

1883 Auckland Naturalists' Field Club Excursion to Rakino and Otatou Islands (Noisies)

Mike Butler

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"On Saturday forenoon the p.s. City of Cork, Captain Jackson, left the Queen-street Wharf for the Rakino Island, having on board a number of the members of the Naturalists' Field Club and their friends. The hour advertised for sailing was half past nine, but naturalists, like other people, are but mortal, and with true colonial punctuality the vessel did not get away till ten. Among those on board were Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Jackson and family, Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Campbell, the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. E. Townshend, Mr. E. A. and Miss F. Plumley, Mr. and Mrs. James, Mrs. Burns, Mrs. W. J. Palmer, Misses Haultain, C. Haultain, Cheeseman, E. Cheeseman, James Hatger, Archibald, Messrs. T. Cheeseman, J. A. Pond, J. Burt, A. Sharpe, T. L. Drummond, T. L. White, E. White, H. L. James, Herrold, Combes, Glover, and a HERALD representative.

The morning was cloudy and the weather lowering, which deterred a number from going, but they were losers by their lack of faith, as the excursion proved one of the most enjoyable and successful that has yet been undertaken by Mr. Cheeseman, not the slightest hitch or accident occurring to mar the general enjoyment. About eleven o'clock Old Sol struggled up the heavens, and breaking through the clouds, successfully asserted his position. The run down the harbour was most agreeable, the air being bracing, and just sufficient swell on to make the motion of the steamer exhilarating. On reaching Motutapu the objective point of the expedition could be descried - Rakino Island - but as the weather was fine, Mr. Cheeseman thought it would be advisable to visit the Otatou Islands, which with Orarapa, David, and D'Urville rocks form the outlying pickets which guard the Waiheke passage. The steamer was accordingly headed for the northernmost of the Otatous, which had a good beach, was dotted with timber to its northward summit, and from which an excellent viewpoint could be obtained for sketching. Orarapa, to the attraction a good deal of attention from its peculiar appearance, being some what like a hay-stack. Its summit is destitute of vegetation, save a species of ice-plant, and it bears a bleached appearance from being the resort of sea fowl, recalling the lines -

*An Island salt, and bare,
The haunt of arc, and seal, and seamens' clang,
as the Pacific rolled in its billows,
which broke in seething foam on its reefs,
and raced up its fissured and beetling cliffs.*

Captain Jackson shortly brought the steamer to a sandy anchorage, in five fathoms, water, about some hundred yards from Otatou, and preparations were made for landing the excursionists, who had previously done ample justice to their luncheon, owing to the stimulating effect of the sea air. Those who elected to land were taken speedily and safely ashore in two

trips, the reef forming a natural landing place. As the boat pushed in the fish could be seen disporting about in all directions, which gave token that those who remained aboard to fish would have a "good time" of it. A number of the young ladies, under the guidance of Messrs. Cheeseman and Pond, ascended the face of the cliff, and struggled through the undergrowth to the summit. Some rare ferns and other botanical specimens were obtained, two of a kind not hitherto found south of the Hen and Chickens. A solitary rat was discovered on a cliff, but whether European or native could not be clearly made out. Mr. Pond also obtained some geological specimens. Messrs. A. Sharpe, T. L. Drummond, and Miss Cheeseman, devoted themselves to sketching, others to collect shells, sea urchins, anemones, &c, some went shooting, while the more Utilitarian portion of the excursionists who were not studying Art or Natural History, went in for oysters, with which the reefs were covered. The view from the summit was something magnificent.

Away to the eastward Cape Colville reared its head into the clouds, to the south could be seen the Wharekawa ranges, 2000 feet high, while northward were the islets of the Hauraki Gulf - Tiritiri, Kawau - and the Tanguhua ranges on the mainland and westward, Rangitoto's peaks stood clear and sharp against the horizon, making up a varied view of land and water, mountain and valley, which can scarcely be matched outside the province. A couple of hours were thus spent very pleasantly. Meanwhile those on board had not been idle. In fact from the beach, those on the steamer could be seen hauling snapper in hand over fist. On the shore-party getting on board again, the spectacle on deck was a curious one; piles of snapper were lying about in every direction; a sackful containing over 100 attested the skill of Mr. Herrold, while Messrs. T. L. White, B. White, and Mr. Jackson's sons were not far behind him. So eager were the fish to be caught that when one snapper was being hauled in another chased it to euchre it out of the hook - or the bait. Getting under way again, Messrs. Cheeseman and Pond conducted some dredging operations in the channel between Otatou and Rakino, but these gentlemen did not come out of the business with clean hands, only some mud, and a solitary sea egg, being brought up. The heavy ground swell began to make the City of Cork get lively under foot, and some of the ladies commenced to peer into the great deep as if with a desire to solve its unfathomable mysteries, but the impulse was of brief duration, as in a few minutes the steamer rounded the quaint rocky sentinels which form the eastern point of Rakino Bay, and the steamer was soon snugly at anchor near the yacht of the lessee of Rakino Island, Mr. Sanford.

The island was purchased some ten years ago by Mr. Seymour George, M.H.R., and was leased to Mr. Sanford, who has been here ever since. It is about 360 acres in extent, and the residence is prettily situated on the margin of the sandy beach of the picturesque bay, which is sheltered by a semi-circular range of hills from nearly all the prevailing winds. It says much for Mr. Sanford's energy and industry that he has cleared nearly the whole area of the island single-handed, and laid it down in grass. He devotes his attention principally to the rearing of sheep and cattle, but has grown for experimental purposes four varieties of tobacco - Connecticut, Florida, Ohio, and Virginia. A quantity of the tobacco leaves which have not undergone all the preparatory processes may be seen at our office. As there are no other settlers or schoolmaster near, Mr., Sanford's elder children hold school every afternoon for the little ones, and in the evening Mr. and Mrs. Sanford supervise the lessons. But this is a digression.

A number of the excursionists who landed were hospitably entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Sanford, who placed their home at their disposal, and provided milk and other refreshments, tea, fruit, &c. After spending a pleasant hour the party bade their hospitable host and hostess and family adieu, and leaving them to their Robinson Crusoe life, put off to the steamer. Mr. Sanford, finding that a Saturday's HERALD and some other papers were onboard, got his son to launch a dinghy and put off to the steamer for these much prized treasures in that out of the way place.

The run home to Auckland was a pleasant one, a fair wind and a flowing tide sending the steamer along. As Drunken Bay was opened the sun sank, capped by a bank of clouds in a gorgeous sunset, behind the Waitakere ranges - the shafts of light streaming across

the bosom of the Waitemata and tipping the dancing wavelets with molten gold. Messrs. Sharpe and Drummond were speedily on the bridge to enjoy the beautiful spectacle, but whether they "caught the sunset effects" remains a secret. As the shades of evening set in, and the stars came out to keep their watch and ward, the ladies also came out to keep their shells and beguiled the journey with music - Mrs. Campbell (whose voice has often been listened to with pleasure in our Auckland concerts) contributing some choice songs; Miss Archibald, Miss Batger, and Mr. H. L. James selections from "Pinafore" and "Patience;" while Mr. James, sen., warbled "My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here," which, after his revelling in the picturesque glories of Otatou and Rakino, was somewhat rough on these localities, to say nothing of the respected Naturalists' Field Club. The steamer reached the Queen-street wharf at 7.30, all departing to their homes thoroughly pleased, with the day's excursion; even the representative of the Law did not feel it in his heart to enter a demurrer, or move for a new trial, or a change of venue. The club contemplates only making one more excursion this season, but next season the "lions" of Otatou and Rakino will bear another interview and inspection, as Mr. Cheeseman has certainly scored a success this time.

Captain Jackson and his men were courteous and obliging, and did much to promote the comfort of the party. Some skippers magnify their office and "shiver their timbers," and (apropolise?) their eyes till the passengers are thoroughly miserable or placed in bodily fear, but Captain Jackson is "not that sort of man." Both in landing and in embarking at the various places everything was done to consult the wishes and contribute to the enjoyment of the excursionists."

Another 1883 Field Naturalists' Club Visit to Rakino and Otatou (Noisies) Islands

Mike Butler

Auckland Evening Star November 12, 1883.

"Members of this Club with their friends, to the total number of 112, left Queen-street Wharf in the p.s. Tainui, at 9 o'clock on Friday morning, bound for Rakino Island, outside of Motutapu. The run down occupied a pleasant two hours, at the end of which the steamer came to anchor in a semi-circular bay, opposite the island's only house. A large proportion of the excursionists landed in boats, while the rest went on further in the steamer to one of the two Otatou Islands, hoping as ardent naturalists, to be rewarded with new and rare plants, and possibly animals. Their expectations, however, were scarcely realised for they got no new vegetable specimens, and schnapper, which was caught in abundance, can scarcely be reckoned a rarity. Mr. Cheeseman, the Club's indefatigable secretary, found a specimen of the only

melon indigenous to New Zealand (*sicyos angulata*). Its fruit, at maturity, is only about the size of a bean. Other rarities were the hymenanthus, and the rhagodia (very uncommon) which latter also occurs at Rakino. Several orchids, most of them common, were found.

On the beach at Otatou was picked up a human jaw-bone (lower), with all the teeth save one intact, and perfectly sound. Each of the first double teeth was ground down in the most singular manner, as if the owner, when living, had been in the habit of masticating very hard food (say fern-root.) Judging from the teeth, Drs. Moore and Purchas diagnosed the fragment to have belonged to a male Maori, aged between 50 and 60, who was possibly drowned in the