

The Heaphy Track, February 1963

Collingwood to Perry's Pass

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WE hunted in all the map shops, but the only map available in 1963 of the Karamea area of Northwest Nelson was the old Lands & Survey sheet 10A, Golden Bay, 1949 (4 miles to the inch), which was four-fifths featureless ocean. So with that we had to make do. (Since 1965 the one mile to the inch sheet N.Z.M.S. S7, Heaphy (Interim series) has been published, which is much more useful although it lacks contours and is inaccurate concerning the extent of forest.)

From Takaka we followed the broad new highway to Collingwood, and turned west just before the Collingwood township to drive up the Aorere Valley on good sealed road as far as Bainham, then about 8 miles on gravel until the road was closed by a gate. From here it continues as a good broad grassy track. We forded Walsh Creek — loose bottom to the ford and we had to push the car— but the water was low after prolonged drought. Fossil Creek was deeper, so we left the car and crossed on foot. (Had we left the car on the Bainham side of Walsh Creek we would not have had to scurry back when rain set in two days later. The creeks rise very quickly in these parts.)

The track continues broad and plain, with large triangular wooden signs at intervals, dating probably from gold-mining days (around 1890). When we reached the Brown River, which is big and bouldery with high banks, we were confronted by a large Forestry notice:

HEAPHY TRACK
KARAMEA 74 MILES
PROTECT YOUR FOREST!

Here a party of scouts had made a large arrow of boulders pointing across the Brown River, at right angles to the track. Such a sign is necessary and should be made a permanent feature, as the track we had been following continued along the north bank of the Brown River. Several parties looking for the Heaphy Track have continued happily straight ahead, believing they were on it, and discovered their error much later.

We crossed the river to a grassy flat with a small rusty corrugated iron hut about opposite the Forestry notice. (This hut is private property and usually locked.) Behind the hut is a hill slope with scattered bracken. One of us took the right spur, the other the left, both missing the proper track which is marked by a

triangular sign and turns abruptly left at the foot of the slope. Being made for packhorses, it is evenly graded and rarely steep. We met at the top however and soon found the track there. In the dusk we saw a large parrot on the ground and watched it laboriously climb a post. We pursued it with a torch, hoping it would be a kakapo, but saw the red under its wings as it flew off. Just a kea, after all.

We had left the car at 6 p.m., and by 8 p.m. had reached the forest, following the well graded and newly cleared track by moonlight and torchlight until 11 p.m., when we laid our sleeping bags on the track near a stream and slept till 5 a.m.

The Golden Bay Tramping Club, a small body of enthusiasts, are to be congratulated on the good job they have made of opening up the neglected and heavily overgrown track. They left a short section untouched to show what it had been like before. Here we had to fight our way through a dense growth of saplings up to three inches in diameter, mainly kamahi and *Quintinia acutifolia* which is very common in the forest here as an under-shrub. Other species of interest in the forest are three ratas: *Metrosideros robusta* (large trees), *M. umbellata*, which grows on the ground as a shrub here and in many other parts of N.W. Nelson, and *M. fulgens*, a scarlet-flowered climber. Higher up the track was lined with plushy dark fronds of *Todea superba*, the Prince of Wales fern.

Two-and-a-half hours from our sleeping place brought us to an old and much used campsite, where fresh tussock bedding neatly arranged and a complete absence of rubbish pointed to recent occupation by scouts. Slip rails fencing off a portion of the track show where horses used to be held in the old days, while their owners camped here. Borrowing two billies we went in search of water. Found none downhill on either side of the ridge, so continued along the track and found a running stream about an hour further on. This was an exceptionally dry season; normally there are many small watercourses crossing the track.

We observed *Jovellana repens*, with its dainty white puffy flowers on slender stems, growing in shade close to the water. A little higher up the track, where the forest was thinning out, we found *Drosera stenopetala* spreading its rosettes of long reddish spoonshaped leaves against a background of pale yellow moss, and some charming small specimens of *Gentiana spenceri* (probably the only gentian that likes living in forest), with white flowers prettily veined in red.

As we reached the edge of the forest and began to come out into the open we found mats and tiny rosettes of *Celmisia parva*, with trowel-shaped leaves 1-2 cm long, shiny dark green above, covered with thick satiny tomentum beneath. The flowers of this


little daisy are about 2 cm across, on slender stalks 5 cm long. "Mountains at the head of the Heaphy R." is the type locality for the species.

At last we came out on to Perry's Pass (called "Downs Saddle" on the older map), a natural clearing of several acres in extent. The new map shows forest on the southern side of Mt Perry, but actually there is tussock fellfield on the pass, changing to herbfield on Mt Perry, with no forest intervening. A noticeboard on the summit of the saddle reads: "Goulard Downs Scenic Reserve and Wild Life Refuge". Although only 2840 ft in altitude, the pass has an extremely rich and varied flora of subalpine plants. A dense reddish turf of *Eleocharis acuta* and *Gleichenia circinata* var. *alpina* (young fronds clothed in light brown wool) forms the main ground cover, varied with red tussock and two shrubby species of *Hebe* (*H. macrocarpa* and *H. odora*), both smothered in white flowers. Hidden among these we found *Gentiana montana*, with pure white erect flower clusters, and two large mountain daisies, *Celmisia lanceolata* with long stiff narrow leaves having a prominent yellow midrib, and *C. dallii* with broad thin glaucous green leaves, backed with cream satin. We also found more *C. parva*, much smaller in leaf and flower on dry sites on the slope of Mt Perry. One specimen intermediate in size between *C. dallii* and *C. parva* and resembling the common silver-backed



Gentiana spenceri, upper forest margin near Perry's Pass. Plant 2 ins. high, each flower as big as a one cent piece.



 Perry's Pass, with Goulard Downs in distance.

C. hieracifolia of the Tararuas (which does not occur in N.W. Nelson at all) could have been a natural hybrid.

Anisotome aromatica var. *dissecta* was found in fruit, also the small *Plantago uniflora*, a glaucous-leaved violet, and the tiny swamp-lily with the disproportionately long name, *Herpolirion novae-zelandiae*. This consists of a tiny tuft of narrow-linear leaves about 1 cm long with a comparatively huge oblong capsule squatting in the centre. The flower, which I have seen on other occasions, is white or very pale blue, sessile, and large for the size of the plant (about 1.5 cm across).

Euphrasia townsonii, a small eyebright, was found in creamy yellow flower, also *Forstera sedifolia* with its beautiful twin flowers, white with a crimson centre. *Gentiana vernicosa* with its glossy "varnished" leaves was found on Mt Perry, but is not at all common. (It is the most abundant gentian on the mountains around Boulder Lake, while *G. montana* is the most abundant on Perry's Pass.) *Epilobium pernitens*, a charming prostrate willow-herb with tiny shining round red leaves, is common here, *E. glabellum* more rare. No other epilobium species were noted in this area. The orchids *Lyperanthus antarcticus* and *Caladenia lyallii* were also in flower.

Plants of the heath family were *Archeria traversii* (with light red bell-flowers), *Gaultheria depressa* (with brilliant scarlet young leaves), the ubiquitous but always charming *Pentachondra pumila*,

and two *Dracophyllum* species (*D. palustre* and *D. rosmarinifolium* as near as I can work them out). *Exocarpus bidwillii* sprawled its stiff leafless branches on the rocks of Mt Perry, *Donatia novae-zelandiae* formed hard dark green cushions studded with tiny starry white flowers, and the modest *Abrotanella linearis* and *Celmisia alpina* with their tufts of short linear leaves filled up the cracks.

From Perry's Pass one can see across an intervening area of forest to the Goulard Downs, about 12 sq. miles of open country around 2000 ft in altitude, surrounded by the forest which is normal for that altitude. (See "Goulard Downs" by W. B. Brockie, Bulletin No. 29, Aug. 1957 —Ed.).

The Downs have not been cleared but are of the type of country known as pakihi, which cannot carry forest owing to the presence of an impervious iron pan a short distance below the surface. Pakihi land has a typical vegetation and flora, interesting in its own right, but not as rewarding (to us) as that of the Pass.

I noted the following species in the scrub on the outskirts of the forest between the Pass and the Downs: *Cordyline indivisa*, *Nothofagus menziesii*, *N. cliffortioides*, *Dracophyllum traversii* (large pink candelabra-like branches, topped with bunches of stiffly recurved leaves), *Phyllocladus alpinus* (celery pine, with glaucous foliage), *Olearia arborescens*, *O. colensoi* (tupari), four species of *Coprosma*, a rigid, stiffly divaricating shrub which could be *Pittosporum crassicaule* (reported from this area), and the yellow-flowered *Phormium colensoi*.

It is interesting to note the plants we could *not* find. There appear to be no wahlenbergias on Perry's Pass, and W. B. Brockie reports he could find none on the Goulard Downs. *Celmisia hieracifolia* var. *oblonga*, a small daisy with golden-backed leaves which is common on most mountain areas in Nelson, was not present either.

A pair of fernbirds on the saddle were very trusting and completely unafraid. We sat on the track trying to photograph them, while they slipped mouse-like through the stems and leaves of flax and snow-grass, and came out on the rocks within a foot or two of our boots. Their long tails always look untidy, as though they had been dragged in the dirt (as indeed they had), but apparently they can never look neat and smooth as the feathers lack barbules to connect the filaments.

We camped on the saddle, on a natural mattress of dry springy *Eleocharis* turf. There is a large rock fireplace, obviously much used, where the track emerges from the forest. We heard a kiwi call in the distance as we were dining in the dark, and later I heard a rustle in the tussocks and pursued it, being rewarded by the sight of a large rounded silver-grey rump dodging rapidly

away from me. Later in the night we were awakened by the rattling of light rain on the tent (nylon tents make a drizzle sound like a hailstorm) and heard kiwis calling all around, gruff and shrill, bass, tenor and soprano, each bird with its own note. We heard the rising semitone scale once only — about three notes ascending, then levelling off. Made a sortie in the dark, torch at the ready, but did not see any more. By morning we found we were bedded on an *Eleocharis* bog, sodden as a sponge, so we had to return in haste to rescue the car. It took us four hours' fast going in heavy rain from Perry's Pass to the Brown River. The creeks were filling up rapidly but we just managed to get the car out in time. We could not have got much wetter anyway. Future expeditions be warned! Leave your vehicles at the road end; it's only an extra mile to walk.

Recent Developments

Mrs F. G. Soper of Puramahoi has supplied the following information: The Heaphy Track area is now part of a newly formed Forest Park. The Forest Service has completed clearing the track, but the use of horses is actively discouraged. A horse can do a lot of damage in a botanical and wild-life reserve, both by eating off rare plants and by bringing exotic weed seeds into the area in its droppings.

Walsh Creek has a concrete bottom to the ford now, and there is a walk-way suspension bridge over Fossil Creek. One still crosses the Brown River on foot, though, but no doubt a bridge will be set up here also in due course. There are two Forestry huts at the beginning of the track, and an early start from these makes it possible to reach the Blue Duck Hut in the Gouland Downs in one easy day. There are also new huts at the Karamea end.

An interesting account, "Birds of the Gouland Downs", by G. R. Williams, is to be found in the Ornithological Society of N.Z.'s journal *Notornis*, Vol. 8, pp. 236—243.

Book Review

A Bunch of Wild Orchids, by Sheila Natusch. Pegasus Press, Christchurch. 24 pp. Price 50 cents.

This slender booklet seeks to kindle the interest of amateur naturalists, particularly children, in observing and cultivating our native orchids. The approach is engagingly informal, and botanical names and facts are skillfully introduced amongst reminiscences of the author's childhood collecting days in Stewart Island. The many sketches of different orchids (four in colour) are executed with Mrs Natusch's usual charm.