

In spite of heavy drizzling rain 35 eager botanists boarded the bus at Auckland, and as it journeyed south the last straggler was picked up at Pokeno. Fortunately the weather improved a little, and our luncheon stop at Te Kuiti enabled us to stretch our legs and have a welcome meal. Although very much in the public eye this was none the less enjoyable, with the occasional drop of rain falling on us from the sodden trees of the Railway Reserve. By the time we reached Mt. Messenger the road was dry again. A short stop just through the tunnel gave us another break and enabled the keener members to find Gaultheria oppositifolia, Gnaphalium subrigidum and Gunnera strigosa growing in quantities on the cutting. Mangeao ( Litsea calicaris ) was also found; rather a surprise as we did not expect to see it so far south. Stratford Mountain House was reached at 6.15pm, and a warm welcome awaited us from Mr. and Mrs. Mace the proprietors. ( Two members who had come through by car were also there to meet us F.M.W. ) After a very much appreciated dinner and a chat round the fire in the lounge, most of the party were quite pleased to have an early night.

20 January dawned clear and sunny with the mountain well in view. At 9.30am we were all ready to set off with Mr. Atkinson, the chief ranger, as our guide. He pointed out the healthy growth of the sun-loving plants on the forest fringe, and told us this was a sure sign that the opossums were at present under control in the Park. We enjoyed a pleasant walk through the Kamahi Track. The kamahi ( Weinmannia racemosa ) was in full flower. These trees together with Fuchsia excorticata, form the main forest here and their shape and the festoons of moss which hang from their branches and trunks give the goblin forest effect for which Egmont is famed. Other trees noted were the thin barked totara ( Podocarpus hallii ), Kaikawaka ( Libocedrus bidwillii ) and the broadleaf ( Griselinia littoralis ), as well as our old familiar friends Aristotelia serrata, mahoe, rimu, rata, miro and Carpodetus serratus. Among the many filmy ferns Hymenophyllum pulcherrimum hung in lovely clusters everywhere, and a very large bank, completely covered with Blechnum patersonii, was something we had not seen in such profusion before. Some excitement was caused when the first vegetable caterpillar's small fruting stem was discovered, and after some careful digging several were unearthed. Returning from our walk we took the bus and drove up the mountain road to the plateau. Bushes of leatherwood ( Senecio elaeagnifolius ) in flower were plentiful, also Dracophyllum filifolium and under every shady bank was a miniature garden of Ourisia macrophylla. After lunch we followed the Curtis Track to a point looking down on the Mangonui Hut and gorge. Alpine plants covering the banks of our track included Ourisia, Coprosma pseudocuneata, Celmisia major var brevis, Celmisia glandulosa var latifolia, Wahlenbergia pygmaea, Euphrasia cuneata, Helichrysum prostratum, Geum, Viola, Forstera bidwillii and the orchid Pterostylis banksii var patens. Many bushes of Hebe odora were in flower here as well as Cassinia vauvilliersii and the now familiar Senecio elaeagnifolius. That evening Mr. Atkinson entertained us with many beautiful slides, views of the very interesting west face of the mountain,

showing lava slides from the last eruption 300 odd years ago; opossum and goat destruction in the area and attempts to combat this menace; pictures of the huts built for the rangers, building operations etc. with the materials flown in by helicopter; and lastly slides of local flowers and trees. After the ladies of the party had gone to bed, several gentlemen filled with enthusiasm for wild life went on a kiwi hunting expedition. However the kiwi is a wily bird - he believes in being heard but not seen - so the expedition was not successful, but the adventurers did assist the work of forest preservation by blinding a marauding opossum with their torches, and finishing it off with a knock on the head.

21 January was spent in New Plymouth. A short visit to the shopping centre first, then to Churchill Heights for the lovely view over the breakwater and surrounding city. On to Pukekura Park, where we lunched and spent the afternoon wandering at will through the beautiful grounds, the fern and Begonia houses, and the Brooklands Bowl, where an openair theatre operates in an ideal setting. On the way home we called at Burgess Park. This is a lovely old homestead and stretch of bush by the river Waiwakaiho. It was given to the citizens of New Plymouth by Mr. Burgess, a late mayor. A very pleasant bush track led up hill and then down to the riverbank. The main trees were tawa, kohekohe and very large rimu, with huge treeferns (Cyathea medullaris) near the river. One member found the orchid Gastrodia cunninghamii here. Again we had an evening's entertainment. This time Mr. Atkinson showed films of Hawaiian volcanoes; and interesting American-New Zealand expedition to Fiordland; and Fire Research operations.

A much colder night of heavy rain with frequent hailstorms did not deter us from setting out next morning for the plateau to walk to Dawson Falls. Mosses, lichens, alpine flowers and orchids lined our path and the photographers were busy, the huge waterfall hurtling down the mountainside receiving special attention. Ourisia, Euphrasia, Viola and Forstera covered the banks and groups of dainty Pterostylids reared their little hooded heads. We saw 3 species here - Pt. banksii var patens, Pt. irsoniana and Pt. humilis. As on the Curtis Track mountain tutu was growing in abundance. Polystichum silvaticum and one specimen of the much rarer P. cystostegia were also found here. As we neared Dawson Falls the beautiful red and brown colouring of the tree trunks kept the photographers busy again. Our bus and the not-so-strong folk were waiting for us at Dawson Falls. They were feeling a bit muddled, for on the way round from Stratford they passed a notice on the road at Mangatoke which read '4½ miles to Dawson Falls'. 2 miles further on another notice said 5 miles to Dawson Falls? Where did they linger by the way? After lunch our friend the Ranger arrived and took us round the Kapuni Track and up the Summit Track to see several large kanuka (Leptospermum ericoides) and a very large specimen of Pseudopanax edgerleyi. Further down the road we went into the taller forest on a carpet of Asplenium bulbiferum to see some huge rimu trees, with rata as large as themselves enfolding them. That evening we were again indebted to Mr. Atkinson for some very interesting slides of a trip he had made to the Poor Knights Islands.

Heavy rain was falling when we awoke on Saturday morning but by 10am it had cleared, so off we went to see what was interesting on the Curtis Falls Track. This was a beautiful walk through tall rain forest, the trees being totara, rimu, rata, kamahi and Fuchsia, with horopito, Neopanax colensoi, and toro, as well as many beautiful Cordyline indivisa, which last were a familiar sight on all the tracks. There were ferns in profusion, including many species of Hymenophyllum - multifidum, scabrum, ferrugineum, revolutum and pulcherrimum. We also found Leptolepia novae zelandiae and more of the orchid Gastrodia cunninghamii. That afternoon we visited a swamp about a mile below Stratford Mountain House. Here we saw much of interest among the flax and rushes. There was plenty of Drosera binata, the orchids Thelymitra venosa var cedricsmithii and Aporostylis bifolia, and several small kaikawaka (Libocedrus bidwillii). On the edge of the swamp Coprosma lucida and areolata were plentiful, and the hanging orchids Dendrobium cunninghamii and Earina mucronata. Here also was the small Libertia, pulchella, the kidney fern (Trichomanes reniforme) and a fine Astelia. On the other side of the road near a quarry, we wandered through a lovely patch of fairly open tall forest. The floor was covered with Asplenium bulbiferum, Blechnum discolor and Todea superba. Here was another large rimu wrapped in too close an embrace by a rata, the huge trunks of which, extending on either side, left room to pass underneath. Two ferns of interest were more fine Leptolepia novae zelandiae and the graceful filmy, Hymenophyllum bivalve. That evening, as it was Mrs. Moore's birthday, we gave her an autographed card designed by our artist John and signed by all present, just in remembrance of a happy day.

The weather was still not too kind to us on Sunday, being showery and cold, with intermittent bursts of sunshine. We left for North Egmont at 10am, our bus taking the beautiful winding bush road up to the Hotel. From here we walked through the lovely Ngatoro Track, its trees similar to those on the Stratford side of the mountain, its little streams and its glorious dell of ferns. The trees were festooned with filmies, clusters of pulcherrimum, trunks softly green with rarum, the ground and the fallen trunks covered with sanguinolentum, demissum, multifidum - mosses, lichens and liverworts - a real Fairy land. One member found here a small Jovellana in flower. After lunch most of the party walked up the Summit Track as far as the Tauhurangi Trig., and 3 reached the hut beyond Humphries Castle. It was a pleasant track, with high banks most of the way, following a razor ridge between deep gullies. We saw Gaultheria depressa with its bright pink berries, Pterostylis banksii var patens again, many Viola and a dear little Oxalis lactea. Here Blechnum capense looked rather peculiar, with no small pinnae, probably a mountain form. ( See Mrs. Wood's note earlier on E.D.H. ) There was much juvenile Carmichaelia egmontiana on the upper track, the orchid Chiloglottis cornuta, many Cotula, and slightly above the trig a spaniard, probably Aciphylla squarrosa. The view from the trig was delightful, with New Plymouth lying far below, the Pouakai Range in the near distance, and the most enchanting gullies running down the northwest slopes of the mountain.

On returning from the trig the bus took us down the road about 2 miles, where we had another scramble through the ferny undergrowth of the taller forest. Both ferns and trees here were similar to those on the Stratford side, but we did add Rumohra hispida and Blechnum membranaceum to our fern list, and noted Olea cunninghamii, Coprosma tenuicaulis, Olearia arborescens and Aseuosmia macrophylla. As this was our last evening, the chief Ranger made good his promise and brought along his wife, his sister, Mr. Turley, Commissioner of Crown Lands at New Plymouth, with his wife, to share with us more of his interesting films. We were particularly thrilled with one dealing with the life of ferrets and stoats in New Zealand, containing the most amazing shots of these animals at work and at play.

Early next morning we said a reluctant farewell to Stratford Mountain House and the Maces who had looked after us so well. The sun was shining but the mountain shrouded in cloud as we commenced our last journey down to the plains below. After a quick run up the coast we paused again on the summit of Mount Messenger to confirm our find of mangeao, and discovered 4 fine trees growing near the old road at the tunnel. A further stop in the Awakino gorge where there was more mangeao, and Hoheria sexstylosa showing a juvenile form. We stopped for lunch at the Mangaokewa scenic reserve on the banks of the Waitete stream, not far from Te Kuiti. Here 2 friendly goats invaded our bus while we were lunching under the trees, but they were kindly treated and photographed before they had time to eat any botanical specimens. And so we write finis to another very pleasant trip. Our grateful thanks go to the organiser of the trip, and especially to Mr. Atkinson, the Chief Ranger, who guided us around and entertained us so well. M.B.

Postscript. Perhaps owing to the stormy weather we did not see many birds in our wanderings. Tuis and riflemen were reported on the Moss Track coming down from the Stratford Plateau, and bellbirds and a pied tit were seen at Dawson Falls.

Remarks overheard - A botanist is an old bag with a little bag !!!

Senecio rufiglendulosus - Why dont they pull up that ragwort ??

