

John Davies Enys (1837 – 1912)

Born on 11 October 1837 at Enys in Penryn, Cornwall, England, John Davies Enys was the second son of John Samuel Enys and his wife Catherine Gilbert. The family was well established – Enys had been the family seat for hundreds of years – and John was educated at Harrow School. Following the interests of his mother’s family, he became a keen amateur naturalist, and in the 1850s attended geology lectures, and took walking trips in Britain, recording observations and collecting specimens.

In 1861 he accompanied John Acland, a pioneer Canterbury runholder, on his return voyage to New Zealand. At the time Enys’s cousin Charles Tripp was in partnership with Acland. Enys gained farming knowledge and experience on their stations, and in 1864 when his brother Charles came to New Zealand they went into partnership, taking over the Castle Hill run. They found high-country sheep farming difficult, and in 1873 leased Akitio station in northern Wairarapa, but they were never successful farmers, and survived only with financial support from their family.

However, Castle Hill was rich in bird, insect and plant life, and John Enys pursued with enthusiasm his interest in natural science. He built up an extensive collection of butterflies and moths and in 1880 published accounts of them. In 1882 he made the first discovery in New Zealand of the fern *Botrychium lunaria* (moonwort), a common species in the Northern Hemisphere; it was not seen again in this country until 1980. His finds of rare plants

among the limestone outcrops attracted scientists and naturalists such as Cheeseman, Kirk, Cockayne and Hector, and overseas visitors, including his botanical artist cousin, Marianne North. The area was on a traditional Māori route from Canterbury to the West Coast, and artefacts from Enys’s large collection were sent to New Zealand and British museums. Akitio also yielded artefacts and fossils, and unfortunately some nearly extinct huia, one of which was mounted and sent to his family at Enys.

His travels in New Zealand included expeditions with Hector and Haast, and a number of his papers were published in both this country and England. A sense of public duty led to his involvement in local body affairs. When his brother Charles became ill and died in England in 1891 John leased Castle Hill and returned to Cornwall. The run was finally sold in 1901. In 1906, after the death of his elder brother Francis, he succeeded to the family seat, and took delight in showing visitors the New Zealand garden he established there. John Enys died at Leeds, Yorkshire, on 7 November 1912. The three brothers never married, and the son of one of their sisters took the name and property of the estate.

In New Zealand John Enys’s name is enshrined in the Enys Scientific Reserve, opposite Castle Hill Village, established to protect bog pine and later *Hebe armstrongii* from grazing animals, Mt Enys, the highest peak in the Craigieburn Range, and a number of plants, including an alpine buttercup, *Ranunculus enysii*.

Ranunculus enysii

The genus *Ranunculus* is a large one, widespread in the world’s temperate regions. The Latin name, meaning ‘small frog’, probably refers to the swampy habitat of some species. At least 19 of New Zealand’s 32 buttercup species reach the alpine zone. *Ranunculus enysii* is a small, glabrous, bright-green herb, 5–30 cm tall, with a short rootstock forming small patches up to 10 cm across. The basal leaves vary in shape, but often have red veins and margins. A plant may have up to five unbranched flowering stems reaching 20 cm, each with a single small flower of 5–10 waxy bright yellow petals. Its occurrence on moist sheltered sites just above the limits of subalpine scrub in the South Island mountains is wide but sporadic.

