

Achille Richard (1794 – 1852)

Descended from a long line of botanists, Achille Richard was born in Paris on 27 April 1794, and grew up amidst the collections of his father, Louis Claude Marie Richard. Although Achille did not study medicine, he took courses in botany at the Paris Faculty of Medicine. The first of his many works, a botanical textbook for medical students, was published in 1819; eleven editions were printed in France, and it was also translated into German, Dutch, Russian and English. The following



Polystichum neozelandicum

Polystichum (shield ferns) are named from the arrangement of the sori in long parallel rows (Greek *polys* 'many'; *stichos* 'row' or 'line'). They are terrestrial, tufted ferns with erect, very scaly rhizomes, usually bipinnate fronds and round sori protected by round indusia. *Polystichum richardii* (common shield fern, pikopiko or tutoke), a variable species with black scaly stipes and dark green, leathery, shiny fronds, has long been treated as a single species. Recent research has identified four taxa within the complex. Found in the southern North Island, and South, Stewart and Chatham Islands, *Polystichum neozelandicum* subsp. *zerophyllum* (synonym *Polystichum richardii*) is a common fern of coastal to montane forested hillsides and banks, and coastal cliff faces under scrub, usually in well-lit areas. It has also extended to urban areas where it is sometimes a feature of roadside banks and cuttings.

year he was awarded a doctorate, with a thesis on the natural history of the commercially available species of *Ipecacuanha*, a South American medicinal shrub, and over the next seven years he directed the publication of a twenty-volume medical dictionary.

From 1819 until 1831 he was curator of the herbarium and assistant naturalist at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. In 1821, with other naturalists, he founded the short-lived Paris Natural History Society. He was appointed professor of botany at the Paris Faculty of Medicine in 1831, and several of his students became successful botanists. He was author and co-author of a large number of floras of countries as diverse as Senegal and Cuba, and wrote taxonomic revisions of many plant groups. He studied and described several orchid genera, and in 1826 completed and published his father's work on conifers and cycads.

Written in collaboration with Pierre Adolphe Lesson, *Essai d'une Flore de la Nouvelle-Zélande* was published in 1832. It was the first of the two-volume botanical section of Dumont d'Urville's official record of the 1826–1829 *Astrolabe* expedition and its 376 pages were devoted entirely to the flora of New Zealand. Three hundred and eighty species were described, many for the first time, including not only specimens from the two expeditions by Duperrey and Dumont d'Urville, but also many collected by Banks, Solander and the Forsters on Cook's first two voyages.

The second volume of 167 pages, published in 1834 under the same title, was by Richard only. As well as describing plants from various groups of the Pacific Islands and Australia, it contains notes on New Zealand algae and explanations of the 39 plates of New Zealand plants in the accompanying folio atlas. Thomas Cheeseman noted that *Essai d'une Flore de la Nouvelle-Zélande* "is the first publication dealing with the flora of New Zealand as a whole, and possesses considerable merit, so much so that it is to be regretted that so little use has been made of it by New Zealand botanists".

Achille Richard was one of the leading botanists of his time, and a member of both the French Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Medicine. He died on 5 October 1852, at the age of 58. New Zealand plants named after him include the South Island toetoe, *Cortaderia richardii*, and two ferns, *Asplenium richardii* and *Polystichum richardii*, the latter now synonymous with the widespread *Polystichum neozelandicum* subsp. *zerophyllum*.