

# Margaret Jane Annand Bulfin (1920 – 1996)

**B**orn on 7 July 1920, Margaret Simpson was the fifth and youngest child of George Annand Simpson of Fraserburgh and his wife Margaret Smith from nearby Buckie, in the northeast of Scotland. In 1925 the family came to New Zealand and settled on a farm at Matata in the Bay of Plenty. As Margaret grew up, the mild climate, productive soil, beautiful coast and bush-clad hills influenced her future interests in horticulture, botany, tramping and mountaineering. Essential employment during the Second World War may have given her the heavy vehicle driving skills later appreciated by her colleagues, and a propensity for hard physical effort.

In 1945 she was in the first group of horticulture students at Massey Agricultural College, Palmerston North. After gaining her diploma she continued botanical studies at Auckland University, and in 1950 was appointed science technician at the Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) in Wellington. She assisted botanists Lucy Moore and Ruth Mason with their work on aquatic plants and became deeply involved in Mason's project to build up a herbarium of fruits and seeds. In 1952 she graduated from Victoria University, Wellington with a BSc, and in the summer of that year made the first of many visits to Molesworth Station to take part in the study of the depletion of high country vegetation. When Botany Division moved to Christchurch, Margaret, the only one on the staff with a heavy traffic licence, frequently delivered packed items to the division's new home. Directed to prepare and publish a seed list – the annual *Index Seminum* – she familiarised herself with the Canterbury flora

and collected widely from the coast to the alpine herbfields. Another Botany Division move in 1960, this time to Lincoln 22 km away, enabled her to grow and study native plants, both there and in the garden she made on the banks of the Liffey, where she lived after her marriage to Ray Bulfin. Assigned to assist with vegetation surveys of Nelson Lakes National Park, she covered its varied landscapes, made many new records or discoveries (especially lichens and bryophytes) and wrote a section on the flora for the park handbook. Her investigations later extended to other special areas of the South Island.

In 1965 Walter Brockie, retired curator of Otari Native Botanic Garden, Wellington, described *Epilobium margaretiae*, citing, "The species is named in honour of Mrs R A Bulfin (née Margaret J A Simpson) who discovered it while making a survey of the vegetation of the Nelson Lakes National Park." He added that he and Harry Talbot of Richmond, working independently of Mrs Bulfin, also discovered the species on 1 February 1964, near Lake Peel, Northwest Nelson – almost 60 miles from Mole Tops, where she had collected it.

Promoted to scientist in 1974, Margaret carried out experiments on seed germination of indigenous species until her official retirement eleven years later. However, she continued her seed work after 1985, and with Colin Webb, began *Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons* (2001). She regularly assisted visiting botanists, and her generosity and hospitality at home and in the field were renowned. Margaret Bulfin died after a brief illness, on 3 May 1996.



## ***Epilobium margaretiae***

*Epilobium* ('flower on top of the pod' referring to the petals attached at the end of the long ovary) is a genus of about 200 species, commonly known as willowherbs, mainly from temperate regions. *Epilobium margaretiae* is a small glabrous herb with short, usually unbranched creeping stems. Crowded, fleshy leaves are arranged on the top of the reddish stems; dead leaves persist at the base. One or two white flowers develop atop the upper leaves and later short stout capsules on short stalks partly project beyond the leaves. A high-alpine plant of flattish, stony, frost-activated sites, chiefly in fell field, it is confined to the mountains of Nelson and North Marlborough.

Lake Peel, Northwest Nelson, 1998