

Alpine Flowers Tour

This is a 8-day tour exploring some iconic subalpine and alpine mountain location in the Canterbury section of the Southern Alps. The combination of a small group size (maximum of 6), keen and interested participants, outstanding scenery, a knowledgeable guide and not too great a distance to travel each day helps to make this a relaxed and enjoyable experience.

What is so special about New Zealand's alpine flora?

- It is unique - 93% of the more than 600 species are endemic to New Zealand – they occur nowhere else in the world.
- Flower colour is predominantly white with some creams and yellows. (*Compare, for example our gentians to the bright blue of the Swiss species*)
- Flowers are promiscuous pollinators – they attract any or all insects. (*The plants would gain nothing by producing coloured flowers because our native bees and butterflies are not long-tongued*)
- The flowering season is brief – there is a rush to set flower and pollinate
- The evolution of the alpine plants occurred very rapidly (*the Southern Alps did not exist 2 million years ago*)
- There are some botanical oddities with even odder common names that attract botanists from all over the world: vegetable sheep, Spaniard, wild Irishman, penwiper to name a few.

Alpine Habitats

There are seven specialised alpine plant habitats in New Zealand. We will visit examples of each and we do not have to walk too far to enjoy, study and photograph the plants. The alpine habitats are:

- **Subalpine shrubland** – up to 300 metres above the bush line.
- **Tussock herbfield** – dominated by snow tussock & mountain daisies
- **Fellfield** – stony & rocky with a sparse plant cover & little soil
- **Snow bank** – areas where snow accumulates until late summer
- **Cushion & mat moorland** – dwarf & often tundra-like vegetation
- **Scree** – steep slopes (30-35°) of dry fellfield with loose & sometimes mobile surface stones
- **Bogs** – depressions where drainage is impeded & the water table is close to the surface

Accommodation & Meals

Days 1,2 & 5	Staveley (Tussock & Beech Ecotours, Cottage & Lodge)
Days 3 & 4	Aoraki/Mt Cook (Mt Cook Backpackers Lodge – formerly Glencoe Lodge, comfortable double or twin rooms with en suite)
Day 6 & 7	Arthur's Pass (Arthur's Pass Alpine Motels)

Dates, Price & Bookings

25 November – 2 December 2011 & 11 – 18 January 2012

Price: contact Odyssey Travel (see below)

Enquiries to: Tussock & Beech Ecotours, Staveley, RD 1, Ashburton 7771. Ph:03 303 0880; e-mail: ecotour@nature.net.nz.
Website: www.nature.net.nz.

Bookings through:

Odyssey Travel, PO Box 37999. Parnell, Auckland. Ph: 09 374 4482, 0800 4440 055 (NZ), 1300 888 225 (Aus).

e-mail: a.dale@odysseytravel.com.au website: www.odysseytravel.com.au

OR: Liz Cruickshank, Southern Institute of Technology, Private bag 90114, Invercargill; 0800 478 839; e-mail emcsouthpoly@clear.net.nz

What to bring

Personal

Toilet gear; Personal first aid (e.g. plasters, Disprin); earplugs (if you are a light sleeper); a book to read

Clothing and Footwear

A good quality waterproof parka; light nylon parka; warm clothing – 3 layers, gloves, warm hat; lighter clothing - shorts, light slacks / pants, shirts, sun hat; clothing to change into at night, light footwear; day pack; hiking boots / stout walking shoes, spare socks; sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent; drink bottle (1 litre).

Optional

Binoculars, camera, walking poles, hand lens

Itinerary

Day 1

Pick up in Christchurch from 10.00am. Travel via Canterbury Plains & Rakaia Gorge to Mt Hutt. First night at Staveley in historic Ross Cottage & Mountain Beech Lodge.

Day 2

The glaciated intermontane basins and braided rivers of Hakatere Conservation Park have been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. They contain many threatened subalpine habitats with uncommon & rare plants. Second night at Staveley.

Day 3

Drive from Staveley to Aoraki/Mt Cook. Morning tea on Mt John beside Lake Tekapo (weather permitting). Activities include the Park Information Centre, a short walk in Governors Bush and walk up the Tasman Valley track. Visit adjacent wetlands to view black stilt/kaki, the world's rarest wading bird. Accommodation and dinner at Aoraki Mt Cook Village.

Day 4

Second day in Aoraki-Mt Cook National Park. Hooker Valley Track – a highlight of a visit to the park. Accommodation and dinner at Aoraki Mt Cook Village.

Day 5

Morning in Aoraki-Mt Cook or visit Mt Dobson Conservation Area for a few hours botanising and photography in the main basin. Return to Staveley for dinner & accommodation.

Day 6

Travel from Staveley to Arthur's Pass, stopping at the shrublands on the Lake Lyndon Road in the Korowai/Torlesse Tussocklands Park. The rest of the day is spent in Arthur's Pass National Park. Punchbowl Falls & Bealey Valley Tracks. Accommodation & dinner at Arthur's Pass.

Day 7

Arthur's Pass National Park – a choice of activities – weather and fitness dependant: Dobson Nature Trail, upper Otira Valley, and Temple Basin Track. Accommodation & dinner at Arthur's Pass.

Day 8

Arthur's Pass to Christchurch stopping at Cave Stream & Kura Tāwhiti/Castle Hill reserves, Dry Stream and Porter's Pass. Arrive back in Christchurch by 3.00 pm.

Locations visited

Mt Hutt Conservation Area

A 2000 metre greywacke mountain overlooking the Canterbury Plains with easy access via a ski field access road. All habitats are found but the highlight is the scree where some uncommon alpinines can be found such as the black button daisy (*Leptinella atrata*) and Dendy's cotula (*L. dendyi*), Haast's hebe (*H. haastii*) and buttercup (*Ranunculus haastii*), *Haastia sinclarii* & penwiper. South Island edelweiss can be found on rocky bluffs, as can "flocks" of vegetable sheep.

Hakatere Conservation Park & Lake Heron Nature Reserve.

A conservation park that was opened in 2007 and has been proposed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Locations visited include: the tundra-like Hakatere Flats with the world's smallest tree (the dwarf broom *Carmichaelia monroi*); orchid hunting in the tussocks at Maori lakes Nature Reserve; the nationally-important & rare kettle tarns on the ancient glacial moraine beside Lake Heron with their Lilliputian plant communities; searching for a rare and as yet unnamed plant which is only found in a few hectares beside the Cameron River.

Aoraki-Mt Cook National Park

Established around New Zealand's highest peaks and a land of glaciers this park could hardly be considered an easy environment for plants. However over 400 species can be found within the park and all seven alpine habitats are represented. There is easy access on well-developed walking tracks. There would be few places in the world where "botanising" is more enjoyable - providing the weather behaves. The contrast between the beauty of the alpine flowers and the impressive grandeur of the mountains and glaciers is very special.

Mt Dobson Conservation Area I Te Kahui Kaupeka Conservation Park. (Alternative option)

A very good road climbs through exotic pastures and tussock herbfields to the ski field basin in this newly established conservation park. Alpine fellfields on scree, bluff, seepage and rockland environments are all within short walking distance of the car park. The locally endemic Dobson's speargrass/taramea (*Aciphylla dobsonii*) grows here. Mt Dobson is popular with alpine plant enthusiasts for its diversity of alpine plants growing within a confined area.

Korowai/Torlesse Tussocklands Park

Another eastern South Island conservation park dominated by greywacke mountains. The extensive subalpine shrublands are species-rich and contain a number of species of mountain daisy. The park is also known for its scree and some unusual plants such as vegetable sheep (*Raoulia eximia*), penwiper (*Notothlaspi rosulatum*) and scree pea (*Montigena novae zelandiae*).

Kura Tāwhiti / Castle Hill Conservation Area

Kura Tāwhiti has Tōpuni status, which is a legal recognition of the site's importance to the Ngāi Tahu tribe and ensures that their values are recognised, acknowledged and respected. Very little original vegetation remains in the distinctive sculptured landforms, called a karst landscape, but that which does include some of the rarest and most endangered plants in Canterbury. A shrubland restoration project within the reserve hopes to recreate the habitat for these plants.

Kura Tāwhiti is also the site of the first reserve in New Zealand established specifically to protect a plant - the Castle Hill buttercup (*Ranunculus crithmifoliosus*) increasing numbers from 32 plants in 1948 to more than 300 today. The reserve also protects the Castle Hill forget-me-not (*Myosotis colensoi*).

Cave Stream Reserve

This reserve is named for a large cave that was formed by limestone being dissolved over time and diverting Cave Stream from its original surface channel. The original shrubland vegetation has been greatly modified but a fenced small reserve of the endangered *Hebe cupressoides* is present and easily accessed.

Arthur's Pass National Park

This is New Zealand's third oldest national park and the first in the South Island, opening in 1929. The park straddles the main divide and contains a wide range of plant habitats. Contrasting forests exist – in the east it is mountain beech whilst west of the divide it is mixed podocarp-broadleaf rainforest. All seven alpine plant habitats occur and the walking tracks make for easy botanising. The rainfall is measured in metres (Otira – 5m, Arthur's Pass 4m) and this is reflected in the diversity and richness of the flora – both forest and alpine.

Porters Pass (Korowai Torlesse/Tussocklands Park)

At 946 metres, Porter's Pass is 26 metres higher than Arthur's Pass. It contains some interesting and uncommon alpine plants growing within degraded shrublands and also greywacke scree slopes.

Reading list

Here are some books that will introduce you to our alpine flora:

Ghosts of Gondwana: George Gibbs. 2006. ISBN 13:978-1-877333-48-4

New Zealand Alpine Plants: Mark & Adams. Reprint 1995. ISBN 0-908877-83-8

Wild Plants of Mount Cook National Park: Hugh D. Wilson. 1978 (Whitcoulls Ltd)

New Zealand's Alpine Plants inside and out: Bill & Nancy Malcolm (Craig Potton Publishing). 1988. ISBN 0-908802-04-8

Plants in Mt Cook National Park: Hugh Wilson. 1990. (Department of Conservation). ISBN 0-478-01195-4

A checklist of the flora of Arthur's Pass National Park: Canterbury Botanical Society, Journal 40, 2006-2007. ISSN 0110 5892

The Story of Mount Cook National Park: Department of Lands & Survey. Reprinted 1991. ISBN 0-477-06136-2