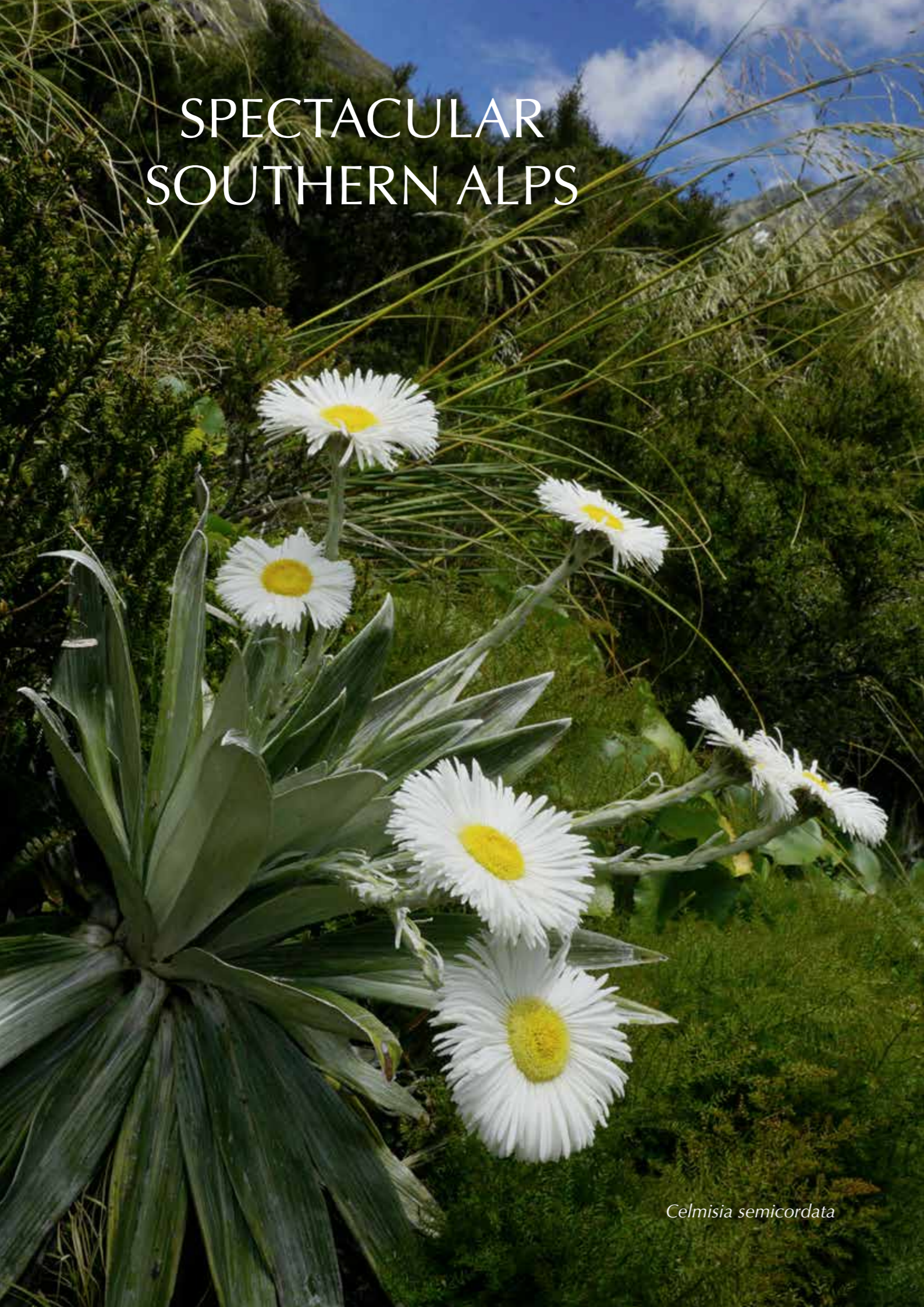


# SPECTACULAR SOUTHERN ALPS



*Celmisia semicordata*



*Aciphylla montana* (female)



*Ranunculus crithmifolius*

For twenty years I had wanted to reacquaint myself with the remarkable flora of New Zealand. My previous visit had been in March, when I was more interested in trekking and birding than the flora. It was time to plan a tour to this one-off destination and thankfully I had immense help throughout from a network of plant mad kiwis. I also wanted to dispel an all-too-common view that the flora was all white!

Arrival is always a blur, there is no easy way around such a time zone shift when coming from Turkey. Luckily, Hamish was there to meet me and once we arrived home planning began, before I collapsed with jet lag. Next day I was off with Ann and Joe, two very knowledgeable and personable plant nuts who took the time out to show me Mount Hutt. It had been a wet spring and this had triggered some incredible flowering. As we would see on this and other trips out it seemed every clump of *Celmisia* was in flower, along with lots more. The first trip found the delightful golden cups of *Myosotis macrantha* - not at all white - and around these were bright yellow *Dolichiglottis* daisies and upper slopes with plenty of orange-and-green *Aciphylla montana*. This is one of a number of architectural *Aciphylla*, and they are part of a very rich textural aspect to the flora. Indeed, New Zealand flora is very much about subtle colours imbedded in diverse textures. Chief among these are the varied leaves of



*Myosotis macrantha*





*Aciphylla congesta* at Gertrude Saddle.



*Ranunculus buchanani*



*Ranunculus buchanani* x *lyallii*



*Celmisia verbascifolia*

*Ranunculus*, and we found wonderful clumps of *R. crithmifolius* alongside *R. hastatus* and the first of the vegetable sheep, *Raoulia eximia*. These are perhaps the ultimate textural expression to be found here and we all took another trip out to Mount Lyford where there were incredible cushions of *Haastia pulvinaris* and *Raoulia bryoides*, as well as vast numbers of *Celmisia spectabilis*. In places the two cushion plants merged together in complex swirls of exquisite foliage.

There was another *Celmisia* top of my list though and I found this in great flower in the Otira Valley. I've always admired the handsome foliage of *Celmisia semicordata* and here I found some beauties. Plenty more of this classic NZ genus followed in what was a bumper year for them. A trip south to Fjordland and a hike onto Gertrude Saddle found stunning drifts of *C. verbascifolia* along with stands of golden *Bulbinella gibbsii*, mats of *Ourisia caespitosa* and pretty tufts of *Aciphylla congesta* bursting from crevices. There was even a plant or two of the gorgeous *Ranunculus buchananii*. By now I was in the company of Hamish, Dave and Steve, who along with their enthusiasm for dubious cocktails and beer were also dedicated plant hunters who knew the mountains inside out.

I took other hikes down here too, one onto Mount Burns was especially memorable. It began in dense mists, which suddenly and spectacularly cleared, allowing me



*Bulbinella gibbsii*



*Phormium cookianum*





*Haastia pulvinaris*



*Haastia pulvinaris* & *Raoulia bryoides*



*Raoulia bryoides*

to track down architectural *Phormium cookianum* and higher up among the rocks, *Ranunculus buchananii* and its hybrids with *R. lyallii*. There were heaps more *Celmisia* too, but probably the finest displays I saw were on the Pisa Range. After fine wine with Tony and Joan I had headed over the mountain spine to Wanaka where Doreen kindly accommodated me for a couple of days. This gave me the chance to go up onto this spectacular range and on a totally windless day (apparently a rarity). I recall being drawn higher and higher, until I reached the ridge line. On the way were amazing patches of *Gentiana divisa* and fabulous numbers of both *Celmisia lyallii* and the scarcer *C. prorepens* in riotous flower.

I had some time at the end to look at Penny Zino's wonderful native plant inspired garden and then completed my trip with another day out with Ann and Joe, though this time orchid scouts (David and Kay) had gone ahead a few days before to find a real gem. Here among the scrub were the stunning blue flowers of *Thelymitra cyanea*.

As is probably obvious by now I had an outstanding trip, but little of this would have been possible without such enthusiastic back up. Sincere thanks to all those involved and hopefully I won't have to wait another twenty years to get back again.



*Thelymitra cyanea*



*Celmisia prorepens*, Mount Pisa

