

tussock, and alpine-flower belt, extending all along the summit of the range. In the lower parts of the forest the nikau palm is very plentiful, and it seems to thrive lower down in the gorge even out in the open, away from the shelter of forest-trees. This is rather remarkable, as the nikau usually requires the shade and protection of the undisturbed bush. Ferns, including the beautiful *Todea superba*, were in abundance on the ridge. It was too late in the season to see any of the ranunculoid family in bloom on the snow-country belt, but mountain daisies were numerous, and also one or two kinds of gentians, pretty white flowers with delicate blue lines or pencillings, resembling flowers I have seen on the slopes of Mount Tongariro.

Bird-life was not plentiful in the bush. There was abundance of miro and other trees, on the berries of which the pigeons feed, but the birds would probably not be seen in numbers until about May, when the berries are ripe. There were a few kakas, and we heard and saw two or three makomakos (bell-birds), tuis, and riroriros, but otherwise the forest was a very silent one.

Emerging from the alpine scrub and climbing up a steep face covered with snow-grass, mountain-flax, and dwarf koromiko, we were able to see something of the mountain country around us. It was extremely wild and broken, quite as wild as any country in the northern part of the South Island before the true Alps are reached, and, except for the snow-grass tops of the mountains, reminding me very much of the heart of the Urewera Country. From the central ridge that was still more than a thousand feet above us there stretched on either side of our ridge a series of other spurs, tussock-yellow and brown on their upper parts, then thickly forested as they sloped away to the north and north-west. They were just like great ribs; the precipitous-sided main range was the spine. Between each sharp rib there was a deep seemingly impenetrable gorge, filled with smoky blue; the sides of these gorges were mostly thickly clothed with forest, with a bare rock face here and there.

We had come all this way without crossing any stream, for we had taken the crest of the spur; but just at the edge of the snow-line two of our party, by prospecting down the side of the gully, found a small spring.

From the top of the first steep snow-grass hill above the alpine scrub it was now easier going, or, at any rate, clearer, although the grade became steep. We now climbed to the top of Mount Dennan. The upper slopes of this peak had to be crossed before we could reach Hector. At the trig. station on Dennan I remained, while Mr. Field and the others went on over the flat top of the next ridge and on to the slopes of Hector. They ascended some way, but had then to return in order to reach camp again by dark. Dennan is a very sharp-topped peak; but it is several hundred feet lower than the next ridge, which is marked "Flat Top" on the survey maps, and which is the most conspicuous object in the range as one looks up the Otaki Valley.

We now had very grand views of the surrounding country: looking west there was the great round-backed mountain Kapakapanui (3,615 ft.), the traditional "Lightning Mountain" of fatal omen of the Ngatitōa Tribe; then the sea and Kapiti Island; a little southward was Cook Strait and the mountains of the South Island. Northward there was range after range of sharp blue mountains. Away some miles north of us there was the double-pointed mountain which the Maoris say is the *tino* of the range—that is, the exact place from which the mountains take their name. "Tara-rua" means "Two Peaks": it is to this part that the Maori name is said to particularly apply. In a straight line north of our viewpoint on Mount Dennan lay Mount Crawford, 4,795 ft. From the slopes of Mount Hector the Hutt Valley and Wellington Harbour were seen, and in the south-east the plains of the Wairarapa. Had it not been for the bush-fires in the valleys below—the settlers' summer burning-off fires—the view would have been much more extensive, for it is said that Egmont and Ruapehū can be easily seen from Mount Dennan on a clear day.

A remarkable and important feature about the high snow-grass saddle on the range-top between Mounts Dennan and Hector is that there is, as reported by the members of the party, a series of small lakes or tarns of excellent drinking-water. There are a score or more of these lakelets lying in the dip between "Flat Top" and Hector, about 4,500 ft. above sea-level. The tarns are quite close to each other, but are at varying levels. They evidently never dry up, and they are not stagnant; there is an outlet, and they are, no doubt, fed by springs from the upper part of Mount Hector. The presence of these little lakes and ponds adds considerably to the possible value of the place as a resort for travellers, for the saddle would make a very good summer camping-place. There is no wood just here for cooking, but enough to boil the billy could be taken from the edge of the scrub below. A camping-ground such as this, so close to the mountain-top, would be a place of magnificent possibilities for the artist, and for those who love wild mountain scenery.

The top of the watershed was reached at about noon: the journey had occupied about seven hours from the Forks camp. Leaving the slopes of Mount Dennan again at about 3 o'clock, and halting half an hour for a billy of afternoon tea where we had had lunch on the way up at the edge of the alpine bush, we returned to camp, reaching the edge of the timber just before dusk, and the Forks at 7 o'clock. The whole journey, about twenty miles of walking and climbing, took about fourteen hours, including rests.

As the result of the expedition and from what I saw of the country, I am of opinion that this is a trip that could very well be added to our tourist routes. To a large extent it is of local importance, concerning chiefly the Otaki district, but there is a good deal of interest for visitors in and about Otaki and Waikanae, and there is very good fishing in the streams; and a mountain excursion of this sort would be an additional and important attraction. The scenery is so fine that it deserves to be made more accessible. At present the ascent as we made it is too severe to be undertaken except by those used to the bush and to rough hill-climbing; and a good bushman-guide would be necessary. From my observations, I think a horse-track could be made from the Forks right up to Mount Dennan: there are no gullies to cross, and only two or three steep places