

Paeroa brought us back to Mangere and Shears Coachlines bus for our short trip to the city and home.

FEBRUARY 1973.

WAIKATO HEADS.

Miss E.M. DAVIS.

It was a bright sunny morning when we set out for the Waikato Heads. The countryside showed evidence of the dry weather of the past few months, the fields in particular looking very parched. At Papakura we made a detour to Red Hill to visit Puketikikiwi Pa, an old Maori stronghold. We walked through the bush reserve and up the steep winding track leading to the summit. Conspicuous amongst the trees and shrubs were some very old, gnarled, puriris. From the comparatively flat extensive surface at the top there is a commanding view of the surrounding country. This with the steep approaches, one side almost a perpendicular rock face, provides ample evidence of the care with which the site was chosen long years ago to serve its purpose as a look-out, a defence post and a refuge against hostile invaders.

We continued on our way to Alexandra Redoubt, once again a carefully selected site on the right bank of the Waikato River, a short distance from the present Tuakau Bridge. In those days of July 1863 it was garrisoned by British troops of the 65th. Regiment with the intention of protecting General Camerons right flank, and ensuring the safe passage of the river steamships carrying the supplies essential for his Waikato campaign. The headstones in the small cemetery record amongst others the names of soldiers who lost their lives in action at this time. From the Redoubt there is an extensive view over the river and its environs. How different that view is today from what it must have been one hundred years ago.

It was in the shade of the trees in the reserve here that we had lunch. The bush is very similar to that at Red Hill. There are some very fine specimens of Leptospermum ericoides (kanuka) and, in addition, Dacrydium cupressinum (rimu), Podocarpus ferrugineus (miro), P. totara, Phyllocladus trichomanoides (tanekaha), Pseudopanax crassifolium (lancewood) in all stages of growth, Knightia excelsa (rewarewa), Litsea calicularis (mangeao), Myrsine australis (matipo), Coprosma lucida, C. spathulata, C. areolata, C. arborea, Brachyglottis repanda (rangiora) and a flourishing growth of seedlings which provides evidence of regeneration in the area.

After a short stay we went on to the Waikato Heads, passing by cultivated river flats, areas of swamp with stands of raupo and, near the coast, salt mud flats with their flourishing groves of mangroves, at that stage of tide almost covered by the sea. It was at the Heads that the Reverend Maunsell had his mission station. Except for the site nothing is left of this now but, in the years 1840-50, it was a

flourishing mission school which was finally transferred to Koha nga, 12 miles up the river where, with the increased area of flat arable land, it continued to prosper until the outbreak of the Maori Wars in 1863, when it was abandoned. An early description of the Waikato Heads in the eighteen-thirties tells us that "it was a popular summer resort for Maoris living in the watershed of the Waikato and its tributaries, but had few permanent residents. At times the broad Maoro Bay (north of the river mouth) was thick with duck in the spring, the run of whitebait was phenomenal - likewise pigeons and kakas."

The beach was in full sunshine when we arrived, a fine surf running and a pleasant westerly breeze blowing. We found much to interest us - rock pools, a variety of seaweeds, green, brown and red, and back on the sand dunes the familiar sand binders, Desmoschoenus spiralis (pingao) and Spinifex hirsutus with the introduced Legurus ovatus. In the gullies behind the cliffs the windswept characteristic bush of the west coast is obvious and, on the steep cliffs and headlands above the beach, Cortaderia splendens (toetoe) was flowering in profusion amidst the clumps of flax (Phormium cookianum) which are so much a part of this coastal flora.

The South Head is a happy hunting ground for fossils, and Mr. Beever discovered here a small cigar shaped structure about 3 inches long in a rocky shingle outcrop near the beach - a belemnite. These are strange lanceolated relics of ancient geological times. They are fossilised remains of ancient cephalopods, which are the forerunners of the squids and cuttlefish of today.

We had tea and began our homeward journey just in time to avoid a heavy shower of rain. The places we visited during the day are rich in historical associations and this, combined with lovely weather and pleasant surroundings, provided us with a most interesting and enjoyable trip. We have to thank Mr. Warren, whose careful planning made it possible.

CORYBAS ORBICULATUS IN THE WAITAKERES

E.D.H.

The 1972 edition of Mr. Mead's excellent little book on the native flora of the Waitakere Range omits the orchid Corybas orbiculatus (Colenso) L.B.Moore.

This was listed in the 1969 edition as Corybas macranthus var. longipetalus. It occurs on the upper reaches of the larger streams where it hugs wet banks in dense colonies. I have myself found it on the Cascades, Nihotupu and Karamatura streams, and unexpectedly on a seepage area on the exposed sea cliff at Kaitarakihī.

Hooker's species the true macranthus also occurs, but less frequently and on drier ground. For purposes of recognition orbiculatus