

just a short way into their overmature stage, having amongst them a few blown-over or basally rotted individuals. Seedlings are lacking. There are no obviously ancient groupings, and without knowing anything of the supposed history of the site one would have no reason to think that these trees are anything other than part of the plantings associated with the radio building (c. 50 years old) or perhaps with some slightly earlier phase of the area as a park. (Examination of a 20 cm diameter stem cut during recent maintenance here yielded an age of c. 40-50 years).

An article about Musick Point in the New Zealand Herald (March 13 1992) indicates that the tainui problem is not just an academic one. Under the heading as above, it has a Dept. of Survey and Land Information person saying that "it is proving difficult to communicate with the various tribes and to figure out who is the true tangata whenua". Perhaps in the near future these plants will be the object of more disinterested scrutiny.

REFERENCE

La Roche, A. 1990. "The History of Howick and Pakuranga". The Howick and Districts Historical Society (Inc.).

Field trip - Upper Nihotupu Track 15 August 1992

Sandra Jones

Following a week of constant thunderstorms and hail, somebody put in a good word for us - only one short, gentle shower was sent, just to remind us of our good fortune. Twenty Bot Soc members were experienced enough field trippers to know that it would be all right on the day. The rain and hail showers resumed again that night.

The Upper Nihotupu Track passes through watershed reserve and links the Nihotupu Auxiliary Reservoir, north of the Piha (West Coast) Road below Waiatarua, with the Cutty Grass Track. A permit is required to enter the Watershed area. The Reservoir is dry, decommissioned 5 or 6 years ago. According to an informant in the ARC, there was "no longer any use for it", which didn't seem to us to be a very satisfactory explanation, especially in view of the fact that a new Auckland water supply reservoir is being built at Riverhead in the next few years. But one of our own members reported that the reason for the decommissioning of the dam was that it had silted up so badly that the water was only 1 m deep in places. On the visual evidence we were more inclined to accept the latter version.

The track crosses a plateau and passes through healthy regenerating bush. It looks as though the area has been extensively milled and burnt in the past. As you might expect from a high altitude plateau such as this there is restricted run-off, and following the sort of heavy rain we'd had, we paddled most of the way. But it wasn't unpleasant. We even managed to cross the 1.5 m wide, 1 m deep ditch-like stream without having to fish anybody out.

The main features of the area are:

(1) the Gahnia xanthocarpa swamp, with Syzygium (Eugenia) maire (swamp maire or maire tawake), the swamp astelia Astelia grandis (one of four

known sites in the Waitakeres), and Blechnum minus (the swamp blechnum);

(2) the rimu (Dacrydium cupressinum) dominant young forest, with abundant Dicksonia squarrosa (wheki), Myrsine salicina (toro), Pseudopanax anomalus and Quintinia serrata. Other Waitakere high altitude plants were also present such as Ixerba brexioides (tawari), Blechnum procerum, B. discolor (crown fern) and Cyathea smithii with its skirt of dead and leafless fronds. A number of not-so-common Nestegis montana (narrow-leaved maire) and Litsea calicularis (mangaio) add variety. There was no sign of Meliccytus lanceolatus, (narrow-leaved mahoe) even though the only known colony in the Waitakeres is not very far away. One patch of the umbrella fern (tapuwae kotuku - the footprint of the white heron) Sticherus (Gleichenia) cunninghamii was seen. Corybas oblongus was in leaf with the flower buds just beginning to form;

(3) a meander along the bank of a small stream, a magic world of filmy ferns and mosses. Libertia pulchella and Blechnum fluviatile grow along the stream bank, Corybas acuminatus (rivularis) was in flower in patches along the track side, and the dry brown fronds of the abundant Dicksonia squarrosa added visual relief to the dominant impression of moist dark green. Mida salicifolia (willow-leaved maire or sandalwood) and Nestegis lanceolata (white maire) didn't excite the usual debate/discussion: perhaps we were too close to the stream-side lunch spot. Or perhaps we all know the difference now. Only one specimen of Meliccytus micranthus was seen to enable a comparison with the superficially similar divaricating shrub Pseudopanax anomalus. One small specimen of Dracophyllum latifolium (neinei or spiderwood) grew on the stream bank, together with Lophomyrtus bullata (ramarama). A large Alseuosmia macrophylla overhanging the stream was in flower. All but four of the Waitakere species of Hymenophyllum filmy ferns were recorded; a closer search would no doubt find more. For the record, we found H. demissum, H. dilatatum, H. revolutum, H. multifidum, H. sanguinolentum, H. ferrugineum, H. lyallii and H. flabellatum. Not surprisingly, Trichomanes reniforme (kidney fern), T. elongatum (scrubbing brush fern), T. venosum and Leptopteris hymenophylloides were also present;

(4) The long gentle climb up to Cutty Grass track passed through relatively unremarkable regenerating bush, but we noted in particular Cordyline pumilio (the dwarf cabbage tree), more Corybas acuminatus in flower, a colony of crown fern (Blechnum discolor) with an enormous basal trunk almost 1 m tall, with a diameter of perhaps 1.2 m. Even the Blechnum fraseri "trunks" seemed taller than usual.

Probably the major find of the day was a specimen of Dicksonia fibrosa (wheki ponga), rare in the Waitakeres. It is generally assumed that specimens at the two other known sites (Titirangi and Waiatarua) have been planted. It's most unlikely that this one would have been planted.

[Rhys Gardner reports that two other naturally occurring wheki pongas have been located on the other side of Scenic Drive in the vicinity of the "Cockscomb" ridge.]