

At the March outing Mr. A.D.Mead, with his customary good leadership, took us down the Mercer Bay Track. This starts at the Piha end, where a well-graded path leads off the ridge site of the old war-time radar station and from there it winds down to follow the coastline around Mercer Bay, then joining up with the Comans Track which ends at Karekare.

We passed through the usual coastal vegetation, low growing where exposed to the westerly winds but taller in sheltered pockets. With a few exceptions the flowering period was over or on the wane. The following contains a few comments on some of the plants seen.

Pimelea longifolia, the N.Z. Daphne, one of our most beautiful shrubs, had finished flowering as had its relative P. prostrata, a low sprawling plant which produces masses of white flowers at the tips of its twiggy, interlacing branches. Cassinia retorta, tauhinu, the coastal cottonwood, with its small grey-green leaves and clusters of flowers was now past its best. These shrubs are part of the coastal scene as is the rengarenga lily, Arthropodium cirrhatum, large clumps of which dot the steep rock faces of Mercer's Bay. Another member of the lily family, Dianella intermedia, turuturu, which earlier had proudly displayed its striking panicle of bright blue berries, was now old and sear. In the spring a few flowers of our native flax, Linum monogynum, are to be seen on the cliffs. Unfortunately this plant seems to be vanishing from the Auckland scene.

Metrosideros fulgens, the orange rata, was in flower, in fact it has been a particularly good flowering season for this species. We were too late to see the pretty white flowers of Myosotis petiolata var. pansa, a member of the Boraginaceae family which shows a preference for rock faces around that area.

Mentha cunninghamii was abundant alongside the track. This is a small herb of the mint family and although it is distributed throughout New Zealand it is often overlooked and unknown probably because its usual habitat is a grassy sward. The small green leaves, only 10-12 mm. long, are usually opposite, with two small white flowers in the axils. We saw the pretty lavender coloured flowers of Hebe obtusata, found only from Manukau Heads to Muriwai. This also has a sprawling habit and is easily recognised by the broad and obtuse leaves which have a fringe of hairs around the margins. Another local plant to be found here is the west coast kowhai, Sophora microphylla var. fulvida, which, as its name implies, is a very hairy variety of that species. The tiny daisy, Lagenophora pumila, with the long Maori name of papataniwhaniwha, has its own special place on dry banks where it often grows in small colonies. Agrostis fulva, the maidenhair with the scabrid stipe, was quite common showing its tolerance of the hard westerly conditions.

On reaching the Comans Track we climbed to a high point and lunched on an open grassy place overlooking the sea. From there we continued down the track, where, sheltered by the high rocky cliffs a different vegetation has emerged. Here are many of the coastal trees, pohutukawa, tawapou, Melicope, nikau etc. Time did not allow us to study

the undercover which included some interesting divaricating shrubs such as Lophomyrtus obcordata, Neomyrtus pedunculata, Corokia cotoneaster and others. The ground cover comprised a good variety of native herbaceous plants. Amongst them were Angelica rosaefolia, Tetragonia trigyna, our native spinach and Parietaria debilis, a lax growing herb belonging to the nettle family and seldom recognised as a native. Maybe it is passed by as a poor little 'Ginderella' unworthy of notice because it lacks any attractive features. Gnaphalium collinum, a native cudweed, white and cottony all over, has a stoloniferous habit of propagation which is helpful in the identification of this species.

The ferns, especially Pteris comans and P. macilenta var. saxatilis were quite common. The Aspleniums were well represented and of special interest were A. hookerianum and the coastal form of A. flaccidum.

A good leader, good weather and an interesting route made this a most successful outing.

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POHUEHUE

18th April

Miss M. Crookes.

In giving some account of our excursion, I felt it best to avoid a fairly long list of the species which we commonly encounter on our regular visits to the Waitakeres and confine myself to discussing species not often met.

A very common tree in the Pohuehue valley was the towai, Weinmannia silvicola, rare on the Waitakeres though common in suitable places on the North Shore. So far it has only been noted on our ranges in the vicinity of the Scenic Drive, not far from the West Coast turnoff. There is also a good collection of towais on the ridge at the back of Redwood Park.

New Zealand has two species of Weinmannia, W. silvicola and the kamahi, W. racemosa, well known to discriminating honey eaters. In addition the towai has a distinct variety, W. silvicola var. betulina. The towai is essentially a northern species, being found from lat. 35-38 degrees; that is as far north as Mangonui and as far south as Opetiki. The kamahi, on the other hand, is much more widely spread ranging from Te Aroha south to Stewart Island. It flourishes in a great number of different situations, indeed, as P. Wardle an authority on the species remarks, "W. racemosa may be the most abundant New Zealand tree."

How do we distinguish between kamahi, towai and var. betulina (birchlike)? An important question for they may be much alike and easily confused. First note that the twigs of kamahi are light grey and quite smooth, while those of towai are brown to dark grey and finely hairy (pubescent). In kamahi the adult leaves are simple, glossy and their veins are not raised above the upper leaf surface. Towai on the