Scirpus fluviatilis on Banks Peninsula

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Our tall, leafy, summer-green species of Scirpus (section Scirpus) with terminal inflorescences and with rhizomes forming woody tubers were at one time all included in S. maritimus or in its two varieties var. macrostachya and var. fluviatilis. Now three species are recognised for this group in New Zealand and Moore and Edgar (1970) record S. fluviatilis (Torr.) Gray "From North Auckland southwards to lat. 38° scattered further south on the east coast north of Napier, and on the west from Wanganui to Foxton". S. medianus Cook is known from various localities in the North Island and locally in Nelson and Marlborough, while S. caldwellii Cook, also known from North Island localities, extends to Nelson and Marlborough and to Canterbury and Otago coasts as far south as Dunedin. S. fluviatilis is much the largest of the three species with culms 150-200 cm x 6-10 mm and with a triangular shaped nut. S. caldwellii, recorded from several coastal or sandy areas in Canterbury and locally from stream margins near Tai Tapu, Motukarara and Lake Forsyth, has culms 30-90 cm x 2-3 mm and lenticular nuts. Laing (1919) in his account of the vegetation of Banks Peninsula listed S. maritimus Linn. from "Akaroa: T. Kirk; Lake Ellesmere; Ohinitahi". S. caldwellii is known from Tai Tapu to near Lake Ellesmere today but there are no recent records from Ohinitahi. The Kirk specimen recently transferred from the Canterbury Museum herbarium to Botany Division herbarium at Lincoln is S. fluviatilis (identified by Dr. E. Edgar).

Banks Peninsula is the southern limit on the east coast for a number of species. However, early records by J.B. Armstrong and E.F.L. Raoul from the peninsula or its near vicinity for species with a disjunct distribution with northern localities have been regarded as suspect by later botanists. Certainly some are of plants unlikely to be found in southern habitats but for others there are well documented specimens and the question as to whether they did in fact grow here must remain open. For example Ruth Mason (in Knox 1969) mentions specimens of Eleocharis neo-zelandica, from the coast between the Waimakariri River and Sumner, Arthropodium cirratum from near Lake Forsyth and Euphrasia cuneata at Lake Ellesmere, all collected by J.B. Armstrong. A. cirratum grows on cliffs to the south of Oaro, the others are not now known south of latitude c. 41° 50'. A specimen of Schizaea dichotoma also collected by Armstrong is labelled "on the track from Purau to Akaroa beneath a totara". The southern limit of this species is regarded as latitude 38°. Raoul listed the northern species Angelica rosaefolia and Pittosporum obcordatum from Akaroa. Another Armstrong record, of Carex spinirostris (as C. vacillans) with a distribution pattern similar to that of Scirpus fluviatilis, was questioned by Laing (1919) but John Thompson has shown that this does grow on Banks Peninsula at least in Lyttelton Reserve. Pterostylis alobula collected at Akaroa in recent years adds to the list, its nearest locality elsewhere being Nelson and Marlborough north of latitude 41° 50'.

Senecio scaberulus (Hoof.f.) Drury was collected from Akaroa sometime before 1864 but has not been seen there since. Drury (1974) when discussing this collection and similar lone records from the ports of Picton and Dunedin tentatively suggested that the annual had been a casual introduction from the North Island. Elsewhere it is known only as far south as latitude c. 38°.

No other specimens of Scirpus fluviatilis are known from Canterbury and recently Ruth Mason and I examined the coastline of the inner Akaroa harbour from Wainui to Akaroa, looking for it or S. caldwellii without success. Possible sites may have been destroyed as the foreshore has been built up and reclaimed, some places are rocky and therefore unsuitable and the most likely site where a stream runs into the harbour is effectively obliterated by a large rubbish dump. If S. fluviatilis does still grow on Banks Peninsula we may have to look for it in some of the more remote, less popular bays.

References

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WINTER PLEASURE

By Myrtle O'Connor

As the days step through winter I can remain indoors and enjoy through the low window, the wider outdoors miniaturised in our riverbed garden. A red tussock leans from the corner, and with a hebe guards a precious new plant of Myosotis uniflorus. Nearby the main plant of Carmichaelia corrugata is sturdy and its tendrils thread the other plants and reappears unexpectedly.

A lonely sensuous mound of Coprosma dominates this area; it is threaded with Raoulia hookeri which also grows round its edges and looks like silvery lace. Next to the Coprosma is R. haastii, a warm cocoa brown, mixed with bronze and gold, adds its lovely colour. Nearby a Scleranthus uniflorus, also a satisfying lump to touch or look at. Muehlenbeckia axillaris always in need of discouragement threads the lump and surroundings. Neat little patches of R. subsericea show here and there - most of them self seeded from the original, R. glabra likes to scramble between several hebes. R. monroi thrives here. Its pale sage green feathers are more luxurient than any seen in the wild.

Acaena microphylla var. robusta, neat and low by the wall, and bright green novae-zelandiae, add texture and colour.