

# FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018



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## A Tribute to Our Long-Term Curator, Malcom Fisher

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In September our long-term curator Malcom Fisher and his wife Alwyn moved to Nelson to be near their daughter and her family. Words are insufficient to express the contribution that Malcom has made to this establishment and maintenance of Fernglen. To have a curator living opposite the gardens and on call 24-7 is dream-like and Malcom has carried out an extensive range of tasks under the broad definition of curator. Not only the specialised care of this vast collection of native plants, Malcom has conducted hundreds of tours of the gardens, has attended hundreds of meetings concerning the welfare of Fernglen, engaged in heavy track maintenance, the watering of the gardens in dry summers and so on. The list is endless!

While there is an obvious family connection with Fernglen, Mal has always been passionate about the gardens, sharing his mother's wishes to expand and improve Fernglen. I can recall the days when we planted all the large trees at Ben's ridge together, Mal was as happy as I was, knowing we were planting trees that would be enjoyed by many in future years.

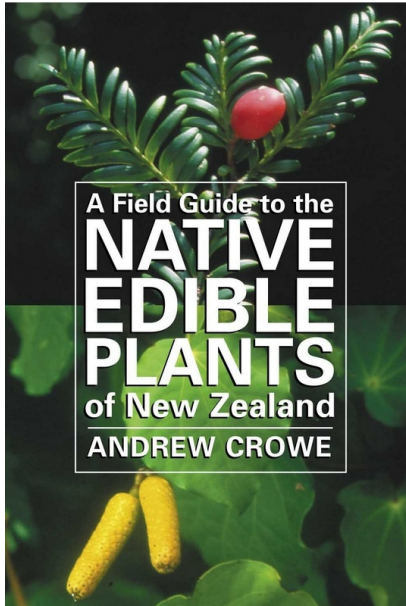
Mal's cheery personality will be much missed as will be his knowledge of native plants which is quite outstanding. Something Mal was always very modest about. Hopefully he will find a similar outlet for his energy in Nelson. I'm sure he will love tramping in the Nelson Lakes area and further afield in the Southern Alps. On behalf of the Fernglen committee, I wish Mal and Alwyn a happy time in the South Island and very big thanks for all the time and energy he has given to Fernglen.



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## Book Review: *A Field Guide to the Edible Native Plants of New Zealand* by Andrew Crowe

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First published in 1981, this very successful publication has been revised and reprinted many times. The 2016 field guide edition is the one I'm reviewing.

Living on Native Plants is no picnic, writes author Andrew Crowe.

*"Many native plant foods are of historical interest only and offer very little food value or taste unpalatable to unaccustomed taste buds."*

*"Apart from the use of bracken tree roots, treated karaka kernels and kumara, Maori tended to rely on a large extend on flesh foods (particularly fish, shellfish, birds, insects and rats)."*

One of the main problems Crowe noted, was finding sufficient starchy foods to sustain energy.

Even though most of the 190 edible plants outlined in this book can be regarded as survival foods only, some have clear potential for being bred and cultivated to provide new food crops. Almost all the fruit and vegetables that we grow and eat today had equally humble beginnings as wild plants!

The publication is divided into a number of sections covering specific areas of edible plants; food from trees and shrubs, edible herbs, edible ferns, edible mushrooms, edible seaweeds, as well as chapters covering the introduced food plants of the Maoris, traditional cooking methods of the Maori, bush survival and poisonous plants.

Andrew Crowe provides a very succinct definition of an edible plant:

*"A plant can only safely said to be edible once it has been eaten by a number of people, over a period of time without ill effects!"*

The author in researching the book tried and survived eating many of the plants he describes in this outstanding publication, often providing an exact comment on his like or dislike of a particular plant. This is what I call researching your topic. An absolute must for all native plant lovers!

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## Winter Planting of Rare Natives Received from Matai Nurseries

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A shipment of rare natives was received in late winter from Lester Davey, the owner of Matai Nurseries in Waimate, approximately 1 ½ hours north of Dunedin. As with previous orders from this nursery, the plants arrived in perfect condition, were superbly grown and all correctly labelled. They included:

*Aciphylla aurea*

*Aciphylla subflabellata*

*Carmichelia stevensonii*

*Celmisia spectabilis*

*Coprosma linariifolia*

*Coprosma microcarpa*

*Coprosma petriei*

*Coprosma rubra*

*Hebe parviflora* var. *arborea*

*Helichrysum lanceolatum*

*Hoheria angustifolia*

*Parahebe olsenii*

*Ranunculus lyalii*

The addition of four more coprosma species is particularly exciting. Our coprosma collection at Ben's Ridge now numbers over thirty species, all thriving. Surely the most comprehensive coprosma collection in New Zealand.

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## Farewell to the Oratia Native Nursery

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Sadly, after many years, the Oratia Native Nursery closed its doors for the final time this winter. After operating from the family land at Parker Road in Oratia, in 1990 Geoff Davidson shifted his native plant growing operation to the site of a large existing nursery on the West Coast Road. Here Geoff expanded his nursery considerably with specialised areas for wetland plants, a large shade house for ferns, as well as propagating an extended range of trees, shrubs and ground covers.

The Oratia Native Nursery has been a great friend of Fernglen supplying many of our rarer and endangered species that are now thriving in our gardens. Geoff has been very generous over the years, our second *Pennantia baylisiana* flourishing at Ben's Ridge was a gift from Geoff.

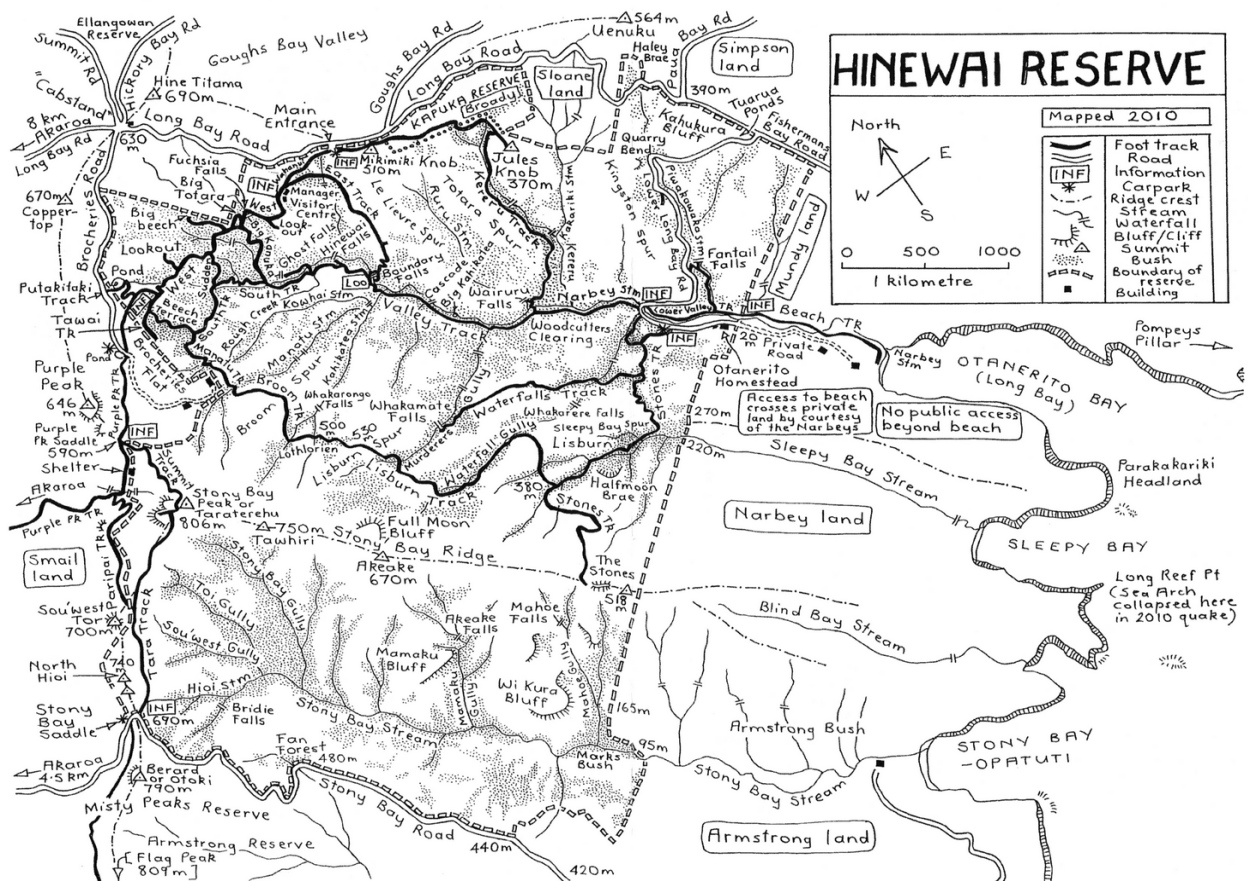
Highlights for the Oratia Native Nursery included supplying plants for the 1990 Commonwealth Games and for Te Papa, where the native planting continues to thrive. Geoff points to the 1991 Resource Management Act as a turning point in the public sale of natives. The public were now being directed to plant native species. He is to be congratulated on his achievement in growing and operating this nursery for so long. The growing and selling of native plants is not an easy task, there is an immediate reduction in the range of plants you can sell (compared to other garden centres) this is even further reduced when eco-sourcing is demanded in re-vegetation schemes.

The impact of the Oratia Native Nursery is a lasting one, as trees mature wetland plantings achieved their goal, and ferneries thrive. Geoff can sit back and smile knowing his nursery had a major role in shaping our environment. The closing of the Oratia Native Nursery leaves an enormous gap in the production of native plants nationwide and especially in the immediate Auckland area. Hopefully someone will 'fill the gap' and can tap into Geoff's extensive knowledge of seed collecting and propagation of our many amazing native plants.

Thank you Geoff for your support of Fernglen and all the best for the future.

## A Brief Introduction to the Hinewai Reserve (South Island)

On the Banks Peninsula in Canterbury there is a remarkable 1250 hectare slice of New Zealand, the Hinewai Reserve. Initially an area of 109 hectares, the reserve has expanded over the years to its present size. Hinewai encompasses most of these catchments, Otanerito, Stoney Bay, and Sleepy Cove. There are magnificent views across the Pacific Ocean, Akaroa Harbour, and the hills and bays of Banks Peninsula. While the reserve is privately managed, there is a publicly accessible network of tracks around 16 kilometres linked to Akaroa by a walkway over the Purple Peak Saddle. All tracks are well signposted and there are public toilets at the visitor centre, at Otanerito, and at the top end of the Valley Track.



The reserve is covered by what is described as a mosaic of native forest in varying stages of development. Approximately 50 hectares are old growth forest, mainly red beech. Ancient totaras, matais and kahikateas can be found in this area. The tracks wind through kanuka, tree fuchsia, mahoe, five-finger, broadleaf, kowhai and lacebark. Over 60 species of fern grow at Hinewai, including six species of tree fern. Native birds are abundant in the reserve, including bellbird, tui, tomtit, rifleman, kereru, fantail, morepork, harrier and kingfisher.

An excellent book written by Hugh Wilson, the long-term moving force behind Hinewai, tells the story of this amazing reserve. It is titled, *Hinewai, The Journal of a New Zealand Naturalist*, and was published in 2002.

The reserve produces an outstanding newsletter twice a year titled *Pipipi*. Not only does it keep you up to date on development at Hinewai, but also includes some stunning drawings of native plants and some very funny cartoons.

For further information contact:

Hugh Wilson, Reserve Manager  
632 Long Bay Road  
RD3, Akaroa 7583  
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## An Introduction to Working Bees at Fernglen Native Gardens

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Every second Saturday of the month a working bee is held at Fernglen, located along the extension of Kauri Road, just below 36 Kauri Road, Birkenhead. The working bee runs from 9am to noon. This is a chance to meet our active committee members, to help maintain the gardens and learn more about some of our rarer and endangered species. The work undertaken is not arduous and all ages are most welcome. A morning tea is provided for all the wonderful volunteers who turn up. A guided tour of the gardens is also available for new visitors to the gardens.

As a rare exception, for the month of December 2018, the working bee will be held instead on the 1st Saturday of the month, the 1st of December 2018. There will be no working bee on Saturday the 8th of December as a Botanical Illustrator event is taking place.





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## The Plight of the Curator at Fernglen Gardens

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Since our long-term curator Malcolm Fisher departed for the South Island in September, we have been without curator. The Auckland Council has spoken of removing the position, employing garden contractors to mow the lawns and carry out what they described as 'garden maintenance'.

The Fernglen Management Committee finds this totally unacceptable, knowing full well the degree of knowledge and skill required to maintain and expand our plant collection. No mention has been made of guiding the many groups that visit our gardens, both school and adult groups.

After representations to the Kaipatiki Community Board and numerous other concerned people, negotiations with the Auckland Council are continuing. It would appear the stumbling block of recognising Fernglen as a very significant plant collection still remains a problem for the Auckland Council. We obviously do not fit into the model of being just another park!

In the meantime, it is only the monthly working bees and some considerable voluntary labour by committee members that are maintaining the gardens at a certain level. Hopefully in the summer newsletter we will be able to announce a positive outcome, but do not hold your breath! The journey of Fernglen since its inception has certainly been a roller-coaster ride, but we as a committee are determined for Fernglen to continue as a place of education, to see the gardens survive and grow and, to become the premier native plant collection in New Zealand.