

# Harry Howard Barton Allan (1882 – 1957)

Harry Howard Barton Allan was born at Nelson on 27 April 1882, the fourth son and youngest child of Robert Allan, a draper, and his wife Emma Maria, née Lewis. At the local Central School the headmaster Frederick G Gibbs introduced him to botany. He was awarded a scholarship to Nelson College, where he won prizes for literature and athletics, and started studying for his BA. After a succession of teaching positions while continuing part-time university study, he graduated MA at Auckland University College in 1908. The next year at Motupiko, near Nelson, he married Hannah Louise Arnold; they were to have a son and a daughter.

Harry Allan was an excellent teacher of English, but at Waitaki Boys' High School his interest in botany was utilised for teaching the new agriculture course. He organised experimental work at the school, and when he left in 1916 to become agriculture master at Ashburton High School he assumed responsibility for the experimental farm being established there. However, contacts with Leonard Cockayne turned his interest more to botany than agriculture, initially as a part-time pursuit. Cockayne supported his election as a fellow of the Linnean Society of London, and encouraged his lengthy botanical study of Mount Peel, Canterbury, which Allan submitted as his doctoral thesis, with acknowledgement of his debt to Cockayne, his "friend and master".

After graduating DSc in 1923, Harry Allan moved to the newly established Feilding Agricultural College as English master and first assistant to the principal.

At the same time he continued botanical research and collaboration with Cockayne, especially on hybridisation between species, and worked on his first book, *New Zealand Trees and Shrubs and How to Identify Them* (1928). He gained recognition as a botanist, received a study grant from the Royal Society of London and was elected a fellow of the New Zealand Institute. Leaving teaching in 1928 to become a professional botanist at the new Plant Research Station in Palmerston North, he began studies in economic botany (on grasses and weeds). In 1937 he transferred to Wellington as head of DSIR's Botany Division until his retirement in 1948.

With Cockayne's death in 1934 Allan emerged as New Zealand's foremost botanist. He received awards from both national and international scientific organisations, and was made a CBE on his retirement. He immediately began a new treatise on the plants of New Zealand, assisted from 1953 by Lucy Moore, but by 1957 his health had failed and he died at Wellington on 29 October, survived by his wife and children.

Moore completed the work for publication in 1961 as Volume 1 of the comprehensive *Flora of New Zealand*. It became the standard reference on the subject, a fitting memorial to a quiet and modest man who added significantly to our botanical knowledge. He is also remembered in *Celmisia allanii*, an alpine daisy he discovered in 1928 and William Martin named in 1936.



## ***Celmisia allanii***

*Celmisia* is an Australasian genus of more than 60 species centred in New Zealand. *Celmisia allanii* is a trailing or sprawling sub-shrub forming loose patches up to 1 metre across. Large soft leaves are distinctively covered in fluffy white hairs, the upper surfaces pale grey and the lower ones snow-white. Flower stalks are hairy or glabrous, up to 25 cm long, with narrow bracts and a daisy head 2–3 cm across. Low alpine, it occurs at 1300–1700 m in snow hollows or snow-tussock herbfield in Nelson and Northwest Canterbury. *Celmisia allanii* is sometimes included within *Celmisia incana* by New Zealand botanists, but until properly tested taxonomically, is regarded as distinct.