



Fur seal, Disappointment Island

*Gentiana concinna*, Fairchild's Garden



track formed by members of the 1972/73 Scientific Expedition which had been based here. This track was one of the few on the islands.

The very wet conditions in this area are ideal for mosses, liverworts, and filmy ferns, of which there was a great variety. The evenings were so light in this latitude at 10pm that we were able to see the filmy ferns well enough to identify them, even in the darkness of the bush.

December 8. The weather was once again kind to us and as there were no strong winds an early start was made to pass through Victoria Passage, the narrow channel between Adams Island and Monumental Island and through which flow strong tidal eddies. The *Acheron* then turned north along the western side of Auckland Island. The cliffs here were steep and forbidding and were the cause of several wrecks including that of the *General Grant* in 1866.

As with Adams Island a special permit was required to land on Disappointment Island, an island which more often than not is surrounded by such a heavy swell that landing is impossible.

This was the first time specialists in land snails had visited this island to collect specimens. Incidentally, 5mm diameter would be a large snail and excitement can run high on the finding of a species even 1mm in diameter.

It was a great thrill to grab the swirling kelp, pull oneself up on to a ledge of rock, and actually stand on Disappointment Island. How different was our reaction to that of the sixteen survivors of the *Dundonald* in 1907 who thought that they were on the main island where there were food depots, only to find that they were on a small treeless island. They managed to survive there for five months in grass-covered holes in the perpetually wet peat. Eventually some made it to the main island in a coracle made of hebe branches covered in sealskin and brought rescue to their comrades.

Disappointment Island, like Adams Island, is unique in that there are no introduced animals or plants. 60,000 birds, the world's largest population of albatross, breed here. This particular species being called the shy or white-capped mollymawks (*Diomedea cauta*) they were sitting on eggs as were the rockhopper penguins (*Eudyptes crestatus*). Petrel burrows were numerous their occupants not being seen, but heard, muttering below ground, sub-antarctic snipe and Auckland Island flightless duck were scurrying about in the undergrowth.

Southern skuas (*Catharacta lonnbergi*) were sitting on vantage points ready to seize an unwary bird's egg. Some of the discarded penguin eggs, I noticed, had holes in them.

For me the highlight of this whole wonderful Auckland Island experience was the hour I spent with a fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*). Over a period of half an hour I slowly crawled along a rocky ledge until I was lying less than a metre away from it and then together we contemplated the heaving sea with the occasional sideways glance at each other.

Many of the lovely plants seen in Fairchild's Garden were flowering here also but the blue-flowered *Hebe benthamii* which wasn't seen in flower in Fairchild's Garden, and which only grows in the sub-antarctic islands, had two blossoms remaining giving just a



*Anisotome latifolia*, Fairchild's Garden