

Johann George Adam Forster (1754 – 1794)

Baptised Johann George Adam Forster in deference to his Prussian kin, George (or in modern German references, Georg) was born near Danzig (Gdańsk) on 26 November 1754. His Yorkshire and Scottish ancestors had settled in Polish Prussia around 1642 during the Civil War in England. George was the first of seven children born to Johann Reinhold Forster, a scholar and parish priest in the village of Nassenhuben, and his wife Elisabeth Justina Nicolai. When he showed an early interest in plants and animals, his father bought up-to-date literature and devoted himself to his son's education. In 1765 George accompanied him on an inspection tour of the Volga region and assisted with the botanical work. The next year he went with him to London, and at 12 years of age translated books while the elder Forster wrote, lectured and made valuable scientific contacts. The rest of the family was summoned when Johann Reinhold obtained a tutoring position at Warrington Academy. By 1770 they were all back in London, and in 1772, at short notice, father and son accepted the positions of naturalist and assistant naturalist-draughtsman on Cook's second voyage. A young Swedish botanist and former pupil of Linnaeus, Anders Sparrman, joined them on the *Resolution* at Capetown.

The three-year circumnavigation took them south into Antarctic waters, twice to New Zealand (Dusky Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound) and through islands of the Central Pacific, before returning to Plymouth via Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. George illustrated 35 of the 38 New Zealand bird species they described, but it was too late in the season to obtain many plant specimens with flowers or mature fruits. However, the Forsters

were the first to publish descriptions of New Zealand plants, and before the voyage ended, *Characteres Generum Plantarum* (1776), which included 31 New Zealand genera, was almost ready for publication. George Forster's *A Voyage Round the World*, based on his father's journal, appeared in 1777, six weeks before Cook's official volumes.

George returned to Germany and professorial positions at the Collegium Carolinum in Kassel in 1779 and the University of Vilnius in Lithuania from 1783 until 1788, when he became a librarian at Mainz. In 1785 he married Therese Heyne, daughter of a classical scholar in Göttingen; they had four children, one a son who died in infancy. George published two further botanical works in 1786: *Plantis Esculentis*, describing 54 food plants of the South Pacific, was his thesis for a Doctor of Medicine degree at Halle, while *Florulae Insularum Australium Prodromus* was a catalogue containing brief diagnoses of 594 species, of which 141 were New Zealand plants. *Clematis forsteri* (collected by Banks and Solander at Tolaga Bay in 1769 and the Forsters at Queen Charlotte Sound in 1773) appeared as *Clematis hexapetala* in *Prodromus* and was renamed in 1791 by German taxonomist Johann Friedrich Gmelin (1748–1804) of Göttingen. Presumably, the name was given in recognition of the botanical work of both father and son.

George Forster's last years were not happy ones. An early supporter of the French Revolution, he was deemed a traitor in Germany. Forsaken by his wife and disgusted by the excesses of the revolution, poverty-stricken and lonely, he suffered a stroke and died in Paris on 10 January 1794, aged 39.



Clematis forsteri

Clematis (Greek *klena* 'a vine') is a genus of some 250 mainly temperate climbing shrubs with twining petioles and opposite leaves, usually divided into three leaflets. The nine New Zealand species are endemic and have white or yellowish-green flowers, male and female on separate plants. *Clematis forsteri* is a smaller and more slender vine than the more familiar *Clematis paniculata*, with which it shares several Māori names, including *puawhānanga*, *pikiarero* and *pōhue*. Branchlets are grooved and glabrous, and the leaves are variable. Sepals are pale green, male flowers up to 5 cm and female to 3 cm, diameter, both with a spicy fragrance. It is found on cliffs, in scrub and lowland and montane forest margins from Kaipara Harbour to Cook Strait.