

**TARAWERA SCENIC RESERVE –  
A FORAY INTO THE LAKELET DISTRICT BETWEEN LAKES  
OKATAINA AND TARAWERA**

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This note covers part of a block of land situated between Lakes Okataina and Tarawera to the north and south respectively and a north / south line between Haumingi Bay and Utumutu Island to the west, and the track between Otangimoana and Humphries Bay to the east. This block of land split up into Maori Land (~ 60%), Okataina Scenic Reserve (~10%) and the balance part of the Lake Tarawera Scenic Reserve which stretches across Lake Tarawera to include part of Mount Tarawera.

A reconnaissance was carried out towards the end of October 2006 by the authors with the view to ascertain the feasibility of having a Botanical Society field trip in 2007 to the “lakelets” between Lakes Okataina and Tarawera.

Access to the area was by boat to Humphries Bay, up the track (to Okataina) then heading west from the saddle between the lakes. From the boat a zone of dead rata trees could be seen along the top of the steep hillside about 50-100m above the pohutukawa growing along the steep rocky lakeshore. Once ashore at Humphries Bay our first goal was the depression (not marked on the map as a lakelet) some 300 metres west of the track at GPS reference E2810320 N6331971. After travelling through open forest of silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*), wineberry (*Aristotelia serrata*), willow leaved hakea (*Hakea salicifolia*), with the aid of GPS and compass (not all that important at this stage as the sun was shining) we reached target #1. The depression showed signs of dampness in the form of a pig wallow and damp ground vegetation under fairly open manuka. The ground vegetation consisted mainly of mosses, cudweeds, *Ranunculus amphitrichus*, *Microtis unifolia* and a small grass. We headed west to the next goal which had been ascertained from aerial photos by Paul Cashmore (pers. comm.) to be probably dry and covered by

blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). After climbing a ridge through mangeao (*Litsea calicaris*), kamahi (*Weinmannia racemosa*), hangehange (*Geniostoma ligustrifolium* var. *ligustrifolium*) and mapou (*Myrsine australis*) we surveyed what was ahead of us and while not exactly what we had been lead to believe it looked a fairly daunting task.

From here on there was an abrupt change in vegetation from mixed native forest on the ridges and manuka in the gullies to hakea dominating the ridges and manuka and gorse dominating the gullies. Side slopes were a mixture of hakea / manuka / gorse dominating the warmer slopes and wineberry / gorse / tree ferns the cooler slopes.

The prime target was the largest of the “lakelets” and we reached this area to find a large grassy area with patches four square (*Lepidosperma australe*) showing up as red/brown areas and even more interesting was the round blob on the aerial photo which turned out to be frosted Spanish heath (*Erica lusitanica*). The only evidence of standing water was a small patch (half a metre square) of dried algal slime in otherwise normal grassland. Only two plants of blackberry were found – one under a gorse bush and the other in what appeared to be a small sinkhole. Both were pulled out using gloves brought with us to combat the dreaded blackberry. This area was obviously fairly heavily browsed by wallaby and deer. At the north eastern part of the clearing were remnants of two fairly large trees of undetermined species. Pine trees, strobus pine (*Pinus strobus*), radiata pine (*P. radiata*) and Corsican pine (*P. nigra*) were prominent in this area.

We moved south along an animal track through patches of grassland gullies to where an actual wetland was found at GPS reference E2809475 N6331576. There was no sign of this wetland as such on the aerial photo. Significant species in this wetland were tall spike-sedge (*Eleocharis sphacelata*), *Juncus* spp. (two species), pond weed (*Potamogeton cheesemani*), *Gratiola sexdentata*, *Ranunculus amphitrichus*, spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and *Glossostigma* sp.

Heading south we climbed up the ridge utilising the path made by a large rhyolite boulder under gravitational effect. At the top of the ridge we encountered a new forest

type “pure hakea forest with sporadic ground cover of ferns, water fern (*Histiopteris incisa*) and pig fern (*Hypolepis ambigua*)”. Hakea trees were up to 15 meters tall and 40 cm diameter. Wow!

Rather than investigate areas to the north and west of the prime target area we decided to head south to where we could now say with confidence was a long grassy area, and this turned out to be more or less the case. Obvious plants here were woolly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), foxglove (*Digitaria purpurea*) and a dense sward of patotara (*Leucopogon fraseri*).

The reduction of hakea was very noticeable on the homeward leg to Humphries Bay. We suspect that DoC doesn't know how much hakea forest they have let alone know what to do about it.

### **General Observations**

In occasional damp grasslands various wetland species occurred in low numbers and included rautahi (*Carex geminata* (broadleaved form)) and swamp sedge (*C. virgata*). No two dry “lakelets” had similar vegetation. Although no animals were seen there was abundant sign of deer, pigs, possums and wallabies but no sign of cattle.

### **Conclusion**

A Botanical Society trip to the area, because of the uninteresting vegetation (hakea, gorse, Spanish heath and manuka) and the difficult terrain – steep slopes and wind-throw in some areas, the prospect of an interesting and stimulating trip could not be envisaged.