

QUARTERLY NEWS LETTER

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AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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With the start of a fresh year, the editor would like to take the opportunity of welcoming members back from their holidays and hopes that a pleasant and profitable time has been spent by all.

EXCURSIONS

On Saturday, Feb. 27th, the Society held an Excursion to Te Henga, West Coast. On our previous excursion we had visited O'Neil's Point studying seaweeds and shore vegetation, but with a high afternoon tide the creek was impassable, so we wandered across the sand dunes, visited Bethell's Lake and later some members also botanized about the swamp margin.

We were able to note the extensive encroachments of moving dune, and see the stabilising effect of plantations of marram grass (Ammophila arenaria) whose narrow spike-like flower heads are so distinct from both the male and female flower heads of our native sand-binding grass (Spinifex hirsutus). On the stable dunes we noticed flowering cottonwoods (Cassinia retorta) and abundance of the naturalised lupin (Lupinus arboreus). Coprosma crassifolia was abundant, and also the Native Jasmin (Parsonsia heterophylla) mostly in fruit, but with occasional clusters of white bell-shaped flowers. After lunch under the pohutukawas, we wandered along the pipeline to Bethell's lake. Items of special interest were a few odd specimens of whau (where the attention of grazing animals had been escaped) a rare form of Blechnum procerum with the lower pinnae not narrowed downwards, Hypolepis tenuifolia, and abundance of the autumn coloured maidenhair (Adiantum hispidulum). The lake itself is surrounded by typical coastal forest containing among other trees the beautiful tawapou (Sideroxylon novo-zelandicum) regarded by many as the most beautifully berried tree in New Zealand. It does well in cultivation, but unfortunately is slow growing.

The lake side also yields Hooker's spleenwort

(Asplenium hookerianum) in a few places and (a considerable distance further round) the rather rare Pteris comans and also a few specimens of Pteris macilenta var penula.

After leaving the lake we returned to the Waitakere stream via the sand hills and the extensive inroads of the moving dunes was forced upon the members in a very practical manner.

Some of our members wandered about the creek and along the swamp margin and various finds were made. Perhaps the most interesting was abundance of bladderwort (Utricularia sp) collected in the vicinity of the swing bridge. This little plant is insectivorous, producing along its roots tiny bladderlike structures which entrap and digest unwary insects. As it was not in flower or fruit it was completely submerged but was eventually discovered by Miss Dingley, growing abundantly together with masses of Nitella.

Other plants of interest found along the creek by various members were Glossostigma elantinoides, bearing minute fringed white flowers, the sand buttercup (Ranunculus acaulis) with its trifoliolate leaves and almost stalkless little flowers. The sand Gunnera (Gunnera arenaria) was growing in abundance. Like our other seven species of Gunnera, it is endemic. Our native arrow-grass (Triglochin striata) was collected in fruit, and many other salt marsh denizens were noted.

Among introduced plants the tropical Otella ovalifolia was noted in mid-stream with a few of its charming white flowers blooming waterlily-like upon the surface of the water, while the Primrose Willow (Jussiaea diffusa)* lit up areas of both water and sand with its abundance of buttercup-yellow flowers.

Needless to say, both marsh and dune yielded numbers of reeds and rushes, but they were so numerous, that discussion of them must be postponed till we have a marsh picnic.

The excursion was led by Miss Crookes. We take this opportunity of thanking Mr. and Mrs. Bethell for adding to our enjoyment by permission to picnic on and explore their property.

* During the excursion I informed some members that "Jussiaea is popularly known as the Burmese Buttercup." I had heard the plant given that name and in view of its buttercup-like flowers had not questioned it. I find however, on referring to Allan (A Handbook of the Naturalised Flora of New Zealand) that the correct popular name of Jussiaea diffusa is Primrose Willow. Actually Jussiaea belongs neither to the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae) nor to the Primrose family (Primulaceae) but to the fuchsia family (Onagraceae) which includes our native fuchsias and willow herbs

and the introduced evening primrose (Oenothera biennis) and its immediate relatives. I am still seeking for the true Burmese buttercup, and if any member can give me information about that elusive plant, I shall be most grateful.

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Many members would like to follow in Miss Nancy Bamford's footsteps in her delightful trip to the Sounds. In the meantime it is pleasant to see some of the highlights of the journey through her eyes.

"A thousand miles seems a long way to go to see buttercups and daisies but, in December last, these were a satisfying reward for a visit to the Hollyford Valley. Around the entrance to the Homer Tunnel they were growing in profusion and all in full flower - Ranunculus lyallii, a lovely sign of spring among those very grim mountains with their cold icefields still reaching low down into the Valley. All around were bushes of Gaultheria rupestris with their waxy lily-of-the-valley clusters of flower and Hebe monticola again white but very showy with masses of flower. Amongst these were the daisies, the large flowered Celmisias.

The walk down to Marion Camp, 8 miles, was filled with interest and surprises. The road drops quickly, 2,200 feet, and the change from lower alpine fields to beech forest and the rich forest undergrowth can be followed. 7 species of daisies (Celmisias and Senecios) were in flower, some yellow but most white and showing a great variety of leaf form. The tall spikes of Spaniard grass (Aciphylla) were in flower and there were clumps of Anisotome and Angelica - not spectacular individually but showy on the cliffs and standing out amongst the rocks.

Lower down in swampy areas, there were patches of golden-yellow Chrysobactron hookeri and several species of buttercups, tall and low growing. One especially attractive species had very bright papery petals with brown backs. Everywhere were varieties of coprosma, Cassinia, Senecio and Hebe, especially salicifolia with large spikes of flower. There were ourisias, mountain totara, Wahlenbergia and Dimelia.

The beds of Pratia, also in full flower, seemed too lovely to walk on.

All these same flowers were later seen at about the same heights along the Milford Track but they were not flowering so well as in the Upper Hollyford Valley. The Track climbs higher,