

Media Release:



Exhibition Explores Wild Life of Pioneering New Zealander

A new exhibition at Auckland Museum explores the life of pioneering New Zealand botanist Lucy Cranwell (1907-2000).

Lucy Cranwell: Walk on the Wild Side, opening on Friday 12 March, uses rarely seen footage, interviews, and draws from the Museum's extensive botany collections to tell the story of a woman passionate about the outdoors.

In 1929, aged only 21, Cranwell became Auckland Museum's first curator of botany. For 14 years she was devoted to sharing her love of botany and the bush to a generation of children, organising native flower shows, writing newspaper articles and leading field trips to remote and wild locations.

Cranwell's botanical curiosity and adventurer's spirit took her from the tops of mountains to the bottom of murky bogs. With an enthusiasm revered by her male colleagues she slogged through forests, slept on frost covered hills and extracted ancient pollen from marshlands, making important discoveries about New Zealand plants.

The exhibition also features a curious specimen collected by Cranwell, the vegetable sheep (*Raoulia eximia*) – a native daisy named for its resemblance to a real sheep. The 61kg vegetable sheep was dug up and lugged down Canterbury's Mt Torlesse by Cranwell and her companions in 1931.

Lucy Cranwell: Walk on the Wild Side investigates how Cranwell, one of New Zealand's first female scientists, earned international acclaim for her groundbreaking work on the reconstruction of ancient botanical landscapes of the southern hemisphere.

Lucy Cranwell: a remarkable woman and a life worth celebrating.

ENDS

What: Lucy Cranwell: Walk on the Wild Side

When: Opens Friday 12 March

Where: Auckland Museum, Tamaki Gallery

Cost: Free with admission



To download Lucy Cranwell images [click here](#).

Lucy Cranwell Bio:

Lucy Cranwell was born in Henderson in 1907. She graduated from Auckland University in 1929 with an MA in botany. During her university studies she developed a love of tramping and gained a reputation as the strongest, fastest walker in the University Field Club.

In April 1929, only a few weeks after graduating, Lucy was offered the botany curator position at Auckland Museum by its director Dr Gilbert Archey. The museum was due to open in its new war memorial building in November of that year and its halls were in need of filling with displays.

During her 14 years as botany curator she introduced “botany trots” excursions for children, wrote weekly short articles for the Auckland Star, and collected over 4000 plants for the herbarium.

Her field work was among the first and most extensive undertaken by a woman scientist in New Zealand. These included trips into the pristine, ancient forests in the King country, various trips to Te Moehau on the tip of the Coromandel peninsula and to Maungapohatu in Te Urewera.

During a trip to Europe in 1935 she was invited by Professor Lennart von Post of Stockholm to learn his new method of fossil pollen analysis with which she opened up a whole new field of botany in New Zealand.

Lucy’s war effort during WWII was to research to and prepare a booklet for downed allied airmen called “Food is Where You Find It: A Guide to Emergency Foods of the Western Pacific”. It detailed, with illustrations, foods the downed pilots could eat.

Lucy married Captain (later Major) S. Watson Smith of the 13th US Airforce in 1943 and moved to the United States in 1944. After working at Harvard University Lucy became a Research Affiliate in palynology at the University of Arizona, Tucson where she earned international recognition for her work.