

O U T I N G S

TAUMATA TRACK. ---- 21st September 1968 ---- Miss M. Crookes.

The weather might have been better when we visited a spur jutting out from the eastern slopes of the Waitakeres. Taumata means a hill with a beautiful view and it was a pity that a slight drizzle somewhat obscured the prospect from the 934' peak.

Our walk lead through secondary growth bush and after lunch we wandered over to the Hamilton block (another reserve) and poked in along its margin. As many of the species encountered are extremely common on the ranges and have been listed in previous accounts of Waitakere wanderings, discussion is confined to the more noteworthy ones. Pride of place must be given to that fascinating climber, Parsonsia capsularis, not so far as I am aware reported from elsewhere on the ranges, though its brother the kaihua, Parsonsia heterophylla, is so extremely common near the coast. The genus Parsonsia, containing about twelve species, belongs to the dogbane family, called after the dogbane, Apocynum venetum, which is supposed to be poisonous to dogs. The name was given to the whole large family Apocynaceae which includes 300 genera and 1400 species. The family includes many climbers such as the Allamandas and the Mandevillas and ornamental trees and shrubs such as the Oleanders (Nerium) and Frangipani (Plumeria), while in our walks we often meet the common trailing blue periwinkle (Vioca major) with its dark green leaves and attractive blue flowers.

The genus Parsonsia includes about forty species, both of ours being endemic. If you break the stem you will notice that both species have the milky juice characteristic of the family and during the juvenile stage are remarkable for the multiplicity of their leaf forms. After a somewhat hectic youth they settle down to rather glossy leaves, those of P.capsularis being longer and narrower. Unlike P.heterophylla, P.capsularis runs into a number of varieties: var. rosea and var. tenuis are both South Island plants with rose to red flowers; var. ochracea, which grows only south of latitude 39, has yellow flowers. This last variety, with its long attenuated leaves, flowers only in what appears to be a permanent juvenile form. Altogether a somewhat intricate species. The half has not been told, however. The two species hybridize - Allan speaks of x heterocapsa. The varieties do likewise. Altogether the complications as that penetrating psychologist Damon Runyon puts it, may be "more than somewhat".

As the track reached the saddle we were struck by the great numbers of that pleasant little shrub Melicope simplex. It has small rounded glossy leaves dotted with glands, though the "spotting point" is the winged leaf stalk. The species was energetically producing large numbers of small white flowers, but as these appear along the stem they lack the charm of the terminal

clusters of its aromatic cousin the mairehau, Phebalium nudum. There are only about fourteen species in the genus. New Zealand has two, Melicope simplex and the wharanga, Melicope ternata. Originally a third species was listed - Melicope mantelli - but it later transpired that the 'species' arose from the inveterate habit so many of our plants have of hybridizing. Mantelli has the three-leaved foliage of ternata and the small leaves of simplex, which confines its three-leaved habit to its early youth.

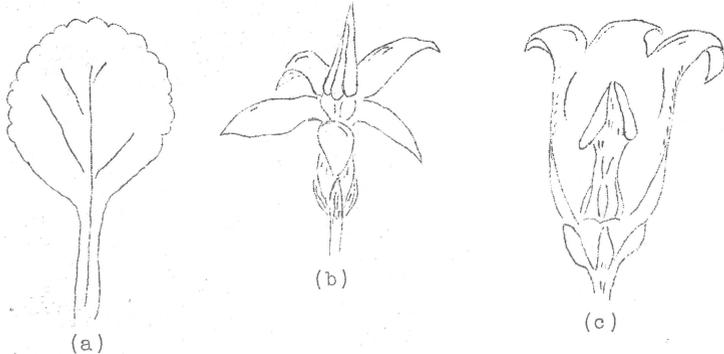
Lunch was taken in a pleasant spot where bush merged into erstwhile farm. Clematis and kowhai were in full flower, and the latter tuneful with eager tuis. Lunch over, a brief talk was given on surrounding species noted in the varied secondary growth. The two species of small white rata grew side by side so we could distinguish at once the rather spreading drooping habit of the branches of Metrosideros diffusa from the stiff upward growing ones of Metrosideros perforata. Of particular interest was a fine specimen of a perching Pittosporum, P. cornifolium, found growing conveniently near the ground. During the afternoon we wandered over to the Hamilton block, an adjacent reserve and browsed about on its outskirts. We were delighted by a particularly fine specimen of our native leather fern, Rumohra adiantiformis festooning a fallen log with its large triangular fronds. We also saw a large mass of the delicate little filmy fern, Mecodium rarum. This Mecodium is by no means uncommon, yet one may often go into the bush without seeing it. Our dainty native iris grows freely on the slopes of the spur, but the approach was much overgrown.

The bush in general showed typical species of the upper Waitakere secondary growth. Mrs. Hynes, with her customary zeal, made a careful species list of what we noted and was kind enough to send me a copy. It included over a hundred flowering plants, ferns and fern allies and a few more might be added by others browsing in different spots. Surprisingly, only five orchids were seen, Pterostylis banksii, P. graminea, the tiny Bulbophyllum pygmaeum, Earina mucronata and a particularly fine specimen of E. autumnalis. Among naturalised plants the mist flower, Eupatorium riparium, was noticeable in sunny places with its masses of small white flowers. The purpletop, Verbena bonariensis, was seen and also, in one open spot, a fine clump of the ferocious but not unattractive milk-thistle

(Silybum marinum), and also we noted the inevitable Himalayan honeysuckle (Leycesteria formosa), a small shrub about six feet high, so often encountered along our roadsides through the bush.

The Taumata track and its surroundings were new ground to our Society. The area has only recently been acquired by the Regional Authority, which obtained it as a result of the generosity of Mrs. Godley, who gave the peak and the surrounding cleared country to form a truly magnificent memorial to her first husband Dr. Pope and her second husband Mr. Godley. The Society records its appreciation of this most splendid gift.

The excursion was lead and organised by Mr. Mead to whom we are most indebted for a rewarding day.



- (a) Melicope simplex - note winged petiole. (Juvenile leaf is trifoliolate)
 (b) Parsonsia heterophylla - note protruding stamens
 (c) Parsonsia capsularis - dissected flower - note stamens enclosed in tube.

(b) & (c) adapted from N.M.Adams as fresh material was not available