

Christine Rance (1958 –)

Brian David Rance (1962 –)

In 2008 New Zealand botanists Peter de Lange and Brian Murray revisited the status of a tiny buttercup collected in 1952 on the shores of Lake Manapouri by George Simpson (1880–1952) of Dunedin. Simpson had allied it to the mainly coastal *Ranunculus recens*, but when later research showed it to be distinctive it was elevated to species rank and renamed *Ranunculus ranceorum*, recognising the contribution made by Brian and Chris Rance to furthering the knowledge and conservation of the southern South Island's indigenous vascular flora.

Brian Rance was born on 13 March 1962 at Wyndham, Southland, the third and youngest son of Glencoe sheep farmers Henry and Mary Rance. Like his brothers, he attended nearby Hedgehope primary school. (Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson named Mount Hedgehope in the Hokonui Hills after the second-highest peak in the Cheviot Hills of his native Northumberland.) Farm life was fun for the three adventurous boys – playing with the animals and helping with stock work, eeling in the local creeks, fishing and duck shooting with their father – but it ended when Brian was eleven years old. Forced out by health problems and a downturn in pastoral farming, the family moved to Tweed Street in Invercargill.

Brian continued his education at Hawthorndale Primary, Lithgow Intermediate and Cargill High schools; he particularly enjoyed science, geography and history, and was Dux in 1979. The next year he went to Otago University in Dunedin to study biology, including plant science, and later continued with botany and zoology, gaining a BSc (honours) degree in botany in 1983 under the tutorship of Professor Alan Mark.

After graduating he gained experience on Protected Natural Area (PNA) surveys, first on the Lindis, Pisa, Dunstan survey, and later on the Umbrella PNA survey as field assistant to Kath Dickenson. In 1986 he was employed by the Lands and Survey Department in Invercargill, and nine months later when the Department of Conservation (DOC) was established, he was appointed botanist for the extensive Southland Conservancy, which included Fiordland National Park and its offshore islands, Stewart Island and New Zealand's subantarctic islands. In 1989 he met Christine Lund.

Chris was born in Stockton-on-Tees in Yorkshire, England, on 22 July 1958, and as a child enjoyed exploring the coast and the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park with her father. Later she became involved in conservation projects, cleaning up some very polluted industrial sites. In 1989 Chris came to New Zealand with her sister Kath and mother Marjorie to visit relatives in Northland. She attended a talk given by Brian Rance on the Auckland Islands (which she thought were somewhere near Auckland). Two years later they married! After working in England as a health service manager Chris retrained as a horticulturist and then as a geographic information systems (GIS) analyst, working part-time for the Department of Conservation.

Chris and Brian established a small plant nursery at their Invercargill town house, and when they bought their 10 acres of swampy farmland at Bushy Point, Otatara, on the outskirts of Invercargill, they began restoring paddocks back into native bush and creating a wetland of ponds and native plant species, focused on attracting native birds.



Ranunculus ranceorum

Ranunculus, from the Latin *rani* 'frog', refers to the plant's amphibious habitat. *Ranunculus ranceorum*, a minute naturally uncommon buttercup, is an annual or short-lived perennial herb of frequently flooded marginal turf on the lakeshores of Te Anau and Manapouri. The stout, fleshy rootstock branches at the surface, forming rosettes up to 40 mm across, often in crowded patches with smaller offsets and seedlings. The leaves, three-lobed when mature, are bright green to olive-green with brown veins, and flowering is from December to April, depending on lake levels.

PHOTO: Chris and Brian Rance

During the next 25 years they planted thousands of native plants, bought four acres of old growth kahikatea swamp forest adjoining their block (now under a QE II Covenant), established the Southland Community Nursery and Education Centre, and added tracks to make the whole property accessible to visitors. Also on the property, and open to the public by arrangement, the Southland Threatened Plants Garden provides back-up populations of endangered species and the chance to see plants seldom found in the wild.

Brian's work and their shared interest in tramping has taken him to many extraordinary places where he has assimilated a wide knowledge of Southland's flora and amassed extensive botanical records. He has been involved in some of the most successful conservation projects in the country (including Antipodes Island mice eradication, expansion of the Awarua wetlands, large-scale marram control at Mason Bay, Stewart Island, and Manapouri lake-shore and turf survey and monitoring). Another highlight has been his involvement in numerous land protection projects such as Heritage purchases, covenants and Tenure Review.

Around the year 2000 Brian led the Department of Conservation's National Recovery Group for small-leaved *Olearia* and was associated with many other similar plant recovery groups. He continues to work for the Department of Conservation and after many restructures his role is now Technical Advisor Ecology in the Southern South Island Region.

Both Brian and Chris have been inspired by the botanical and conservation work of Sir Alan Mark. Annual South Island botanical trips (1988–93) with Tony Druce, Neill Simpson and Geoff Rogers instilled in Brian a love of field botany, and he still enjoys the infectious enthusiasm of entomologist Brian Patrick on expeditions. Chris's passion was stimulated while working for Carol West, Advisory Scientist for the Southland Conservancy, and by her own work for the Department of Conservation. She now marvels at the countless volunteers working tirelessly for conservation in local communities.

Brian and Chris have worked voluntarily on numerous conservation projects, including Te Rere Yellow-eyed Penguin Reserve in the Catlins and the Otatara Landcare Group's Bushy Point; they have been involved in the Southland Ecological Restoration Network, and on their own property run the restoration project, the Southland Community Nursery and Education Centre.

In 1999 Chris and Brian Rance were awarded the Loder Cup, New Zealand's premier award for plant conservation. The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network recognised the Community Nursery in 2011 and the Otatara Landcare Group in 2014, and in 2016 the Rances were honoured with a Queen's Service Medal for their services to conservation.

They continue to encourage conservation and welcome nature-lovers to their place in the deep south.



Chris and Brian Rance, Otatara, 2018. (PHOTO: Sarah Crump)