

REPORT ON WAIMA-WAIPOUA-MATARAU FORESTS FIELD TRIP JANUARY 1989

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On the night of Friday 13th a party of some 30 members from the Auckland and Waikato Botanical Societies assembled in the former gundiggers' hotel, now the Auckland University Field Club's Scientific Station, at Kawerua on the West Coast through the Waipoua Forest. Over the next 4 days we were guided to a series of interesting and diverse botanical localities by our leaders, Anthony Wright and Ewen Cameron. On Saturday we made an early start for the Waima Range, to climb to Hauturu Trig, accompanied by local DOC officers Lisa Forester and Don McKenzie, and local ABS members Brent Maxwell and family now resident in Rawene. The first highlight, at the beginning of the track, was a vigorous colony of Colensoa (Pratia physaloides). Soon thereafter even the bryologist put her head down and pressed on for the summit, where we were able to lunch beside the recently discovered large-leaved species of Olearia and Coprosma, plus an unnamed Hebe discovered some years ago by the late John "Burrigane" Bartlett in Herekino Forest. Seedlings of both the Coprosma and Olearia were discovered - a sign that DOC's recent goat eradication programme has had good effect. It is surprising that such conspicuous plants could remain unrecognised for so long but their distribution is apparently limited to the summit regions of this forest. By avid searching we were able to extend the ranges of both the Coprosma and Olearia on Hauturu, albeit by only a few metres. The moss Isopterygium limatum was seen several times on Hauturu. This species is not common in northern New Zealand, but is also on the summit of Tutamoe, 40 km to the south, and is known from the upper slopes of Little Barrier, as well as from Moehau. Another interesting find near the summit was a number of trees of Coriaria arborea (tutu) bearing large galls on their upper branches. Superficially the galls resembled those of the rust galls on Acacia, but we were unable to identify any obvious cause. Nor did a subsequent search of the literature indicate any insects or fungi as likely candidates.

On Sunday the bryologist suffered a bout of the debilitating lethargy known to Field Clubbers as Kaweruaitis and stayed home to make the cheesecake, but the rest of the party headed south along the beach to the dure lakes. Cortaderia splendens (toetoe) was a magnificent sight on the eroding Pleistocene sand cliffs and the consolidated dunes; so far the introduced pampas grasses have yet to make more than a token presence. Striking inland to the First Lake we waded ankle to knee deep around the margin in search of the seldom seen orchid Spiranthes sinensis, while keeping a watchful eye on our legs for leeches. Success in finding the orchid, in late flower, preceded us being found by the leeches by only a few minutes. Returning to the coast, a few felt a bout of Kaweruaitis coming on and decided to return to the hotel while the rest headed south across the Waipoua River mouth. The lowish tide allowed most to get across with only wet shorts, although one needed the reassurance of the leader's steady hand. An exciting find in the brackish pond left by a former meander of the river was Ruppia polycarpa, the so-called horse's mane weed, which has not previously been reported for the Kawerua region. Collecting a good specimen required some deep wading, but some had come well prepared for the task in their togs. Continuing south we explored the damp sand flats. Highlights included finding the small herbs Lilaeopsis novae-zelandiae (orbicularis), Myriophyllum votschii, Limosella lineata and Glossostigma elatinoides, the minute flowers of the latter two providing a challenge

for the photographers. The Second Lake, reputedly free of leeches, lured some in for a swim to cool off. The long slog back on wet sand was interrupted by fording the river mouth, now about chest high, and the construction of a miniature dam by the 'true Brits'.

On Monday we journeyed north again to the Mataraua Forest at the head of the Wekaweka Valley, the more alert noting a roadside stand of Cannabis sativa en route. Here we potted in very damp Weinmannia/Syzygium forest doing a stint on the 'lower' plants, with an introductory chat about the common mosses and a look at some of the beautiful epiphytic lichens. 'Higher' plants of interest along the trackside were Gunnera monoica (strigosa), seldom seen this far north; Gratiola sordentata, closely resembling in vegetative features adjacent Epilobium rotundifolium; and an adventive species of Scirpus apparently new to New Zealand. Beetles collected from an extensively chewed sapling of Ackama rosifolia (makamaka) were later identified as Encolaspis brunneus (bronze beetle), a common native beetle which has now become a garden pest. The Syzygium maire (maire-tawake, or swamp maire) attracted particular attention as the lower branches were loaded with abundant bright red fruit. While some eyes were focussed upwards on the fruit others looked groundwards for pneumatophores (breathing roots). Stout erect roots bearing many fine erect branches, distantly resembling mangrove pneumatophores, were present. In addition stout loop roots covered with flaking white bark closely resembling that on the stout erect roots were present on the soil surface. In his recently published book 'Forest Vines to Snow Tussocks. The story of New Zealand Plants' (Victoria Univ. Press, 1988) John Dawson illustrates both types but comments that the erect type is found only on Syzygium and the loop type only on Laurelia novae-zelandiae (pukatea). The apparent absence of any Laurelia nearby, and the distinctive flaking bark, convince us that the loop roots were from Syzygium; and in the Waitakeres we have found thin erect roots near to pukatea which we have taken to be Laurelia pneumatophores. Can anyone cast further light on this pneumatophore puzzle?

Leaving the valley we detoured via the local store for refreshments, and aquired 'Mike' an American hitchhiker, before stopping in Waipoua Forest to search for Yuania australis along the northern end of the Yakas Kauri Track. Initially known as 'the Waipoua Orchid' because the first specimen was collected 'beneath an old man Taraire on the banks of the Waipoua River' on 28 January 1955, it has not to our knowledge been found there again. Our efforts in this direction were not rewarded, but in recompense we saw one of the finest giant kauris and, at the other end of the size scale, the moss Pyrrhobryum paramattense was found growing on the trunk of the large Weinmannia. This moss, until recently known only from Australia, was recognised by Allan Fife of Botany Division in a herbarium specimen collected in Waipoua by K W Allison in 1944. Heading back to Kawerua we stopped for a swim in the river pool at the Forest Headquarters, and conducted another abortive Yuania search along the beginnings of the southern end of the Yakas Kauri Track.

On our last day, after packing up, Anthony led us to one of the few west coast localities of Fuchsia procumbens. The plants were vigorous, scrambling over and under Cortaderia splendens and some rather scruffy low pine trees, but producing only occasional flowers and bright pink fruit. En route back to the main road some of the party stopped to botanise in the gumland scrub, others to search for highly polished moa gizzard stones eroding out of the fossil dunes, before setting off on the journey home. To Anthony and Ewen and their various assistants, many thanks from all the participants for an excellent trip, both botanically and gastronomically (especially the corn fritters).