

Lake Saint John

once "a gem of blue water"

Bec Stanley

Lake Saint John was described by Lucy Cranwell (1981) as a 'mecca for botanists'. Cheeseman, at least, was a frequent visitor as revealed in his notebooks (1873). While searching for historic sites of our nationally and regionally threatened plants, I was interested by how many of our threatened plants once grew at St Johns Lake. I found that 3 national, and 6 regional, threatened plants once grew at this site including *Juncus holoschoenus* (now extinct in Auckland), *Sparganium subglobosum*, *Ophioglossum petiolatum*, *Hierochloa redolens* (now extinct in Auckland), *Hydrocotyle pterocarpa*, *Ranunculus glabrifolius*, *Carex subdola*, *Empodisma minus*, *Isolepis distigmata* and *Centipeda minima* - it must have been a special place.

I discovered that Lake St John was once a 22 ha lake, ranging in depth from 1 to 5 m deep, depending on the season. It was the only freshwater lake in the East Auckland isthmus lying in the area near where the Remuera Golf Course is today. The

lake was also known as Waiatarua or 'waters of double reflections'. Around 9000 years ago the lake was a tributary of the Tamaki river sealed off by a lava flow from the Mt. Wellington eruption (Searle 1964). An extended area of swampland surrounded the lake margins (Management Plan, 1984).

The reclamation of the lake bed began over 120 years ago, in 1876, when the swamp was partly drained by trenches. By 1908 the Waiatarua Drainage Board had been formed to remove swamp around the lake, and in 1918 a drain was constructed to the Orakei Creek. The aim was to create a park and also to use some of the surrounding land for roading purposes. However, the lake did not fully drain, as the lowest level of the lake was below the level of the drains. Thus from 1954 onwards, the park has been used as part of a surface water drainage system, for stormwater retention purposes. The former Lake Saint John is now a Recreation Reserve (Waiatarua Park) with a small ponding area managed by the Auckland City Council.

List of threatened plant species once found at Lake St. John

(based on the Auckland Regional threatened plant list de Lange & Cameron 1997 a & b)

<u>Species</u>	<u>Category of threat</u>
<i>Juncus holoschoenus</i> s.s. (AK 3090) n.d. Cheeseman	Insufficiently Known
<i>Sparganium subglobosum</i> (AK 1208) 1910 Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Ophioglossum petiolatum</i> 1963 Crookes & Dobbie	Vulnerable
<i>Hierochloa redolens</i> (AK 1324) 1881 Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Hydrocotyle pterocarpa</i> (AK 6259) 1920 Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Ranunculus glabrifolius</i> (AK 4325) 1881 Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Carex subdola</i> (AK 214467) Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Empodisma minus</i> * (AK 2882) Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Isolepis distigmata</i> (AK 219791) Cheeseman	Regional
<i>Centipeda minima</i> ** 1873 Cheeseman	Local

*Cheeseman noted *Empodisma minus* was already extinct in 1868

**recorded by Cheeseman as *Myriogyne minuta*

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