plants of Caladenia lyallii within a few metres. We found no more, but perhaps there was too much growth in most places.

Two broad green leaves flanking an upstanding green flower could only belong to Chiloglottis cornuta. The shade of the high canopy and the deep leaf mould must have suited these plants and they were as big as any we had ever seen, with leaves 9 centimetres long and 3.5 wide. Again there was a little colony where we first came upon them, but the species was scattered in small numbers in various spots near the path.

A broad hollow offered chances of something new. Here to our delight we found tufts of the narrow, grasslike but slightly fleshy leaves of Arthropodium candidum. To make quite sure we lifted the layers of decaying leaves mixed with white felted fungus, and traced the long pale stems down to the little dark tubers that are characteristics of the species. Most of these were in the proper soil but one had embedded itself firmly in a cone of Norway spruce.

Without making an extensive search we found nearly a score of other native species, including half a dozen more herbs and four ferns. Amongst the undergrowth we noted then about 20 non-native species, the most conspicuous being the wall lettuce (Mycelis muralis) as thousands of plants just stretching up to flowering stage. The trees are planted in blocks, mostly of one species, and we thought it would be an interesting exercise to determine whether the smaller plants were different in different blocks.

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