

MINNIESDALE, 19th. FEBRUARY.

Miss. D.C. BAGNALL.

Once again we had wonderful weather for our all-day trip in February. These trips are often more a picnic than a serious botanical study; this one proved to be an interesting historical outing.

Our coach left at 9 a.m. and travelled across the Harbour Bridge to the North Shore, where the "Shorites" joined the party. Our first stop was at Waiwera, where we were able to spend an hour as we wished - swimming at the beach or in the warm pool, exploring the area as far as the Caravan Park where one can rent a site for six months for \$200, or simply having morning tea in the local tea-rooms - a very pleasant hour whatever we did.

At 11 a.m. we continued on our way to Port Albert and from there to Minniesdale, getting lost a couple of times but in the process seeing some beautiful scenery. We were welcomed to the really delightful and very well-kept 100 year-old home by Mr. and Mrs. Blackler, the owners. They showed our large group real country hospitality, allowing us to have our picnic lunch on their most attractive lawn, from where we could look out across to the Kaipara Harbour - a lovely view - and then showing us through the various rooms of their home.

This house, built over a century ago, with its dormer windows and beautiful gardens, is in an excellent state of preservation and is well cared for. The furniture is in character, as are the pictures on the walls, and we were very privileged to be able to see through what is, after all, someone's private home. Our grateful thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Blackler for their kindness to us.

Mr. Blackler then accompanied us to Minniesdale Chapel, the historic chapel originally brought to New Zealand from England in 1867 for Rev. Edwin Stanley Brookes and re-assembled where it stands to-day. It is still in use, a wedding having been solemnized there very recently. A very interesting half-hour was spent there, hearing a talk by Mrs. Layther, studying the building and also exploring the graveyard, where we found the graves of many of the early settlers of the district.

The final part of the day was botanical, a walk through part of Mr. Blackler's bush. He has 300 acres of which 250 acres are in grass and the rest is lovely native bush, with a good variety of plants. There were fine samples of lancewood, totara, puriri, taraire, karaka and kauri. Some of the Coprosmas noted were arborea, spatulata, areolata and rhamnoides, and as well we saw Melicytus micranthus and numerous ponga ferns and tall nikau. It was beautiful in the bush on such a day, the sight of fantails keeping us company, the songs of bell-birds and grey warblers, and the hum of cicadas added to the joy of the day. Further on we came to kahikatea, mature lancewood, manuka, tall rimus, kowhais and straight totaras. Here we came across some delicate Clematis parviflora, a plant that was new to some of us. Other plants noted were patete, filmy ferns, putaputaweta, which looked particularly attractive, being a bronzy colour against the sun. Coming out of the bush, we again had beautiful views of the countryside and harbour.

Farewelling our friends, the Blacklers, we returned home the way we had come, with a stop at Orewa for tea. This will be remembered as one of our "special" days, with its glorious views, its dip into the past and its exploration of places new to us.

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MT. KOHUKOHUNUI - 18th. MARCH.

A.D. PALMER.

An uneventful journey brought us to the Mounoukaia Hill Rd., which climbs steadily up through farming land interspersed with bush remnants, regrowth of scrub and scattered pines. At the entrance to the Hunua catchment area we were met by Mr. Dakin, one of our country members, who works at the forest nursery in the Hunua and who was to lead the party which went to the top of Kohukohunui.

We took Plow's Rd. which passes at first through plantings of several different species of exotic conifers. Towards the end, however, we were passing through fairly dense mixed native bush with an interesting amount of the handsome ramarama, Lophomyrtus bullata. We arrived at the entrance to the track and split up into two groups, 21 of us optimistic enough to think that we could reach the top in the limited time available.

The forest we passed through was rather thin in many places, with a lot of the understorey destroyed, much of the damage having been done by goats. These are now intensively shot, although some still remain and one was seen by some of the party. At the turn of the century they were said to be so numerous that it was almost a question of clearing a track through the goats, rather than the bush!

At one point along the track we stopped by two large uprooted tawas and Mr. Dakin told us that the whole forest was in an unstable state. The large old rimus are all dying, thus exposing the tawa to wind which causes them to die back. The tawa is shallow rooted and is further affected by the removal of much of the understorey by animals, and the consequent raising of the water table. Just why the rimu are dying is not fully understood. It could be due to climatic factors, or it may just be that they are reaching the end of their natural life span. There is very little regeneration of rimu. It may well be that the area will revert to a cover of mixed scrub hardwoods, before a balance is regained and timber trees start to make a re-appearance.

One notable feature was the abundance of Cyathea smithii, more particularly from about 1500' upwards. It is easily recognised by the soft, light brown scales which densely clothe the base of the stipes. It is not of course a rare tree fern, but I don't think I have ever seen it in greater numbers before.

At around 2000' we saw the first Gleichenia cunninghamii, in quite an extensive patch, also one or two quite large specimens of