

Sven Berggren (1837 – 1917)

Sven Berggren was born in Skåne, the southernmost region of Sweden, on 12 August 1837. He studied at Lund University from 1857, and after completing his PhD in 1865 he lectured in botany there. From 1881 until his retirement in 1902 he was professor of botany at the University of Uppsala and then at Lund. Although specialising in the study of bryophytes, he was also interested in algae, fungi and the vascular plants, and he journeyed to the Swedish Arctic in 1868 and to Greenland in 1870, exploring, collecting and extending his knowledge of the natural history of the northern regions.

Encouraged by Scottish botanist William Lauder Lindsay, who had spent several months studying the cryptogamic flora of eastern Otago in 1861-1862, Berggren made an extended visit to New Zealand in 1874-1875. With a list of distinguished scientific contacts, and letters of introduction provided by Lindsay, Berggren left London on 13 September 1873 on the *Helen Burn*, and arrived at Lyttelton on New Year's Day 1874. A welcoming letter from James Hector awaited him. After spending several weeks in the Christchurch area, he set out with a packhorse and attendant for the West Coast, staying two nights *en route* at Castle Hill Station with amateur naturalist John Enys. In Otago he again enjoyed the hospitality of local scientists; he attended the Otago Institute meeting, went out with the Dunedin Naturalists Field Club and collected specimens on a large scale, literally – amongst his treasures, a vegetable sheep!

By the time he reached Wellington in early July, Berggren had exhausted his £200 grant from the Royal Academy of Sweden, and Hector, on his

behalf, requested a further £200 from the New Zealand government. In return, Berggren undertook to complete a named set of all his new plants, furnish an account of his discoveries for publication by the New Zealand Institute, and provide a complete set for the General Assembly Library of the large illustrated works that would be published in Europe. Cabinet approved a grant of £100.

After attending the July meeting of the Wellington Philosophical Society, Berggren left by sea for Napier. He then made a hurried trip through the centre of the North Island to Auckland, arrived at the Bay of Islands on 20 October and joined Percy Smith's survey party at the head of the Waima River. Although still focussed on plants, his diary entries reveal a keen interest in the Māori language and an awareness of Māori identity, as well as New Zealand life in general. He visited the centre of the island again, before retracing his route to Auckland, and thence to Christchurch, leaving in April for Fiji, Hawaii and California. By February 1876 he was back in Lund, where he died on 28 June 1917.

Twenty-four new species of flowering plants were described and illustrated in a paper published in 1877 in the *Proceedings of the University of Lund*; his work on New Zealand liverworts appeared in 1898. His collection of mosses, including those of New Zealand, is in the herbarium of Lund University Museum. Donald Petrie, a new member of the Otago Institute when Berggren visited the province in 1874, would have met him. In 1885, Petrie described and named *Carex berggrenii* "in honour of Dr Sven Berggren, of Uppsala University, who has described and figured several New Zealand species of the genus".

Carex berggrenii

Carex (Greek *keiron* 'to cut', referring to the cutting leaf edge) are leafy sedges with unisexual flowers and the nut enclosed in a utricle. The leaves are often scabrid (rough), hence the term "cutty grasses". Around 2000 species are widespread in temperate and cold regions, with about 80 native and 22 naturalised species in New Zealand. *Carex berggrenii* forms short, dull red or green tufts from a short rhizome. The broad, flat linear leaves, rounded at the tips, are up to 6 cm long; the culms short, with female spikes crowded at the base of the terminal male spike. An endemic, *Carex berggrenii* is found in mountain bogs, damp river flats and turfy lake margins, mainly in the Kaimanawa Range, Canterbury and Otago.

