

ORUATEWEHI REVISITED – 20 YEARS ON

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On Sunday 1 April 2007 a party of 10 people returned to the small patch of remnant indigenous forest on the northern Kaingaroa Plateau known as Oruatewehi Ecological Area or Troutbeck's Bush. Almost 20 years had passed since the last Rotorua Botanical Society visit and with changes in society members since then an entirely new team of botanists who hadn't been present on the earlier trips turned out to explore this fascinating area.

As they say “getting there is half the fun” and once off the main forestry roads and not that far into the forest it proved a slow trip. The road leading to the remnant was heavily overgrown in places, mainly with buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) which required an advance party with slashers and pruning saws for the two vehicles to get through. Eventually reduced to piling into one DOC Hilux we managed to reach the forest edge.

The reserve is comprised predominantly of two large gullies and a main leading ridge running between them. We headed off up the southern most gully first. Immediately upon entering the forest proper we were struck by the abundance of rohutu (*Lophomyrtus obcordata*) trees in the understorey and the groves of wheki-ponga (*Dicksonia fibrosa*) in the gully bottom. These were noted also by Nicholls (1987). Also relatively common in the understorey were specimens of *Streblus heterophyllus* and *Hoheria populnea* var. *lanceolata*. Pig rooting was also abundant in the gully.

We continued up the gully for several hours past some fine specimens of mature kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*), matai (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*) and totara (*Podocarpus totara*). An excellent arrangement of ferns was also present on the gully sides and bottom including *Asplenium bulbiferum* and various *Hymenophyllum* species.

Eventually we climbed out of the gully heading for the ridge for lunch. We soon climbed out of the podocarp and tawa dominated lower gully into the secondary vegetation further up the hill. It was fairly obvious that the gullies had been little modified as opposed to the ridges which appeared to have been historically burnt as they were dominated by secondary vegetation with kamahi (*Weinmannia racemosa*), kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*), and rewarewa (*Knightia excelsa*) dominating with wilding conifers present in places. This change in vegetation however provided botanists with a new range of species not seen in the gully. While some lingered searching the kamahi and rewarewa trees for interesting species the others kept heading upwards more focused on lunch and the top of the hill. Near the crest of the ridge John Hobbs suggested to Kerry Jones that this was good habitat for *Drymoanthus* and Kerry asked him what the orchid was on a nearby rewarewa - hence *Drymoanthus adversus* is a new record for the reserve.

On reaching the broad ridge we were disappointed to find it dominated by large radiata pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) overtopping the kanuka-rewarewa canopy. As a result the understorey was relatively open with few plant species present. Some of the kanuka was also dying as a result of being shaded out by the much larger conifers. While the radiata pine was old and by and large not regenerating the more shade tolerant Douglas fir was noted regenerating through the open kanuka in places, which was of concern.

After lunch we continued west following the ridge but as the vegetation was relatively homogenous and dominated in this area at least by exotic conifers there was little of botanical interest. Therefore we dropped off the ridge sidling east towards the bottom of the northern gully. Sidling through mainly kamahi we eventually reached the gully bottom at an exceptionally large totara tree. Continuing downstream emergent podocarps appeared to be more abundant than in the southern gully with many large specimens of matai and rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) noted. We also came across several areas of pole matai and kahikatea in the gully bottom. Other understorey species present

were similar to those seen in the other gully. *Australina pusilla* was noted here in abundance in damp patches throughout the valley.

This gully was dry unlike the southern gully which had a small stream present. Nearing the eastern edge of the reserve we were blocked in our descent by a small drop off and then had to sidle above this back onto the ridge. While sidling onto the ridge *Libertia grandiflora* was noted present below some small bluffs. We dropped back out of the kanuka forest on the ridge emerging back in the clearing where we began the trip.

In summary everyone present was very impressed with the quality of the vegetation in the gullies, in particular the size and abundance of the podocarps. It appeared that apart from the exotic conifers on the ridges there were relatively few adventives present in the reserve with most occurring in the clearings at the eastern end of the reserve. Twenty-two adventives were recorded in the reserve. Only 6 indigenous species were added to the list of Smale and Courtney (1985) as updated by Nicholls (1987) bringing the total number of indigenous species to 156. These original lists did not include adventive species.

Some doubt has also been expressed as to the validity of Courtney's record (Smale & Courtney 1985) of the occurrence of *Geniostoma ligustrifolium* var. *crassum* – a species listed as At Risk - Range Restricted (Hitchmough *et. al.* 2007), now known only from the Surville Cliffs near Cape Reinga. On this basis the authors, after discussing this with Shannel Courtney agreed that this was likely to have been an error on the original list and this species has been removed in favour of the more common *Geniostoma ligustrifolium* var. *ligustrifolium*.

A full updated list for the reserve can be obtained by contacting the authors.

REFERENCES

Hitchmough, R.; Bull, L.; Cromarty, P.; (Comps) 2007. New Zealand Threat Classification System lists—2005. *Stand-alone publication No. 236*. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

Nicholls, J.L. 1987: Oruatewehi field trip. *Rotorua Botanical Society Newsletter No. 10*: 15-16.

Smale, M.C. and Courtney, S.P. 1985: Vascular native plants of Oruatewehi Ecological Area (Troutbeck's Bush), Kaingaroa State Forest, N86/112730. *Unpublished checklist*. Forest Research Institute, New Zealand Forest Service.

LIST OF ADDITIONS TO THE LIST OF SMALE AND COURTNEY (1985) AS UPDATED BY NICHOLLS (1987)

John Hobbs

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| * <i>Achillea millefolium</i> | * <i>Leycesteria formosa</i> |
| * <i>Agrostis</i> sp. | * <i>Lotus pedunculatus</i> |
| * <i>Buddleja davidii</i> | * <i>Mycelis muralis</i> |
| * <i>Cirsium arvense</i> | * <i>Pinus radiata</i> |
| * <i>Conyza albida</i> | * <i>Plantago lanceolata</i> |
| <i>Cyathea cunninghamii</i> | * <i>Prunella vulgaris</i> |
| <i>Cyathea smithii</i> | * <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i> |
| * <i>Dactylis glomeratus</i> | * <i>Ranunculus repens</i> |
| * <i>Digitalis purpurea</i> | * <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> |
| <i>Drymoanthus adversus</i> | * <i>Rumex acetosella</i> |
| * <i>Galium aparine</i> | * <i>Senecio jacobaea</i> |
| * <i>Holcus lanatus</i> | * <i>Stellaria alsine</i> |
| <i>Hymenophyllum peltatum</i> | <i>Tmesipteris elongata</i> |
| * <i>Hypericum japonicum</i> | <i>Trichomanes reniforme</i> |