

With the group safely ferried back to the mainland Doug and Ewen made a superb beaching through the surf which brought to an end a most adventurous and botanically rich day.

Botanical Society Field Trip to Brown's Island (Motukorea), August 18 1996

Rhys Gardner

This was a Sunday trip to an island not previously visited by Bot. Soc. and about 50 adults and children were able to enjoy the plant-life, some unexpected sunshine, and the shapes and textures of an unspoilt piece of volcanic topography.

Brown's Island is owned by the Auckland City Council (it was gifted in 1955 by Sir Ernest Davis) and managed by the Department of Conservation. Rabbits have been eliminated, as have (DoC believes) the rats and mice in a poisoning carried out last year. Except for the steepest cliffs the ground is mostly in grasses, particularly Kikuyu grass, this recorded by Alan Esler in 1974 merely as a small patch on the flat ground! The crater bottom, which incidentally was left for a subsequent party to explore, is full of bracken and *Muehlenbeckia complexa*, and if grazing were to cease these would probably spread to produce something like the cover of grass, fern and light scrub seen by William Brown and John Logan Campbell in 1840.

We disembarked onto the stone jetty at the island's southern end and moved up northwards past the "small pool of water in the centre of the level ground" mentioned in Campbell's book "Poenamo". It is now in a sad state, without cabbage trees, *Carex secta*, or indeed any native plants. At the island's summit Bruce Hayward pointed out the volcanic landforms standing (or lying) all around.

We lunched at the beach on the north-eastern side in front of the scrub-covered terrace at the foot of the tuff cliffs. Planted trees (a tall yucca, a coral tree, and a couple of species of bottlebrush) are conspicuous, as are Sydney golden wattle, Italian buckthorn, flannel leaf and moth plant. Boneseed has been eliminated from the pasture but is common elsewhere.

At one place the north-eastern cliff is cut by a group of steep faults, and here grew two small colonies of the native spurge *Euphorbia glauca*, a species not found elsewhere in the inner Hauraki Gulf (Little Barrier Island is the nearest known locality). One colony consisted only of three new stems, apparently just having escaped being torn out completely by a recent slump, a hazard of life in this part of the cliff. A search by Peter de Lange in March 1995 had failed to turn up these plants, but the site was extremely dry then so perhaps they had died back.

Additions to Alan Esler's list were: *Asplenium flaccidum* subsp. *flaccidum*, *A. oblongifolium*, *Cheilanthes distans*; *Pteris tremula*; *Coriaria arborea*; *Fumaria* sp.; *Geranium solanderi* "coarse hairs"; *Senecio esleri*.

We regrouped at the southern end of the island at four o'clock low tide, all geologists now, pointing out to each other how the jetty had been gathered up from the crust of the basalt flow that forms the level ground here. Such flows may underlie the meaning of Motukorea "island of the small canoe", the reference perhaps being to the dangers of hidden reefs, and we cautiously returned to our offshore vessel by means of a Zodiac. Panmure Wharf was reached just before dusk.

Jessica Beever and John Braggins kindly imparted their knowledge of mosses, liverworts and lichens to us. Thanks also to Bruce Hayward for volcanic instruction, and to boat operators Jim and Raewyn Insley.