

Mavis Melville Davidson (1910 – 2004)

Born at Te Karaka in Poverty Bay, Mavis was of Cornish and Norwegian ancestry, the seventh child of Thomas James Gedye and Dagmar Martha Melville Gedye (née Hansen). After completing her education at Tokomaru Bay and Gisborne (Mangapapa and Te Hapara primary schools and Wairoa District High School) she attended Brain's Commercial College in Auckland. She began her working life as a shorthand typist and ledger keeper in Auckland and Wellington offices, and in 1939 married W E (Bill) Davidson.

The Second World War interrupted her studies for a science degree, which she commenced in 1940 at Victoria University College, Wellington. She spent four years in the Women's Royal Army Corps, serving in Coastal Artillery, after which she returned to "Vic" and in 1950 completed her MSc in zoology. A period in the Totalisator Agency Board's head office followed, until in 1958 she joined the traditionally male domain of the New Zealand Forest Service as a biologist. At first she was attached to the opossum unit, but was soon doing major research into sika deer and their impact on forest and grassland ecosystems, spending long periods in the field in the Kaimanawa and Kaweka Ranges. She became a world authority on the subject.

Tramping and mountaineering were an important part of Mavis Davidson's life, and fitted in well with her research activities. She joined the Tararua Tramping Club in 1934, tramped and climbed over much of the New Zealand backcountry, and in 1953 led the first all-woman ascent of Mount Cook. She held office in both the Tararua club and Federated Mountain Clubs, and was granted life membership of the New Zealand Alpine Club, which she had joined in 1949. She was a foundation member of the Wellington Botanical Society in 1939, and also an accomplished photographer. Two books on mountains of New Zealand, co-authored with L R Hewitt, include her photographs.

When Mavis was 65 she retired, and with her husband Bill moved to Leigh in Northland, where she continued to assemble her research for publication in New Zealand and internationally, and maintain world-wide contacts and a wide circle of friends. She was a recipient of the International Gold Badge for her work on sika deer, the Forest Research Institute's Jubilee Award as "pioneer in her field", and in 1992 the OBE for her services to science and mountaineering. She nursed her husband Bill for several years until his death in 1990, and after a long, varied and fruitful life, Mavis Davidson died at Leigh on 24 May 2004. She had been a trailblazer for most of her life, and a skilled and perceptive observer of nature. Her name lives on in the specific name for a small white mushroom she collected from the forest floor on Taranaki/Mt Egmont in 1948.



Humidicutis mavis

Humidicutis is a small genus of brightly coloured agarics, the majority of which are found in eastern Australia. They were previously described as members of *Hygrocybe*. The generic name derives from the Latin *humidus* 'moist' and *cutis* 'skin', referring to their moist caps. Although wax-gills are often brightly coloured, *Humidicutis mavis* is a pure, silky white mushroom that grows from the ground to a height of 80 mm and a width of 50 mm, the fragile cap conical when young and splitting at the margin with maturity. The hollow stipe is also silky white and fragile. Like other members of the family, it has smooth, thin-walled spores, which give a white print. It may be found growing singly on the forest floor in New Zealand and parts of eastern Australia, during autumn.