

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.

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

Dracophyllum latifolium, several Hebe macrocarpa and Griselinia littoralis which occurs in the higher parts of the forest. Griselinia lucida is also found in the Hunuas, but is confined to the lowland areas.

The rarest plant we saw was, of course, the single specimen of Senecio myrianthos, protected by a wire fence from the goats who seem to be rather partial to it. It is the only plant to have been found so far in the Hunuas and does not appear to be reproducing itself, as an intensive search of the surrounding area has failed to reveal any seedlings. Why a lone specimen should exist in this way is really a matter for pure speculation. It could perhaps be the sole survivor of a larger group that has been decimated by goats. Alternatively, seed may have been blown or brought in some way from the Coromandel Peninsula, although it is worth bearing in mind that the Hunuas plant differs somewhat from those found on Coromandel. An interesting problem, unlikely to be resolved!

Ascarina lucida was another plant we are not used to seeing very often. An attractive shrub or small tree, occurring here near the summit only, but in some quantity.

The view from the summit across the Firth of Thames was good and on a clearer day would have been magnificent. All the land we looked down on had been worked over and partially cleared with a view to farming, but after it had been scratched around on for some years it was finally given up as a bad job and allowed to revert.

Many interesting ferns were found during the day, including Blechnum nigrum which is normally found in high, damp places, often where a watercourse is beginning.

For me one of the most interesting things to emerge on the trip was that pointed out to us by Mr. Dakin, namely the small hooks or spines occurring along the mid-rib and in the sinuses of the juvenile leaves (upper surface) of Pseudopanax edgerleyi. This fact is not mentioned in any flora to my knowledge, and when I wrote to Dr. Lucy Moore recently I asked for her comments. Here is the relevant portion of her reply:

"Mr. Barton of Hunua had drawn our attention to the spines on the mid-rib a couple of years ago, and they can be well seen in a few, but only in a few of our herbarium specimens. The much smaller projections in the sinuses of lobed young leaves seem to be much more generally present, and I see an occasional one on a margin where a vein ends. The sharp teeth at the end of the vein terminating each lobe are much more easily seen. Those on the mid-ribs seem to be mostly at or near to the origin of lateral veins, and it is tempting to think there may be some functional connection between these structures and the veins."

Perhaps other members would like to comment and keep a look-out for this particular feature.

In conclusion, our thanks are due to Mr. Dakin for his able and interesting leadership of a most enjoyable trip.