

Archibald Menzies (1754 – 1842)

Born at Styx House in the Perthshire village of Weem, Scotland, Archibald Menzies, the son of James and Anne Menzies, was baptised on 15 March 1754. After a basic education at the Weem parish school, he worked with his four brothers in the nearby gardens of Castle Menzies and then followed his elder brother William to Edinburgh, where he was employed at the new botanic garden established in 1763 by Professor John Hope. He came to the notice of Hope, who helped him get into the university's medical course, which included botany, and attended lectures between 1771 and 1780. During the 1778 summer vacation he toured the Highlands searching for rare plants for two London physicians, and collected his first lichens.

Leaving Edinburgh he became assistant to a surgeon in Caernarvon, Wales, and in 1782 entered the Royal Navy in that capacity, serving on the *Nonsuch* at the battle of the Saints in the West Indies. In 1783 he joined the Halifax Station in Nova Scotia, and before returning to England in 1786 he took every opportunity to botanise. His collections included lichens and seaweeds, as well as seeds for Professor Hope and Sir Joseph Banks at Kew. Recommended by Banks, he was appointed surgeon to the *Prince of Wales*, and during a three-year fur-trading voyage to the northwest coast of America 1786–1789 he collected a number of new plants. He was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1790.

In 1791 he set out as naturalist with Captain George Vancouver on the *Discovery* expedition to survey the Pacific coast of North America, and when the surgeon became ill Menzies assumed his duties. After rounding the Cape of Good Hope the *Discovery* sailed on to Dusky Sound, New Zealand, where Vancouver knew water, food and timber would be available. During the stay of three weeks in November 1791 Menzies collected many ferns, mosses and lichens. At Hawaii he distributed orange seedlings grown from pips collected at the Cape of Good Hope, and climbed remote peaks in search of new and rare plants. When plant hunter David Douglas visited the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands in 1834, he found that the Hawaiians remembered the surgeon-naturalist as “the red-faced man who cut off men's limbs, and gathered grass”. In 1795, in Santiago on the return to England, Menzies was served the seeds of the Chilean pine *Araucaria araucana* as nuts in a cream dessert while dining with the governor of Chile. He pocketed some, germinated them on the *Discovery* and introduced to Britain five healthy monkey-puzzle plants.

In 1799 Menzies received an MD from King's College, Aberdeen, and after short service as a naval

surgeon in the West Indies, he married and set up in practice in Oxford Street, London, retiring to Notting Hill in 1826 and living there alone after the death of his wife Janet in 1836. At his death in 1842, at the age of 88, his herbarium of ferns, mosses, sedges and grasses was donated to the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Garden. The North American Douglas fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* and many species of Hawaiian plants are named after him, and also some of the mosses and other plants he discovered at Dusky Sound. *Dracophyllum menziesii* (pineapple scrub) and the majestic silver beech, *Lophozonia menziesii* (was *Nothofagus menziesii*), are two larger New Zealand species for which he is remembered.



Dracophyllum menziesii

Dracophyllum ('dragon-leaf'), a genus of around 60 species, is found in Australasia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, with about 40 species of small trees, shrubs and alpine mat or cushion plants. *Dracophyllum menziesii* is a much-branched erect or spreading shrub growing up to one metre tall, the stout branches ringed with leaf scars. Leaves, stiffly curving in tufts like pineapple tops at the branch tips, turn bronze or red with exposure. The flowers are creamy white bells with pink tips, on stiffly drooping sprays beneath the leaves. *Dracophyllum menziesii* grows in high rainfall mountainous regions in scrub and rocky places in southern Westland, Fiordland, western Otago and Stewart Island.