

George Simpson (1880 – 1952)

Born in Dunedin on 14 October 1880, George Simpson was the son of Catherine, née Russell, and George Simpson. His father, who was born in Leuchars in Fife, Scotland, arrived in Dunedin with his wife in 1879 and worked for several years as a journeyman builder before setting up his own business in 1886. It thrived, and after leaving Arthur Street School as dux, young George joined the firm. At the age of 25 he married Annabel Annand of Christchurch, and established their family home at Belgrave Crescent, Roslyn. In 1912 George and his father were listed as members of the Otago Institute; they remained members for life and served the institute in various capacities between 1914 and 1936.

George was a life-long friend of John Scott Thomson, who lived in nearby Wakari. Both were keen native plant growers, and from their many field trips together they brought back treasures for their gardens. Cultivation techniques were developed and willingly shared, and seeking deeper knowledge of the plants themselves, they became interested in ecological and taxonomic botany. By 1925 they were recognised as a team, referred to as “the firm” by Leonard Cockayne, and they became part of his distinguished visitors’ circuit. Their botanical expeditions covered most areas of the South Island, and their papers were always published jointly. Both were good photographers and used the camera to aid their work and illustrate lectures and public talks. They were elected members of the New Zealand Alpine Club in 1929 and fellows of the

Linnean Society of London in 1930, and in 1936 were awarded the Loder Cup for their “outstanding botanical explorations, surveys and research”.

When George Simpson senior died in 1934, George and his brother John continued the business, employing around ten carpenters and joiners, including George’s son Archie. The office, along with the usual paraphernalia, housed trays of germinating *Carmichaelia* seed and other plant material for further observation. In 1945, after Thomson’s death, Simpson published the monograph on *Carmichaelia* for which they had gathered material for many years. One of the last plants he described was a minute buttercup he collected from the shores of Lake Manapouri in 1952; his *Ranunculus recens* var. *lacustris* was recently elevated to species rank with a new name, *Ranunculus ranceorum*, meaning “of the Rances”, in recognition of the contribution Brian and Chris Rance of Invercargill have made to knowledge and conservation of the southern South Island flora.

Throughout his last ten years George Simpson kept up his extensive private practice as a valuer, and continued his interest in the Alpine Club, making a major contribution to hut building, especially that of the Aspiring Hut in 1946. At the time of his death in Dunedin on 16 May 1952, he was nearing the end of a detailed study of *Ourisia*, and in 1961 *Ourisia sessifolia* var. *simpsonii* (now *Ourisia simpsonii*) was named by Lucy Moore in his honour.

Ourisia simpsonii

Ourisia comprises 28 species occurring in high elevation areas of South America, Tasmania and New Zealand, and has only recently been transferred to Plantaginaceae, the plantain family. *Ourisia* have flowers with five united sepals and five fused petals, and may be herbaceous or slightly woody. Most of the eleven New Zealand species now recognised are found in moist and rocky sites in subalpine to alpine herbfields, scrub and/or tussock grassland. *Ourisia simpsonii*, a creeping and rooting herb with delicate hairy rosettes of overlapping leaves spread along the stem and a glabrous (hairless) corolla throat, may be found in South Island alpine herbfields from Nelson to North Westland-Canterbury, above 1200 m.

