

Ranunculus sericophyllus

R.B. Keey

25 Montclare Ave., Christchurch

Ranunculus sericophyllus is normally regarded as a high-alpine plant of the Southern Alps from Lewis Pass southwards. According to Mark & Adams (1986) the silky-leaved buttercup grows on snowbanks and sheltered fellfields at heights between 1400 and 2100 m because of its tolerance of a short growing season and the chilled flow of melt water. The pale green, slightly glaucous leaves are trifoliate, and the herb produces relatively large, single yellow flowers, with five or more petals, and a fruiting head about 10 mm in diameter.

On a day tramp beside the East Branch of the Matukituki River, on the borders of Mount Aspiring National Park, what seemed to be a small alpine garden was noticed growing in fresh riverbed gravel at about 400 m in altitude. The plants included *Epilobium* species., *Helichrysum bellidioides* and an alpine buttercup, later identified as *Ranunculus sericophyllus*. Possibly seed, or even the rhizome, had been washed downstream through erosion or avalanche activity in the basins that flank the Mount Aspiring massif.

Reference

Mark, A.F. & Adams, N.M. 1986. **New Zealand Alpine Plants**, 2nd edition.
Reed Methuen Publishers, Auckland