

July : KAREKARE Valley Slopes

Leader Mr.D.J.Mead

We are privileged to be one of the first parties over a new track cut by the Centennial Park Rangers along a ridge from the bottom of the Karekare Stream up to the main road. Before proceeding to this track we went up the stream a short distance to see an attractive little waterfall, seen by few people, and draped in bryophytes.

Most of the bush here was milled about a hundred years ago, with a mill at Karekare, and part was later farmed. Much is now in mature manuka around 20 feet high, with regeneration of various tree species coming in underneath in recent years. Geniostoma, Meliccytus macrophyllus, and Coprosma arborea are common. The odd pohutukawa/rata tree survives.

The West coast form of the M. al. Sophora microphylla var. fulvida with its very small leaflets was common, along with juvenile plants. Some trunks were 12" in diameter plus. A single specimen of Pinelea longifolia was reported, though had no flowers as yet.

Climbing up the first part of the track, aided by a rope on the steep and slippery first part, we left the more coastal species and ascended to a rock outcrop, over which members scrambled to list what occurred on it. There were several "epiphytes" on the rock surface, such as broadleaf, Astelia, and Lycopodium billardieri. Bulbophyllum pygmaeum was on the rock too, much as I saw another species of this distinctive genus in far-away Nigeria. Sarcocaulis was on the boughs of a tree, and some juvenile Arthropteris fern on a boulder. The bush here had a bare floor, and silver-fern and nikau were common.

Mr. Mead was particularly keen to show us the curious hybrid lance-woods which have come away in patches in the scrub, and which he described and illustrated in the last Newsletter. Some specimens had leaves more like those of a fig tree than a Pseudopanax. The track has now been named Horoeke Track after these. Such areas, where man has grossly disturbed the habitat in the past, frequently give rise to hybrids between species which were formerly apart in the natural bush, but are now thrown together in the greatly changed conditions, where they are free to hybridise, providing of course they flower at a similar period, and other conditions are right.

We continued to ascend through dense manuka, noting the occasional orchid by the rather dark track. Pterostylis trullifolia var. alobula was seen in flower, and the remains of Acacia thus forficatus var. sinclairii. Conditions here were not the best for orchids, but the opening of a new track could well improve things. Those who stick to the tracks often see the most orchids, so man-made tracks are often beneficial, creating more suitable conditions in increasing light and reducing competition.

A surprise packet was in store for people towards the end of the track, where a side-track had been put in to a rather unusual sight here. It was a lone kauri - not the fine upstanding type, but an unusual spreading bushy type with only a few feet of trunk, and very heavy limbs almost to the ground. It had no other trees round it and had spread out. Exposed to the westerlies, it had never made much height growth, the leader being damaged early in life. Whipping by scrub in youth can cause leader damage, and it is mainly for this reason that kauri on Great Barrier and Russell Forests is released from the scrub when young.

The passage through the different types of scrub and second growth made an interesting study in the recovery of the bush, and where animals are few there are encouraging signs that numerous tree species are coming back, dependent on the efficiency of their dispersal mechanisms. The fruit-eating birds now make their absence felt in many places.