

## ANNIVERSARY WEEK END 1959

Some twenty members converged from various parts of the country on Ohakune for this week-end, and they were indeed fortunate, having perfect weather, good accommodation, interesting trips and a most varied, comprehensive field of botany to intrigue them.

At 8.45 a.m. on the Saturday there was a bus at the door to take us to that botanists' paradise adjacent to the railway line at National Park Station. The journey there was most interesting with wonderful views of the mountains, bush, viaducts etc. I suppose I've been to that little area at least a dozen times but it never palls and members that day certainly got more than they could digest. My list of species for this area totals well over the hundred, but I can only mention a few of the more interesting ones. First was the Pokaka (Elaeocarpus Hockerianus) its polymorphic leaf forms intrigued us each day, then Gyathea colensoi with an underground caudex and a head of usually 3 to 6 fronds only; "Jim" got it when someone mentioned Alsophila. Apteropteris malingii was next found on a dead Kaikawaka (Libocedrus bidwillii) but the rather miserable specimen that appeared to be growing on a Kamahi (Weinmannia racemosa) we proved to be growing on dead Kaikawaka timber inside the Kamahi. The latter had evidently started as an epiphyte many many years ago on the Kaikawaka which was almost certainly dead even at that time.

The trees in the forest here are clothed with mosses and filmy ferns right up to the roof but most of these were suffering from the drought. We did, however, find one really nice clump of Mecodium pulcherrimum which gave us some idea of what this most magnificent of our ferns can look like. Strangely enough, the Leptopteris superba among the undergrowth didn't seem to be suffering. A few small Dacrydium colensoi, some still showing their juvenile foliage, were to be seen amongst this undergrowth, and at this stage so early in our explorations we decided to give the Coprosmas the best of it, though next day we were to see a bewildering lot more of them. I got out of the predicament gracefully but very self-consciously by saying "probably a hybrid".

The shrubs on the outskirts of the bush and the adjacent rather swampy meadowland were most interesting and profitable. In no time someone had found a "new" orchid with a lovely pink flower, Spiranthes australis. This was indeed quite a find; a little later another cry of delight as a lovely patch of fruiting Gunnera dentata was discovered. A most peculiar-looking find turned out to be fruiting Oreostylidium subulatum.

When our thoughts turned to the inner man, our President did his job a la George Atkinson and all agreed it was a good brew. After lunch most of us went about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile South to find the original trees of Pittosporum turneri discovered by Cockayne and Turner in 1909. Alas, the three adult trees seemed to be missing, but in amongst an almost impenetrable jungle of scrub some eight juveniles were found, up to 10 ft. high, probably at least 20 years old. When are they going to become adults!

Here we found masses of a distinctive small-leaved Olearia aborescens var. capillaris. Why it should be a variety of aborescens, which it in no way resembles, I can't understand; some day it might attain specific rank. At the side of the track was a glorious patch of Hypolepis millefolium, which along with Leptolepia novae zelandiae found later on the trip, must be among the most finely cut and elegant of our N.Z. ferns.

Growing in a shallow pool of water were the glorious little purple, yellow and white flowers of Utricularia monanthos. This is a most interesting plant about which Miss Crookes has written; so has G.M. Thompson. If you will only read about it, you will certainly want to find it. Appearing as red patches on marshy land, both here and approaching Blythe Hut, were thousands of tiny plants of Drosera pygmaea about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or  $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. Many of these, when more closely examined, could be seen to have flower buds, spent flowers or seed capsules on them. However, in spite of the glorious day it was, I much doubt if any of the party noticed a single open flower; this is not so strange as it may seem, as this plant is cleistogamic i.e. the flowers are self-pollinated in the permanently closed state. It perhaps knows more about its own particular environment and climatic conditions than we do and has evidently learnt from bitter experience. In the past we have often mistaken this plant for Drosera spatulata, which has a flower scape 1" - 6" high and bears several flowers thereon; pygmaea has a flower stem only  $\frac{1}{2}$ " high and usually bears only one flower.

While looking for the P.turneri we made one splendid find, a single plant of Nothopanax parvum growing between its parents N.simplex and N.anomalum. I was very pleased indeed to see this as the only other plant of its kind I'd found some years ago in this area had recently died.

Later in the afternoon the party drove back to Erua Station and explored the lower slopes of Haubungatahi Mountain. Mrs. K. Wood who was here a few days before us is writing up the botany of this area. Here I deserted the party and crossed the Waimarino River and adjacent swamp to obtain the adult foliage of Pitt. turneri, and specimens of that peculiar, almost leafless shrub, Hymenantha dentata var. angustifolia. The going here was too tough to take the party. Much time was spent that evening in discussing and identifying specimens.

Sunday was our big day, Blyth track with the hut our objective. This was made possible for most of the party by transport  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles up over the new road. So, although we missed the glorious rimu, matai forest, we were able to spend more time in the less familiar beech forest and semi-alpine areas further up the track. Owing to the early flowering season we unfortunately missed the usual lovely show of Elytranthe tetrapetala, a special feature of this track at the right season. The Kaikawakas with characteristic small heads on tall trunks were very prominent here, but one of the most noteworthy features of the day was that we were able to see six out of the seven Dacrydiums on the one track. What was the missing one?

Astelia nervosa, (one plant with a gorgeous spike of orange fruit) in the lower parts changed to Astelia Cockaynei as we reached higher altitudes, and that lovely little member of the lily family, Enargea parviflora was flowering profusely on a shady bank with the last occasional blooms of our native violet, Viola filicaulis, showing nearby. At long last we came out into the alpine tussock to find masses of lovely Euphrasia cuneata, a few late Celmisia spectabilis and C. gracilentia, Gentiana bellidifolia, G. griesbachii and Craspedia uniflora which you should examine with a glass to appreciate its beauty. One gorgeous specimen of Hebe tetragona covered in bloom had all the cameras busy. Perhaps its shy-flowering, and now jealous, neighbours will now endeavour to emulate its display.

Alpine fruits and berries are always most attractive. That peculiar characteristic of so many of our N.Z. plants of having small inconspicuous flowers, followed by lovely fruits is well exemplified here. Conspicuous among these we found Cyathodes colensoi, C. empetrifolia, Gaultheria antipoda, G. depressa, Podocarpus nivalis and Suttonia nummularia, with Cyathodes pumila perhaps the best of all.

Most of us lunched at the hut, rested and admired the views, cameras getting really busy; but my short-sightedness, or lack of imagination (!), precluded my seeing Mt. Egmont. The long trip back found one or two rather foot sore. One lady even wanted me to carry her, and her husband most politely took my pack, but there were too many cameras itching to come out! However, that night, all, thoroughly tired, agreed that the 12 miles tramp (at times it seemed much more) was well worth while. It was noticeable that in spite of unquenchable thirsts most of the party retired quite early.

Just over the railway bridge crossing the Mangawhero River a few chains from the hotel is a track leading up Raetihi Hill to a Railway Department dam. This hill heavily covered in bush, being a limestone remnant not engulfed by the eruption of Ruapehu, had often intrigued me and on Monday morning we set off to explore it. After reaching the dam we found no track, but we climbed up to a ridge and followed it until lunch time, through unutilized, original forest. Here we encountered and admired magnificent specimens of our familiar rimu, miro, matai, rata and black maire (Olea cunninghamii) with comparatively little undergrowth but a forest floor well covered in ferns. Lunch was enjoyed on top of one of the numerous limestone crags, where I made the mistake of sitting amongst our old odouriferous friend. I had no trouble in identifying that coprosma. Here we diligently searched for small Aspleniums, and found Asplenium colensoi or perhaps they were all Asplenium hookerianum: as yet I've not been able to decide. Asplenium richardi was found near here a few years ago but was not located this time nor was Asplenium trichomanes which might be there.

Coming down the hill to the river we found, much to Mrs. Hynes' delight, several patches of that small, creeping, herbaceous plant Australina pusilla. You will perhaps remember she gave us a talk on this some months ago. Then down to and across the river to come out on the Blyth track road and so back to the hotel quite early.

It had been quite an easy and interesting trip in entirely new territory.

Later the male members set off by car to take important photos of the mountain, but they were away a suspiciously long time. It's to be hoped they have some really good ones to prove their case. That night came packing, waiting for and catching the train home for most of the party. A lucky few stayed on to go further afield, but somehow it seemed dead after the party broke up and we few were glad to get away early next morning.

If this account of the joys and pleasures that party had at Ohakune makes you feel envious and now wish you had gone, remember not to miss out next time: if it has that effect it has been worth while writing.

Arthur Farnell

---

Members, the Editor hopes, will endeavour to read that important book "A Pelican in the Wilderness" (George Allen & Unwin). The author, Dr. Frazer Darling, one of Britain's most noted naturalists and ecologists, and a most doughty champion in the cause of nature conservation and wild life protection gives a delightful, if disturbing, account of what he saw and heard on a visit to the United States and Mexico and later to Alaska to study the complex problems of the husbanding of the land's biological resources. And these problems must be tackled on a broad basis.

"As I see it" he remarks, "there is only one ecology, plant associations are so greatly affected by animals and most animal ecology is meaningless without constant reference to the plant field, and as such a large part of the earth's surface is influenced by man we must be prepared to develop human ecology". He brings to his journey searching experience in Britain. "My work in the West Highland Survey . . . . . had brought this out as a central theme or chain - deforestation and its consequences, pastoralism and a lack of balance between cattle and sheep, the sheep always taking more than they could give, the gradual deterioration of the habitat with the economic and social collapse of the West Highland region".

In America he saw all too often the familiar spectacle of the ruin brought by overgrazing, disasters caused by homesteading, the heartbreaking effects on men and land of attempts to speed the plough where the plough can bring only desolation in its train. Dangerous and far-reaching effects caused by upsetting the balance of nature are described and accounts of the destruction of valuable areas through the depredations of deer have an all too familiar ring. But the story is not all dark, "The idea of conservation has already received the impact of American idealism" and much fine work is being done.