

Andrew Sinclair (1794 – 1861)

Andrew Sinclair, the son of John Sinclair, a weaver, and his wife Agnes Renfrew, was born on 17 April 1794, at Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. He studied medicine at Glasgow, Paris and Edinburgh, where he qualified as a licentiate in 1818. In 1822 he joined the Royal Navy as an assistant surgeon on the *Owen Glendowie*, and in 1835, after further study, he was appointed surgeon on the *Sulphur*. While abroad he pursued his interest in botany, and the specimens he sent to the British Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, from South Africa, the Mediterranean and Central America, established his reputation as a collector.

After being invalided home in 1839 and regaining his health, he served briefly as a surgeon on convict ships to Australia. In 1841 he visited the Bay of Islands while the ships of Ross's Antarctic expedition were there, and accompanied assistant surgeon Joseph Dalton Hooker and missionary William Colenso on several local botanical forays. The following year he returned to Scotland. Two years later he sailed to Australia again, as surgeon-superintendent on the convict ship *Asiatic* bound for Tasmania. His term of service completed, he took his discharge in Sydney and accompanied Governor Fitzroy to New Zealand, arriving at Auckland on 23 December 1843. He was pressed into accepting the position of colonial secretary and held office for twelve years. Although lacking expertise for the job, he was reputed to have been honest, fair and hardworking.

Andrew Sinclair never married. He devoted his leisure to botany and collected throughout the North Island, sending specimens to Kew Gardens and providing Hooker with material for his work on the New Zealand flora. In 1852, when Sinclair's brother died, his widow and her three children joined him in Auckland. His two nieces helped him organise his collections, and his nephew became Auckland's chief surveyor from 1856 to 1892.

His focus in retirement was scientific exploration. He travelled to Scotland and Europe, and had discussions on scientific matters with Darwin, Huxley and Hooker. He was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1857. In 1858 he was back in New Zealand, collecting further plant material for Hooker's *Handbook of the New Zealand Flora*. His journals show that he collected in most districts, ever hopeful of new finds. In 1861 he joined Julius von Haast on an exploratory trip in the Southern Alps, and was drowned while crossing the Rangitata River. His lonely grave is on the river flat near the Mesopotamia homestead.

Andrew Sinclair was described as a pleasant and knowledgeable companion who made a major contribution to New Zealand botany. Hooker dedicated his *Flora Novae-Zelandiae* (1853) to Andrew Sinclair, William Colenso and another prominent collector, David Lyall. New Zealand plants named in Sinclair's honour include an alpine buttercup (*Ranunculus*) and daisy (*Celmisia*), a tiny orchid (*Acianthus*), the large-leafed puka (*Meryta*) and a shade-loving herb (*Jovellana*), which he discovered near East Cape in 1842. His association with Julius von Haast is remembered in the alpine plant, *Haastia sinclairii*, and Haast named a mountain, a river and a mountain range after his friend and field companion. The shortest street in Devonport, and Auckland University's Sinclair Scholarship in botany and zoology, founded by his niece Agnes's husband Thomas Bannantyne Gillies, also honour him.



Jovellana sinclairii

The genus has a few species in Chile and two endemic to New Zealand. *Jovellana sinclairii*, New Zealand calceolaria, is a sprawling, shade-loving plant up to half a metre tall. In early to mid-summer dainty white flowers, spotted inside with purple, stand out above the soft green toothed leaves. It grows locally in shady sites along both coastal and inland forest margins and streamsides from East Cape to Wellington. *Jovellana repens* is a smaller creeping herb with a wider distribution.