

CONSERVATION IN THE AUCKLAND REGION

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INTRODUCTION

Like the main interests of ABS the emphasis of my talk will be on the terrestrial, natural environment, particularly native forest. I shall start with a brief history of Auckland's vegetation and then look at specific areas, particularly ones involving ABS, where conservation battles have been fought but not always won. After touching on the cultivated environment I shall finish with what the future holds with regards to conservation around Auckland.

BRIEF HISTORY

To put Auckland's forest remnants in perspective this map of the North Island, shows lowland forest (below 760 m ASL) which has been lost, and forest still remaining, including cut-over. Note how important the Waitakere, Hunua, Coromandel, Hauraki Gulf Islands and Northland areas are as the only sizeable forest remnants remaining in this part of N.Z.

By the time of European settlement, to quote Lorry Millener (1965) "Auckland forests had been decimated ... by sea level fluctuations, volcanic activity and fire." Auckland Isthmus was then predominantly shrubland and fern. Today most of the shrubland has given way to urbanisation, but in a few areas it has progressed to forest.

However, a city the size of Auckland must be one of the few cities in the world to have at its doorstep two native forest blocks, the size of the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges. Both these have been modified, especially the Waitakeres, but are recovering well.

Apart from the two large areas, Auckland has a series of small reserves administered by ARA, DOC, ACC and local councils. The ARA Regional Parks have mainly been purchased in recent times (late 1960s - mid 1970s) and we are extremely fortunate for the ARA's foresight.

Since its beginning ABS has been involved in conservation issues, mainly close to Auckland but submissions and letters range from North Cape to Lake Manapouri. The Loder Cup has been awarded annually since 1928 for outstanding achievements in the protection and cultivation of N.Z. native plants and it has been won by nine ABS members.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

Conservation problems surround us but time only permits me to touch on a few that involve Aucklanders.

WAIPOUA

Before ABS was formed N.Z.'s first conservation battle had begun for the preservation of Northland's Waipoua Kauri Forest. From 1925 to 1952 it was fought almost single-handedly by Barney McGregor who organised a 50,000-strong petition to Parliament and published a book on the area in 1948 (McGregor 1948). Additions to Waipoua Sanctuary are still being sought to extend the reserve down to the Tasman Sea.

COPPERMINE ISLAND

Coppermine Island of the Hen and Chickens Group, in the Hauraki Gulf was N.Z.'s second big conservation issue and like Waipoua was spearheaded from Auckland. Since 1965 it was the centre of intense controversy when an international mining company, Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia, applied for permission for mineral exploration on the island which was then a Wildlife Refuge.

Frank Newhook and Jack Rattenbury of ABS were deeply involved in the controversy which died down in 1969 after a drilling programme, carried out under stringent conditions to protect flora and fauna, showed the copper deposits to be uneconomic.

SMITHS BUSH

Not all campaigns are successful. On Auckland's Northshore Smiths Bush is a unique forest remnant of large puriri, taraire and associated kahikatea. Threatened with subdivision it was acquired as a reserve in 1943 by the prominent efforts of ABS in association with Lucy Cranwell, the Auckland Institute and Museum and the ACC. Despite vigorous protests including a delegation to Auckland's Mayor (Sir John Allum) led by Sir Gilbert Archy and Lorry Millener who pleaded for the motorway to alter a few degrees, Smiths Bush provided the cheapest route for the northern motorway which opened in May 1959. Ten years later it was widened to 6 lanes, destroying even more bush and leaving the remaining blocks reduced to 6 and 1.25 ha. To quote Pat and John Morton " ... as the gateway to Takapuna, Smiths Bush will carry through the future this heavy mutilation, day by day visible, and for all time irreparable".

GRAFTON GULLY

A deep gully largely filled with lowland, coastal forest, (see 1956 photograph in 'Botany of Auckland', Cranwell 1981), until it was cleared in 1966 for the motorway. As Lorry Millener recently told me " ... it could have been a magnificent asset to the city with walkways and lighted in the evenings." A must for every tourist to visit.

WAITAKERE and HUNUA RANGES

ABS has always been intimately associated with the Waitakere Ranges and the majority of field trips and projects continue to concentrate on this area. Arthur Mead who was Waterworks Engineer with the ACC (from 1929 to 1953) and a keen member of ABS played a leading part in delineating and reserving Auckland's water catchments. He also took a major part in the formation of Centennial Memorial Park (established in 1941) and later in Park additions.

More recently ABS and conservation groups responding to the ARA's Proposed Cornwallis Forest Park Discussion Document (1981) successfully asked for Cornwallis and Kaitarakihi to be added to Centennial Memorial Park and opposed the concept of exotic forestry here. Then in 1984 in a submission to the ARA on the draft Waitakere Ranges Regional Park Land Management plan, ABS stressed the need for the water catchment land to be included into Centennial Memorial Park, for botanical surveys and for weed control. This has not yet occurred.

The wilderness character of Auckland's wild, west coast from Whatipu to Karekare is still threatened with the possible rebuilding of a tourist railway.

The ARA Management Plan for Hunua Forest 1985-1990 proposed more exotic planting, including the controversial Tasmanian blackwoods. Unfortunately this Plan was never released for public comment.

TWO PRIVATE LAND ISSUES WITH WHICH I WAS PERSONALLY INVOLVED

Ness Valley on the northern slopes of the Hunuas. Although much of the valley had already been cleared for farming some taraire forest survived. Taraire forest at this locality is approaching its southern limit and is now unusual in the area. As such this stand is nationally important. In 1983 the Government's new Forestry Encouragement Grants caused increased pine planting, mainly by Forestry Companies, in many parts of N.Z. There were no fields checks, no environmental restraints and 45 % of establishment costs were refunded. This policy resulted in the flattening, by Odlins and Aetna life, of forest and shrubland in the Ness Valley. This later appeared to cause the destruction of a road bridge, by storm water, further down the valley, costing thousands of dollars to rebuild.

From the large public outcry some good has occurred. The surviving taraire forest is presently being reserved (4 years later!), Manukau City has implemented a District Scheme change to protect forest on private land and Forestry Encouragement Grants are being phased out.

Eady's Bush in Northcote on the Northshore is a 9 ha block of regenerating bush adjacent to Kauri Glen Scenic Reserve and was threatened with subdivision in December 1982. 6.6 ha of the property was zoned for development. The local residents and outside organisations deluged Northcote Borough Council with objections to the subdivision, including one from ABS. The effect was that the Council refused the development and finally in 1985 the Council purchased 6 ha of the area, now the Cecil Eady Reserve. This successful compromise maintains the bush corridors between the existing reserves and the overall bushy character of the area while allowing limited subdivision on the less environmentally important fringes.

THE CULTIVATED ENVIRONMENT

Plants soften our man-made urban environment and help us to relax. We are fortunate in Auckland to have many green suburbs, but others are closer to deserts.

Large trees require large areas to grow and in this respect our city parks are vitally important. Too often trees have to be severely pruned because they are not in suitable sites. Even worse, trees may be removed for no apparent reason at all. Sadly in 1986 this was the fate of one of Auckland's largest and most unusual fig trees, Ficus obliqua var. obliqua (= F. "australis" of Burstal and Sale, 1984) in the Marcellin Hall grounds at Hillsborough. Three smaller trees of this species are still present in the same grounds. Auckland has a very favourable growing climate but I wish park staff would consider more carefully what they are planting, whether native or exotic and show more originality in their selection.

Education about plants goes hand in hand with their conservation. For a long time the University grounds and Arthur Farnell's Middlemore plantings acted as "Aucklands Botanical gardens". Now, thanks to the ARA, we are very fortunate to have our own real Botanical Gardens at Manuwera covering 64 ha, but I wish they would plant less coloured freaks and more wild natives of known provenance!

THE FUTURE

1986 saw the separation of commercial and conservation interests regarding Public Land and the creation of DOC. Around Auckland this land carve-up has occurred relatively smoothly with the most contentious issues being the kanuka remnants and the large wetland in Woodhill Forest, and the proposed separation of Okiwi Station on Great Barrier Island. We are still awaiting the final decision on these 2 areas.

It is imperative to know what vegetation remains and its importance so that vital areas can be preserved. To provide this data the Protected Natural Areas (PNA) programme was started in 1981. To date it has only surveyed 31/268 Ecological Districts throughout N.Z. The only completed PNA survey near Auckland is Rodney; Coromandel Region has started, Hunua District will be done this summer and Waitakere next summer.

Because a survey had been done before the Rodney PNA programme, the amount of vegetation lost during the intervening period was able to be calculated. The results are alarming (from Campbell & Slaven 1984): 31,382 ha of native forest (greater than 3 m tall) and shrubland remained in 1984, 3:2 (forest:shrubland) which was 18.6% of the whole Rodney District. It was estimated that 10.6% (3,700 ha) of forest/shrubland was lost between 1978-84. 80% of the lost areas were under 10 ha and if you think that small areas are not important, some 95% of the remaining Rodney forest areas are less than 50 ha in size.

For completion of these surveys the PNA programme urgently requires more funding.

THREATS

Reserving areas does not protect them from other threats: mining; flooding (dams); weed invasion; introduced animals, especially browsing mammals (goats, deer, possums, rabbits &c); roading; fire; pipe-lines; over-head wires; trigs; aerials; over-use; rubbish; marinas &c. Constant vigilance and management of reserves is required. Offshore islands offer the only future hope for near pristine vegetation.

"Weeds pose a greater threat to the long-term integrity of the natural communities than any other factor" quoted from ABS submission on the draft Waitakere Ranges Management Plan (1984). There are hundreds of introduced plants growing wild around Auckland. Fortunately most are herbaceous and do not smother. A few do and the ones that are shade tolerant are possibly the worst, particularly wandering Jew, wild ginger, mist flower, Japanese honeysuckle, and tree privet. In open situations some sun demanding species may also be a problem e.g. pampas, Hakea species or pines. On Rangitoto Island ABS, lead by Lorry Millener, played an important role controlling pines on the island (1948-mid 1950s). The density of weeds and their longevity is very important. Relatively short-lived plants which become less dense with age actually assist forest regeneration e.g. gorse and wattle species.

But should some weeds be protected? Like the glorious annual spring show of exotic flowers, mainly in the iris family at Waikumete Cemetery.

Exotic water weeds are a problem throughout N.Z. and MAF together with ACC are to be congratulated in recently eradicating the floating fern, Salvinia molesta from Western Springs. Lake Otatua by Woodhill Forest is nationally important because it is one of N.Z.'s few lakes with totally native aquatic vegetation and one of Northland's few dune lakes with associated forest.

FINALLY

We can all actively practise conservation in little ways like using less water, then the need for another dam could be deferred saving the ARA several million dollars/year. (The surface area of the Waitakere and Hunua lakes is presently 716 ha, the drowned habitat area is far greater).

I would like to believe that Smiths Bush and Grafton Gully clearances would not occur in today's more environmentally 'aware' society. We have almost reached the day when there will be no 'idle land' remaining, reserves will be cleared right up to their boundaries and there will be few funds for reserve acquisitions by the Crown. Therefore there is a need to amend the Town and Country Planning Act to protect natural areas on private land and amend the Rating Act to make natural areas non-ratable. Other rural Councils need to follow Manukau City's recent lead of a 3/4 rate relief for native forest areas (greater than 3 ha).

There has always been and will continue to be threats to our natural environment. The continued loss of natural areas around Auckland has resulted in the remaining areas being more important and more vociferously protected. In DOC we have for the first time a Government advocate for the environment. We now have numerous conservation groups, but still preservation will only be achieved through active involvement and support by the public.

With this in mind I quote John Horsman, a past editor of ABS newsletter, writing in the July 1966 newsletter "it is noticeable in the Society how the younger generation of botanists is lacking ... we have the responsibility to encourage young people ... I feel (the junior members) could be much increased." Rich Afford a founding member of ABS, or Master Afford as he was known then, recently informed me that the majority of those early members were young when ABS was established. Sadly today we still lack youth in the Society; without them our appreciation and knowledge of the environment and our consequent desire to conserve it, may be lost. I must add it is heartening to see today's large audience with its younger element, long may it continue.

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H.B. DOBBIE 1852-1940 - FERN ENTHUSIAST

J.D. McCraw

Dobbie's book, *Ferns of New Zealand*, is well-known although out of print, but little was known about the author. Thanks to the generosity of descendants in lending manuscripts and photographs some information about his life is now available.

Herbert Boucher Dobbie was born at Hayes, Middlesex in 1852. His mother was Ellen Locker, sister of the editor of the London *Graphic* and of the poet Frederick Locker. His father was a Major in the Madras Army but died on active service when Herbert was very young. His mother and her six children then returned to England and settled at Irthington near Brampton in Cumberland.

It was here that he developed his life-long interest in ferns. He served his apprenticeship with an engineering firm and worked at various jobs until he decided to emigrate to New Zealand in 1875.

He worked in an engineering firm in Auckland and then joined the Railways Department in 1877 as a fitter and later as a draughtsman.

1880 was an eventful year. He bought a house in Parnell, he married Charlotte Gilfillan, his sister Mary was murdered in Taranaki and he published his first book on New Zealand ferns.

This first book was a rather primitive affair and consisted of a number of pages with white silhouettes of ferns on a blue background and for this reason it is often referred to as the "Blue Book". The prints were made by placing dried ferns on glass with sensitised paper beneath and exposing the assemblage to light.

He moved to Whangarei in 1881 to take up the position of District Manager for the Railways Department. As the railway was only three miles long with few trains he was not overworked so bought land on the outskirts of the settlement and developed a large citrus orchard. He was the first and largest citrus grower in the district.