

Auckland Botanical Society Field Trip to Tapora, September 1995

Fran Hintz

Friday night; rain pouring down. I ring Maureen. Yes, we meet at Tapora school at 10 am, and yes, there is a favourable weather forecast.

Saturday morning; grey and unpromising. I set off for Tapora via the West Coast Road and am glad to meet Anthony, Ewen, and Jamie in Helensville. Mist over the harbour for the entire trip north.

At Tapora, we assemble, eleven of us, and take the cars to the end of the access road. By now the sun is out. The walk through the pine plantations to the coast is made botanically interesting by a comparison of species, male and female cones, this year's and last year's. We cross to the island through ankle deep water, looking at the salt marsh plants. It was low tide; the water was fresh because of the heavy rain, and the glasswort looked unwell in this unusual habitat.

The island (DOC estate) is a hidden treasure. Golden sand dunes, a vista of the harbour, particularly North and South Heads and the bar, pingao, little fresh water lakes in the hollows, patches of kanuka scrub, an honest salt wind and waves on the sandy beach. The mixture of indigenous and exotic species (*Lilium formosum*, buffalo grass, pampas, marram) was interesting. The incidence of dead and dying pingao was a concern and no one could offer an explanation.

We return to the mainland by a different route to visit a narrow coastal strip which is DOC land. We are looking for some special plants and we find some: *Coprosma parviflora* and *Mazus*, but not (as promised) *Gastrodia*. A single specimen of *Metrosideros excelsa* x *M. robusta* ("back-crossed to *excelsa*" is Ewen Cameron's comment) intrigues some of us. Lots of kowhai. Also *Muehlenbeckia* and buffalo grass hiding a wire fence.

Back to cars, a longish walk over the paddocks. By now the sun has brought out the purple flowers of the *Romulea*.

A really special day. Glad I didn't miss it. Thank you Maureen and Frank.

Flora of Kauritutahi Island, Awhitu

E.K. Cameron

In the Manukau Harbour some 300 m off the point between Kauritutahi and Brooks Beaches of Awhitu Regional Park lies the small (<0.1ha) Kauritutahi Island (map reference: NZMS 260 R12 578553). The narrow island is flat-topped, c. 5 m asl and is some 20 m long by 3 m wide (long axis ENE-WSW). A storm platform exists around the island except on the south side which is vertical and eroding. This island is comprised of indurated Pleistocene Sandstone (B.W. Hayward *pers. comm.*) and is slightly taller than the adjacent mainland point of similar composition.

During a Balmoral Cub Camp weekend based at the Awhitu Environmental Camp, I visited the island for 30 minutes at low tide on 18 November 1995. Apart from a small outcrop of intertidal sandstone blocks 50 m to the west of the island, Kauritutahi Island stands out as the only

landmark on the extensive tidal flats. The island can easily be reached on foot at low tide by walking across the sandy mudflats and judging by a worn track along the island it is frequently visited. The island it is not part of the Regional Park. Midden shell was evident eroding out of the northern cliffs.

Kingfishers were nesting in the northern cliffs, common copper butterflies were frequent and tiger beetles were common on the bare sunny banks.

The total living vascular flora numbers 29 species of which only 31% are native (see Appendix). There are two plants that must have been planted on the island: Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) c. 13 m tall (c. 25 cm diameter) in the centre of the island; and Canary Island palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) on the eastern tip of the island, trunkless and leaves up to 2.5 m long. The erect Norfolk Island pine is visible from a long way away.

The vegetation along the flat top of the island is predominantly rank pasture dominated by narrow-leaved plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*) with *Bromus willdenowii*, *Poa trivalis* and buffalo grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) locally common.

Exotic annuals, like vulpia hair grass (*Vulpia bromoides*) and *Lotus* spp. are common along the lower margin of the vegetation at the top of the bare northern cliffs.

The main woody vegetation is about 5 multi-stemmed pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*), up to 6 m tall (much wider than tall) on the northern cliffs. They only protrude about 2 m above the island. About six shrubs of boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) up to 3 m tall, mainly overhanging the south-east edge, form the only other woody vegetation. There were seven woody, erect shrubs, 70-150 cm tall and opposite-leaved, along the top of the island. Unfortunately they were all dead and leafless. The wood is consistent with *Coprosma* (R.O. Gardner pers. comm.). The most likely erect *Coprosma* species to be present is *C. robusta* (based on adjacent shoreline vegetation).

Conclusion

Kauritutahi Island is highly modified with exotics prominent in both the flora and vegetation. Boxthorn should be removed as it could spread over the whole island. The planted Canary Island palm and the Norfolk Island pine should also be removed as they give an exotic form to the vegetation and the spiny palm could naturalise on the island. A pure canopy of pohutukawa would be more pleasing to me.

The island would make a logical addition to the Awhitu Regional Park.

Acknowledgements

Jessica Beever for identifying the two mosses, Rhys Gardner for examining the dead woody shrub material, Bruce Hayward for geological information, and the Balmoral Cub Group for organising the most enjoyable weekend.

Appendix: Kauritutahi Island flora, Awhitu

Ferns (2)

<i>Asplenium oblongifolium</i>	s
<i>Pyrrhosia eleagnifolia</i>	lc

Conifers (1)

*Araucaria heterophylla*** x1

Dicots (13)

*Cerastium glomeratum** o
Crassula sieberiana l
? *Coprosma robusta* x7 (all dead)
*Galium aparine** o
*Lotus angustissimus** l
*L. suaveolens** lc
*Lycium ferocissimum** o
Metrosideros excelsa o
Muehlenbeckia complexa lc
*Plantago lanceolata** a
Solanum americana s
*Sonchus oleraceus** o
*Trifolium dubium** c

Monocots (14)

*Bromus hordeaceus** o
*B. willdenowii** c
*Dactylis glomerata** a
*Gladiolus undulatus** l
Isolepis nodosa o
*Lolium perenne** o
*Phoenix canariensis*** x1
*Poa annua** o
*P. trivialis** c
Rytidosperma sp. l
*Stenotaphrum secundatum** c
Stipa stipoides lc
*Vulpia bromoides** c
*V. myuros** o-lc

Mosses (2)

Bryum campylothecium AK 226300
Weissia patula AK 226299

* = adventive species

** = presumed planted

AK = Auckland Museum herbarium voucher number

a = abundant

c = common

o = occasional

l = local

s = scarce (< 5 plants seen)

x1 = single plant seen