

EASTER EXCURSION TO THE EAST COAST

John F.F. Hobbs and Paul Cashmore

This trip was planned to occupy the days Friday through to Monday of Easter weekend, visiting Eastwoodhill Arboretum then moving north to climb Mt Hikurangi on the Sunday or Monday as weather permitted, or visit the sights of Gisborne then return to Rotorua. Eleven of the sixteen who had indicated their interest in the trip decided to miss the Easter rush and arrived at various times on the Thursday. Accommodation was at the Eastwoodhill Centre which was really convenient and comfortable. Those that arrived in daylight hours were able to walk around the grounds before the evening meal. Some even decided to go for a night walk and ended up in places they had not intended to.

Come Friday those present armed with the species list provided by Mike Thorsen (DoC Gisborne) visited some remnant alluvial podocarp forest remnants in the Waikura River valley near Pehiri not far from Eastwoodhill. We were met on the roadside by the owner and given directions as to where and how to get to the sites.

The first visited was a hillside which had been fenced off for many years. After parking in a paddock which had an obvious history of flooding we studied and calibrated our minds to a range of shrubby divaricates, many of which were not seen in our home territory. After crossing the fence a whole new field of species confronted the party, and there were many amusing debates on what was what, some solved by consulting a book on small leaved New Zealand shrubs with others still up for discussion. One grass species caused much discussion as we sidled up the hill until the species list was consulted and the majority came out in favour of bamboo grass (*Microlaena polynoda*). Continuing up the hill a single large rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) was observed and admired.

On the ridge lacebark were flowering on profusion and most species of coprosma were bearing a profusion of fruit in a variety of colours – white, blue, orange and red. We

continued up the ridge to the fenceline where coprosma fruit were sampled and the tastes of the various species were compared. Also of note was the kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) with its bright orange sweet tasting fruit and matai (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*). Kereru were busy feeding on the abundant fruit available. The track was retraced down the ridge to a grassy wetland where several shrubs of *Pittosporum obcordatum* were admired. Several species were added to Mike's list – a hook grass *Uncinia* sp. (possibly *U. affinis* or *U. scabra*), lace fern (*Paesia scaberula*), rasp fern (*Doodia media*), rimu, tarata (*Pittosporum eugenioides*) and wall lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*) – from this area.

Lunch was partaken back at the cars then we headed eastwards to another podocarp (mainly kahikatea-(matai)) remnant area which had a more wetland influence to it. Again this area had been fenced to keep stock at bay. There is a small lagoon within this area with a few willows *Salix cinerea* and *S. fragilis* with mainly *Carex virgata* and a few *C. secta* around the margins. Other species included willow weed (*Polygonum salicifolium*), *Ranunculus* spp. and water parslane (*Ludwigia palustris*). Further east into the forest margin were several *Corokia cotoneaster* in full bright orange fruit. In the forest proper it was fairly open. Again there was much discussion over the small leaved coprosmas - *Coprosma crassifolia*, *C. rigida*, *C. rubra*, *C. virescens* all being thrown in to the bag. *Myosotis spathulata* proved to be difficult to find.

With day light on the wane we headed off back to base. On the way back to the vehicles a half buried fence was noted indicating considerable sediment had been deposited over the wetland area in the past. It was good to get into forest with unfamiliar species. These small remnants were probably typical of that once common throughout Hawkes Bay and Gisborne districts before forest clearance. The vast array of divaricating shrubs and the many threatened plant species present made these areas a very interesting place to botanise. We could not think of any similar habitats in the Bay of Plenty with this diversity of divaricating shrubs so the day turned out to be an excellent refresher course for all present.

Saturday dawned bright and sunny with a little bit of morning mist hanging about. Several early birds were out before breakfast taking photographs in the early morning light of autumnal colours on the exotic hardwood trees in the arboretum. After breakfast we were treated to a three hour guided walk lead by Paul Wynen, the Curator of Eastwoodhill Arboretum who spoke of the history and difficulties of maintaining such a collection. As we proceeded around the paths amusing anecdotes were brought to light about the personalities who had been associated with the property over the years. Some of the interesting plants were pointed out – a shrub with blue sausage shaped pods with sweet tasting flesh around the seeds. The timing of the trip was possibly a bit early for the autumnal colours of the trees to be at their best but that is nature.

In the afternoon most of the party walked the track up to the lookout from where we could see to the south over the arboretum and surrounding country side, and to the north and west the mountains of the Raukumara Range including Hikurangi - the object of the following days endeavours. On a saddle between the lookout and the highest point of the estate, several hundred meters to the east a stock watering trough was the scene of some serious botanising when it was noticed that the water surface was covered with thousands of little green plants. One could almost hear the brain gears churning through the “Manuals” to arrive at watermeal (*Wolffia australiana*).

After returning to base three males in the party headed out with Chris Ecroyd to collect herbarium specimens (with permission) from the pinetum for the NZFRI Herbarium. Back at base every one was busy preparing for a pot-luck meal which helped supplement the diet of those who seemed to think that hot-cross buns were a staple diet. In the evening Mike Thorsen from DoC gave us an interesting talk on threatened plants of the North Island East Coast. Of interest was the cultivation of kaka beak (*Clianthus maximus*) along the roadsides by school children. He also mentioned the finding of new populations of mistletoe (*Tupeia antarctica*) in the region. Mike bought with him several potted up specimens of threatened plants that he was working with, enabling us to see some of these species up close. All in all a different day for most.

Sunday also dawned bright and sunny for the trip north to climb Hikurangi.. We met at the bridge over the Tapuaeroa River then up to the DoC carpark on Pakihiroa Station. With Mike Thorsen joining us and organising this part of the trip we were most fortunate to get a ride up (two trips) almost to the hut on the upper slopes of Hikurangi saving a walk of some 10kms up to approximately 1100m to the upper carpark. If you think we cheated fair enough! From this car park there was a climb to the hut of about 2 hrs.

Those in the first trip headed off up the mountain, while those in the next trip set out to botanise the nearer slopes. The lower slopes were very botanically interesting with a diverse range of alpine vegetation. Several *Aciphylla* species (*A. colensoi* and *A. squarrosa* var. *flaccida*) were notable on the slope behind the hut on the way up. In contrast to the previous RBS trip to Hikurangi in 1988 (Shaw and Beadel 1988) very little animal sign except hares was noted in the alpine herbfields on the mountain and the vegetation appeared to be in relatively good condition. The only serious exotic weed noticed was a few small patches of *Hieracium pilosella*. Although it was sunny there was a bitterly cold wind. Back at the hut the fire was lit but the wood was a bit wet. Tea was cooked while we waited and waited for the climbers to return – some returned in day light and those that didn't probably won't be on another over night trip.

Monday – the wind had dropped for another beautiful day and two of those who hadn't made the climb took off for the summit and botanising at 0800hrs followed a half-hour later by a diggeridoo player who had damaged his knee the day before and had changed his mind about climbing that day but after a bit of walking around made a well judged decision and took off in pursuit catching the others who were delayed with some serious botanising. They were found in some small wetlands looking at some interesting myosotis which was thought to be *Myosotis pygmaea* var. *pygmaea* (not previously recorded from Hikurangi) but upon subsequent intense discussions amongst a range of botanists following the trip was determined as *M. pygmaea* var. *drucei*. Other interesting plants seen

on the way were *Kelleria dieffenbachii*, *Epilobium astonii*, *Leucogenes leontopodium* and *Phyllachne colensoi*. The latter two occurred near the saddle between the two summits. The summit was reached at 1100hrs where we took photos and admired the view. The first author claims to be possibly the first to have blown a digeridoo at the Hikurangi trig. Mike headed down early to take the first load back to their vehicles while Paul and self did a quick trip to the northern summit hoping unsuccessfully to get a clear photo of the trig between bouts of mist. Heading down we understood why several people had mentioned that the track could be better marked but we made it back to the well cleaned hut where we finished packing for the trip home. Using Tony Druce's plant list and the additions from previous RBS trips to Hikurangi it appeared that there was little to add to these lists from this trip. The only new addition that was recorded was *Lachnagrostis filiformis* (Mike Thorsen *pers. comm.*).

An enjoyable trip all round and it was good to have John and Stella from Hamilton, Brian and Bev from Cambridge, Bernie back with us for the long weekend trip. A big thanks to Mike Thorsen for talk, the species lists and for organising the Hikurangi section of the trip.

REFERENCE

Shaw, W.B., Beadel, S.M. 1988. Fourth Annual Expedition, Mt Hikurangi, East Cape. 29th January to 1 February 1988. *Rotorua Botanical Society Newsletter* 14:6-9.



Posing for a group photo at the lookout above Eastwoodhill.