

## Walter Boa Brockie (1897 – 1972)

**W**alter Boa Brockie was born on 21 January 1897 in Selkirk in the south of Scotland. He was educated at the Selkirk Borough School, and at the age of 14 became an apprentice gardener on the Haing Estate, renowned for its glasshouses and grape culture. During the 1914–18 war he served with the King's Own Scottish Borderers in Gallipoli and the Sinai Desert, and at Gaza in 1917 was wounded and posted as missing. For the rest of the war he worked on the Berlin-Baghdad railway as a prisoner of the Turks.

After returning to Selkirk to complete his apprenticeship he came to New Zealand, intending to go on to California to study citrus growing. In Dunedin, he became interested in the "incomparable" New Zealand flora, and decided to stay. While working briefly for New Zealand Railways, and then as a gardener at Bushy Park, he became familiar with much of Otago and its plants. In 1928 he joined the staff of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens and extended his interest to collecting and cultivating native plants, especially alpenines. He was responsible for setting out the Cockayne Memorial Garden, and his study over many years of *Ranunculus paucifolius*, known only from Castle Hill, led to an area being reserved for its protection.

In 1946–47 he visited Campbell Island, officially as meteorological observer. He botanised extensively and returned with many live plants, herbarium specimens and seeds for distribution. In 1947 he

was appointed curator of Otari Native Botanic Garden at Wellington, a post he held until his retirement in 1962. With limited finance and staff he designed and constructed a large rock garden, which was planted with New Zealand plants, many from his own field trips, and carried out botanical research, including hybridising. After his retirement to Richmond, Nelson, he planned and supervised the building of the large native rock garden at Pollard Park, Blenheim, featuring plants endemic to the Marlborough region.

On one of his many botanical trips with school-teacher friend Harry Talbot, a new species of bulbinella (*Bulbinella talbotii*) was discovered at Goulard Downs, and an unusual coprosma (*Coprosma talbrockiei*). Other species discovered by Brockie and subsequently named in his honour include a harebell, *Wahlenbergia brockiei*, *Scleranthus brockiei*, *Hebe brockiei* and a forget-me-not, *Myosotis brockiei*. He was a respected member of scientific, horticultural and botanical societies, and was awarded the Loder Cup in 1945. His writing – major papers, garden notes and a book on New Zealand alpenines – was in an easy and individual style, and his interests also included astronomy, trout fishing and winemaking.

He married Vera Ellison in 1931, and during their many years together she was a loyal and gracious supporter. After a full and productive life, Walter Boa Brockie died in Nelson on 17 December 1972, survived by his wife, son and two daughters.



### ***Scleranthus brockiei***

*Scleranthus* (Greek: 'hard flower') in the family Caryophyllaceae, is a widespread genus, mostly of temperate regions. One of the three New Zealand species, *Scleranthus brockiei* is endemic. *Scleranthus brockiei* is a perennial, closely branched herb forming a moss-like green cushion up to 10 cm across, with a central root system. Leaves are very small, strongly overlapping and persistent along the stem. The minute flowers are in pairs on the short flower stalks, and have five sepals, which persist in the fruit. After the fruit falls, four bracts remain on the flower stalk. Coastal to high alpine to 1700 m, it occurs sporadically in the South Island in well-drained open tussock grassland, herbfield and rocky places.