

EAST CAPE TRIP #7 - DAY 1: HUKUTAIA DOMAIN, OPOTIKI

Paul Cashmore

On Friday 4 October 2013 six members of Rotorua Botanical Society gathered at Hukutaia Domain in Opotiki for a slightly different botanical expedition. John McLeod of the Hukutaia Domain Care Group had asked RBS for assistance to help to identify the existing native plant collection in the Domain which had been started by Norman Potts in the early 1900s and subsequently added to by Marc Heginbotham. Over time with plants dieing, plant labels disappearing or being moved, it had become more and more difficult for the local Care Group to keep track of what native species they had and to be sure of the correct identification of what was present. They needed some expert botanical advice so had contacted myself initially. I soon realised with a collection of native plants from across New Zealand this would need to be a team effort in order to correctly identify as many species as possible and so organised the visit as part of a RBS trip so that a wider group of botanists could attend and assist.

We started with a welcome and a large morning tea prepared by the Care Group, to which we were truly unaccustomed on a field visit. We then got stuck into the plant identification working through the plantings near the front entrance. The going was initially slow as we debated various *Pomaderris*, *Brachyglottis* and *Hebe* species along with small-leaved *Coprosma* spp. and several *Pittosporum obcordatum* specimens.

Eventually we reached the original native forest in the reserve dominated by tawa (*Beilschmiedia tawa*), puriri (*Vitex lucens*), kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) and abundant nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*). With less planted material and fewer plant labels in the native forest the identification task became quicker and easier. We admired several large planted kauri (*Agathis australis*) before being called back to lunch. Another big feed was laid on for lunch during which further botanical discussion ensued. During lunch we also spent time examining the extensive botanical library which the Hukutaia Care



Figure 1: John Hobbs reading Normal Potts original copy of Cheeseman's 'Manual of the NZ Flora'



Figure 2: Lunch at Hukutaia Domain with the Hukutaia Domain Care Group.

Group had built up. Included in this was Normal Potts original copy of Cheeseman's 'Manual of the New Zealand Flora'.

After lunch we split into two groups and headed around the loop track in opposite directions through native forest. Stopping in several places we noted *Peperomia urvilleana* and many large and small specimens of king fern (*Ptisana salicina*) present in the forest, and on the ground in gullies there were several large patches of parataniwha (*Elatostema rugosum*). We lingered in several places to identify epiphytes in a large puriri and at another site in a large tawa tree we noted many specimens of *Peperomia tetraphylla*. We checked and corrected several fern species including tree ferns mislabelled. By 4pm we had regrouped back near the main entrance plantings. We took a chance to more closely examine some of the labelled and unlabelled fern populations including *Blechnum vulcanicum*, *Adiantum* species and some *Coprosmas* amongst others.

By the end of the day we had sorted 99% of the unknowns, removed a few bucket loads of redundant labels where plants were no longer present, moved existing labels to new sites and added many new yellow labels to unlabelled specimens. This was a worthwhile day, not only for RBS members to test their plant skills on species some of which are not seen in the Bay of Plenty, but in particular to assist the keen volunteers of the Hukutaia Domain Care Group to maintain what could be considered to be a regionally significant native plant collection for the Bay of Plenty.