

James Hector (1834 – 1907)

James Hector, the son of Alexander Hector, a conveyancer and solicitor, and his wife Margaret Macrosty, was born in Edinburgh on 16 March 1834. After attending Edinburgh Academy and High School, he worked briefly in his father's office. An interest in natural science led him to study medicine at Edinburgh University as an avenue towards a scientific career, and he graduated in 1856.

In 1857 he was recommended by leading Scottish geologist Sir Roderick Murchison for the position of surgeon and biologist on John Palliser's expedition to explore and map western Canada. Two years of adventure and hardship established Hector as an accomplished scientist and intrepid explorer. Kicking Horse Pass, discovered by Hector and named after an accident that nearly killed him, is now crossed by the Canadian Pacific Railway and marked by a monument in recognition of his work. For his achievements in Canada he was also elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and fellow of the Royal Geographic Society.

Hector returned to Edinburgh and again on the recommendation of Murchison was appointed director of the geological survey of Otago, New Zealand. He arrived here in 1862 with letters of introduction from Sir J D Hooker to Haast and Buchanan, and set about assembling the nucleus of a staff and exploring the terrain and resources of the Otago region. He organised displays of maps and collections showing the work of the survey at the New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin in 1865.

When his three-year appointment as provincial geologist expired in 1865, he accepted the joint appointments of first director of the New Zealand

Geological Survey and director of the newly formed Colonial Museum in Wellington. His responsibilities included at various periods the botanical gardens, meteorological department and colonial observatory, custody of standard weights and measures, and the patent office library. When the New Zealand Institute was set up for the advancement of science, Hector became its manager as well. He was often asked for official advice, and wrote a prodigious number of scientific papers and reports, but also continued to do fieldwork with Buchanan in many parts of the country.

In 1868 he married Maria Georgiana Monro, daughter of David Monro, speaker of the House of Representatives; they had three sons and three daughters. Due to retire in October 1903, somewhat embittered by controversy, and in poor health, he travelled to Canada, where official recognition of his work on the Palliser expedition was blighted by the sudden death of his son Douglas, who had gone with him. James Hector died at Lower Hutt three years later, on 6 November 1907.

During his lifetime he received many honours. In 1911 the New Zealand Institute honoured him by establishing the Hector Medal and Prize as its major award for excellence in research. His name is also commemorated in an alpine cushion plant, *Hectorella*, which was first discovered by him, a mountain daisy, *Celmisia hectorii*, described by Joseph Dalton Hooker in 1864, and at least five other New Zealand plant species.



Celmisia hectorii

Celmisia is a large Australasian genus of approximately 85 to 90 species, centred in New Zealand. Flower heads are rather similar between species, but there is a wide range of plant form and leaf shape in the genus. Hybridisation is widespread. *Celmisia hectorii* is confined to alpine regions, 1300–2000 m, of the southern half of the South Island. The prostrate stems branch and bend upwards to end in tight masses of densely hairy leaves, silver above and whitish below. A single plant can be a metre or more across. The “flowers” have white petals and a yellow centre.