



Succulent cushions of *Celmisia philocremna*, another very rare mountain daisy which is entirely restricted to bluffs in two streams in the Central Eyre Mountains.

Photo: Neill Simpson

their pastoral lessees in a derelict and severely eroded state. Since that time burning and grazing in the ecologically important areas has all but ceased. Indeed, more than 70% of the blocks are classified as severely eroded or eroding land (Class 8 and 7e) which is unsuited for sustained grazing. Under Government policy this land is to be destocked and managed for soil and water protection. On Eyre and Cainard this should mean that only the relatively small low altitude areas of the two blocks are used for farming, although sheep are still grazed on some severely eroded high altitude areas.

Most biological interest in the Eyre Mountains centres on the slopes of Jane Peak (2035m) and Eyre Peak (1968m), plus the upper reaches of Eyre Creek. It was mostly to here that a previous handful of scientists have come — notably between 1912 and 1916, in 1927, and the late 1960s. In more modern times, Dr David Given, a specialist on New Zealand rare and endangered plants, had visited the area in the 1970s and one of us (Dr Alan Mark) had also collected material for his book on alpine plants here in the early 1970s.

For ten days various parties from our group climbed each day from the valley floor to the range crest sampling vegetation and insects in all the tussock, forest, shrubland and alpine communities. However, our January's 1987 expedition ranged as far afield as the Mt Bee-Helen Peaks area of Eyre State Forest well to the south, as well as to the Gorge Burn catchment which feeds the Oreti river to the west.

Head high tussocks

Our group was heartened by the good condition in which we found most of the mountain vegetation sequences, from for-

est, shrublands, grasslands, fellfields and on up to bluffs and screes. Alpine buttercups were in glorious flower showing little grazing and stands of narrow leaved snow tussocks were flowering abundantly and were head high, a rare phenomenon in this type of country.

Most of this type of tussock, which is magnificent when in heavy flower as it was this year, is now stunted elsewhere through grazing and repeated burning.

Several of the alpine plant discoveries would be the envy of many collectors and for that reason we are anxious not to reveal their precise locations.

The mountain daisies *Celmisia thomsonii* and *Celmisia philocremna* were two outstanding finds, the former probably the first pink alpine daisy recorded in New Zealand. About five percent of the plants had pink coloured flowers, while others displayed a curious mix of pink and white petals. Apparently none of the earlier observers had seen this species in flower and consequently they missed discovering their flower colour. Of the wildlife recorded, the most significant were the four populations of rock wren, the first recorded to the east of the Southern Alps. Also of note was a rare land snail, *Powelliphanta spedeni* var *spedeni* found locally in snow tussock grassland.

Crown or Corporation control?

In sum, our survey considered that the Eyre Creek and upper Maitara catchments, and the Mt Bee-Helen Peaks sectors were "outstanding biologically because of the numerous natural values they contain." The 13-strong party included Katharine Dickinson and Brent Fagan (botanists, Otago University), Colin Meurk (Botany Div. DSIR),

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Landcorp are demanding title to all lands below 3000 ft in the headwaters of Eyre Creek and the Maitara River. This will deny DoC the opportunity to reserve bush, short tussock and dry shrubland communities on the lower slopes and valley floor, vital for any representative reserve sequence. Landcorp are also demanding the right to graze sheep to the 5000 ft eroding range crest on land allocated to DoC on Cainard. Surrounding private farmers have all sensibly retired such lands under Catchment Board run plans. Final allocation is still unresolved.

Neil Simpson, Brian Rance and Susan Timmins (botanists, Lands and Survey), Hazel Sandicock (botanist, New Zealand Forest Service), Barbara Simpson (botanist), Barbara Barratt (entomologist, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries), Brian Patrick (entomologist), Graeme Loh (Wildlife Service) and the authors.

Eyre Creek and Cainard were under the control of the Lands and Survey Department until the 1 April 1987. But under the land allocation accompanying environmental restructuring, future management responsibility for the blocks has been under debate. Conservation and recreation groups have challenged the interim allocation in mid 1986 of both properties to Landcorp. Fortunately, this allocation is now being reviewed.

The groups have no objections to the Land Corporation holding title to and farming the lower parts of the properties provided there is public access up the streams. However, protection of the upper altitude areas totalling 20,000 hectares and the stream sides which form the headwaters of the Maitara River is vital and should be under the control of the Department of Conservation. Little of this area is presently farmed.

The distinctive and important forests, shrublands, tussock and alpine lands of Eyre and Cainard, when combined with the adjoining Eyre State Forest and destocked parts of Mt Nicholas, Half Way Bay and Walter Peak stations form an extensive natural area totalling some 80,000 hectares.

This offers a magnificent opportunity for a large scenic reserve or conservation park in the heart of the Eyre Mountains.

Acknowledgements

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Further Reading:—

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