

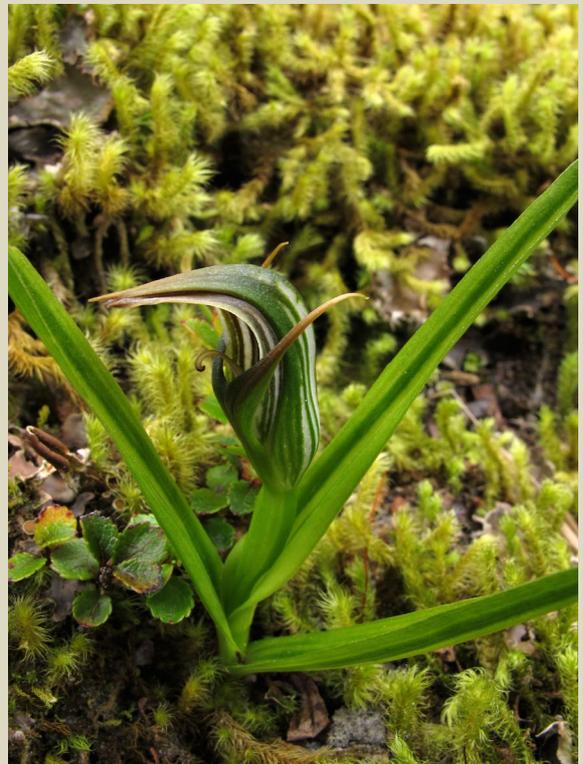
## Owen Edward Gibson (1928 – 1978)

Owen Gibson, the son of carpenter Cedric (Sid) Gibson and his wife Gertrude May, née Parkin, was born in New Plymouth and grew up in the suburb of Westown. At the age of 15 or 16, Owen (or "Snow" as he was often known) left New Plymouth Boys' High School, where his father had earlier been dux, and took employment as a trainee with nurserymen Duncan and Davies, working up to the position of block manager. Founded at Westown in 1899, the firm was to become the largest grower of ornamental trees and shrubs in the Southern Hemisphere.

Owen imbibed a love of the outdoors and its wildlife from his father, and as a lad accompanied him to nearby Barrett Lagoon, or further afield to Taranaki/Mt Egmont and Pouakai and Kaitake ranges, sometimes with friend and orchid enthusiast Bruce Irwin. Later Owen Gibson replaced his father on native orchid expeditions with Irwin, and in 1947 he discovered a new species of *Pterostylis* on the mountain. He drew it, and in 1950 E D Hatch described *Pterostylis irsoniana*, "Ir-son", a combination of the names of the two men "who between them have done much to elucidate the orchid flora of Mt Egmont". The investigations of Irwin and Gibson led to Hatch's paper "Orchids of the Egmont Ranges," published in 1953. On an expedition to Northland in 1949 they found an unusual *Thelymitra* that Irwin nicknamed 'sanscilia'. On their return south, near Wellsford, Gibson found *Corybas cryptanthus* a little-known, almost subterranean spider orchid. Their last trip together was to Arthur's Pass in January 1957 – looking for orchids, of course!

Owen Gibson married Phyllis Swan; they were to have two sons and a daughter. In 1962 the family moved to Waitara, leased a block of land, and started their nursery, Seaview Plants. Gibson was a good plantsman, and did considerable work with hybrids. In the 1970s he grew the award-winning native flax "Yellow Wave" for horticulturalist and plant breeder Felix Jury, and recognising the qualities of a *Leucadendron* hybrid bred by Mr Bell, Wanganui, raised and introduced "Safari Sunset" to New Zealand gardeners and cut-flower growers.

Owen and Phyllis Gibson both enjoyed drawing, painting and, in the early days, going on art group excursions. Owen had studied watercolour painting at night school; his native orchid watercolours were accurate as well as artistic, and were published in number 15 of the New Zealand Native Orchid Group's *Historical Series* (2007). He was a keen sportsman; his small stature precluded rugby, and while at Duncan and Davies he played cricket for Westown. Taking after his father, he was also a competent handyman, and built a bach at Onaero, in North Taranaki. On-going health problems led to Owen Gibson's untimely death at Waitara in 1978, at the age of 49.



### *Pterostylis irsoniana*

The orchid genus *Pterostylis* is a large one, with the majority in Australia. Most of the New Zealand species belong to the grass-leaved group of greenhoods, which does not occur in Australia, but has relatives in New Guinea. *Pterostylis irsoniana* is a strongly coloured plant up to 35 cm high, but often much smaller, with the uppermost leaf usually overtopping the flower. Its characteristic labellum is very narrow, arched and protrudes from the flower, showing its dark, swollen knobbed tip curling downward. The labellum is unique in having a large dark prominent callus at the base, and occasionally smaller calli along the midline. Flowering in December–February, *Pterostylis irsoniana* grows in subalpine scrub and forest margins from Taranaki/Mt Egmont and East Cape southwards (but not Ruapehu) and in the South Island, Nelson and Westland.