

MYRSINE DIVARICATA AT THE CASTLE HILL RESERVE

MIKE LUSTY

I have an indefinable affinity towards the weeping mapou, *Myrsine divaricata*. It all began when making my first visit to Castle Hill Reserve at the invitation of Lance McCaskill (after whom the reserve is now named). The prime objective of the visit was to check out *Ranunculus paucifolius* and do some further planting of it. On completion of our task, time was spent wandering around the area to look, learn and listen under the guidance of the reserve's instigator.

In the course of this exercise I came across a particularly presentable specimen of *Myrsine divaricata*, thriving between some boulders and limestone rock tors. So taken did I become by this particular shrub that I not only vowed to grow my own plant but every so often I endeavour to make a special pilgrimage to this site to pay my respects, homage if you like, to this particular specimen. It has also become a personal memorial to a very resolute conservationist.

Myrsine divaricata is a truly divaricating, large shrub or occasionally a small tree. It has a rigid growth habit of drooping branches with tightly interlaced branchlets which together give it a really weeping conformity. The leaves are small, predominantly alternate and almost heart shaped. The minute flowers which appear in the spring may go almost unnoticed to other than the observant or informed. The fruit, a globose berry, of purplish hue, takes a considerable time to ripen and can be quite persistent on the plant. Slow growing and not readily available except from specialist nurseries, *Myrsine divaricata* will never make the top ten as a garden favourite, but for some discerning plant growers it has special attractions and qualities, especially if given reasonably good soil and shelter from strong winds.



Fig. 1. *Myrsine divaricata*, weeping mapou on a rock ledge in the limestone at the Castle Hill reserve.