

George Valentine Biggar (1855 – 1931)

George Biggar's name is often linked with that of his friend Dugald Poppelwell (1855–1931), five times mayor of Gore, solicitor and Southland botanist.

George Valentine Biggar was born on 11 November 1855 at Alloa in Clackmannanshire, Scotland, and came to New Zealand with his parents in 1861. They made their first home in the Kaikorai Valley, Dunedin, where George attended Waikare School, and then moved to Allday Bay, south of Oamaru in North Otago. His father maintained the road in the district, and after George left school he joined him in this work. Later, Matthew Holmes employed George on his sheep station, Bolwalla, where his aptitude for handling horses became evident.

On 30 May 1879 at Port Chalmers he married Annie Harland; they were to have five sons and four daughters. They moved to Southland and two years later George bought a small farm at Croydon Bush, near Gore, where he lived for the rest of his life. While breaking in his farm, he worked also as a waggoner for the Waimea Plains Agricultural Company, spending several seasons in the Mataura Gorge splitting timber and packing fence posts out to the railhead. He could not resist the lure of gold, and in 1885 and 1886 took part in rushes to the Criffel goldfield near Mt Pisa in Central Otago and Big Bay in South Westland. For three months in 1896 he assisted McKay and Linck in their survey of the Preservation Inlet and Wilson River goldfield.

His account of this, dictated to his wife, was published by A C Begg and N C Begg in *Port Preservation* (1973). According to his friend Poppelwell, he also worked for Buchanan and Haast, and collected birds for Buller.

During the summer months between 1910 and 1917 Biggar assisted Poppelwell and his friends on at least five botanical expeditions: to the Garvie Mountains, Upper Makarora and Haast Pass, Martins Bay and the Bunker Islets and Bench Islands of Foveaux Strait. Biggar's camp skills, bush lore and horsemanship were invaluable to the success of these field trips, and were recognised in the naming of *Veronica biggarii* (later *Hebe biggarii*). The new species was described in 1916 by Leonard Cockayne, based on a plant raised in Poppelwell's garden from a cutting he collected on the Eyre Mountains.

George Biggar was a popular and respected leader of the Croydon community. He was a ranger for the Acclimatisation Society and caretaker of the Croydon Domain, and when the Gore and Surrounding Districts Early Settlers Association was established in 1924, he served on the executive committee. Above all, he was a dedicated conservationist who stressed to others the need to preserve our heritage of unique flora and fauna. He died at Gore on 23 June 1931, 21 years after the death of his wife.

Hebe biggarii

Hebe is credited with being the largest genus of New Zealand plants, with the mountain dwellers the most numerous and varied in size, shape and flower arrangement. *Hebe biggarii* is a small shrub of decumbent or prostrate habit, with spreading, rather stiff densely leafed branchlets to 25 cm long. The leaves are glaucous and smooth, except for a few minute hairs on the edge near the base. Short, rather dense lateral racemes of small white flowers, 5–6 mm across, with magenta anthers, appear in October. Naturally uncommon, *Hebe biggarii* is confined to the Eyre Mountains, Thomson Mountains and Mid Dome of Southland, where it occurs on subalpine rock outcrops at 1200–1450 m above sea level.

