

FIELD TRIP TO THE WAIOHAU CONSERVATION AREA

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The weather forecast for Sunday 10 May 2009 was not a promising precursor for the Rotorua Botanical Society field trip to the Waiohau Conservation area at the northern tip of the Ikawhenua Range. However an early call was made on Sunday morning and it was all on. Seven people turned up at the agreed meeting place on MacDonald Road where we learned that there was a one and an half hour window when the gate would be open despite assurance that we would have access up Omataroa Road. Plan “B” went into swing (it always pays to have a contingency plan where forestry access gates are involved) and we headed to the other side of the Raungaehe Range towards Ruatoki North and then up Ohotu and Ohaua Roads taking the right hand turn into Owhakatouro Road as far as possible before parking up.

On foot we headed up a track through pine forest before dropping down into the Kotorenui Stream, fording it in several places before we latched on an old benched track formed in the 1860s to facilitate troop movements during the Maori wars and still in remarkably good condition. The plan was to walk up the valley to the only known plant of kawaka (*Libocedrus plumosa*) then return.

The forest was emergent rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) over some very old rewarewa (*Knightia exselsa*), tawa (*Beilschmiedia tawa*) and occasional hinau (*Elaeocarpus dentatus*) with understory of pate, mahoe, rangiora, patches of wheki (*Dicksonia squarrosa*), occasional wheki-ponga (*D. fibrosa*), silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*) and mamaku (*C. medullaris*). One soft tree-fern (*Cyathea smithii*) was noted on the track. Small nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*) were common but it wasn't till we were quite a way up the track that we saw some with trunks over two metres high. Ground cover included hen and chicken fern (*Asplenium bulbiferum*), the filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum demissum*) and bush rice grass (*Microlaena avenacea*). In damp places *Nertera depressa* in full fruit and in slip debris areas shrubby

haloragis (*Haloragis erecta*) were found. On the stream bank there was a small patch of *Gunnera monoica*. Bryophytes which attracted attention were *Monoclea forsteri* covering rocks in damp situations and a reasonably large patch of the giant moss (*Dawsonia superba*) which was not noted on the way up the track but certainly was on the way down.

There was a good representation of epiphytes and on one log across the track were kidney fern (*Cardiomanes reniforme*) and the hairy filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum scabrum*) growing together. *H. frankliniae* was also seen near by. In the higher canopy were *Astelia* and *Collospermum* spp. along with hanging club moss (*Huperzia varia*), *Earina autumnalis* and *E. mucronata*. One solitary plant of *Tmesipteris lanceolata* was found poking out of a mamaku.

As midday approached and we had just negotiated an old slip, lunchtime was called under a grove of tanekaha (*Phyllocladus trichomanoides*). About a kilometre upstream from the lunch spot we came across the sought after kawaka – not a grand specimen by any stretch of the imagination but I believe the only known one in the Taneatua Ecological District. This was soon to change as one of the group pointed out another when we headed homeward about two hundred metres down the track. More were to come as a fine sapling some 2.5 metres tall was noticed (well spotted Linda) close to the track not too far from the eastern boundary of the reserve.

Back at the vehicle the group was packed in to save two trips (as on the inward trip) as the weather gave the impression that trouble was brewing. A good day and the consensus was that kawaka had to be the plant of the day. Thank you Gareth for organising the contingency plan, transport and the break in the weather.