

MOEHAU

J.M. PALMER

On the afternoon of Friday, 9th. November, 1973, four of us set off from Auckland in our car for Hunua to meet up with the rest of the party going to Coromandel for the weekend. We were completely laden down with the four of us, our packs and all the food for 15 people. I lived in terror of a sudden stop in case the 4 dozen eggs that I was carrying on my knees became scrambled!

We met up with most of the others at Andrew Dakins and after a re-distribution of luggage, food etc. set off for Port Charles. We stopped at Thames for tea and discovered that it was the town's centenary celebrations. Many of the shop assistants and some shoppers were dressed in period costume. As it was Friday night and very busy we were somewhat delayed and did not arrive at Port Charles until about 10 p.m.

Ten of us slept in Brian McClure's bach (he was to lead us up Moehau on Saturday) and five in a neighbouring one. I knew we were to make an early start, but was surprised to hear movement at 4.30 a.m. and the smell of bacon cooking at 4.45 a.m. We had breakfast in shifts and were away just before six, having made the lunches the night before. It was a fine, sunny morning and by six o'clock we had begun our climb. One of the worst parts was the beginning when we toiled up over paddocks in the blazing sun - it was already hot and there were doubts about our getting half way up, let alone to the summit. Alan Esler had kindly given us a list that he had made on two previous visits to Moehau and they were of great assistance to us - we used it as a check list and crossed plants off as we saw them. I don't propose to give another list of the plants we saw, but would like to mention one or two that were especially interesting and also any additions to Alan's list.

One plant which impressed me very much and which I had not seen before was Metrosideros albiflora. It is a showy plant, easily recognisable by its large, thick, leathery leaves and conspicuous panicles of white flowers. It is found up to an altitude of 2,800 ft. in forests from Manganui to the Bay of Plenty. Because we felt that it would make an excellent garden plant we took several cuttings. Some of these have since rooted but they seem to be extremely slow in making any new growth. We may yet discover a good reason for its apparent neglect.

We saw plenty of Corokia buddleioides above 2000 ft., covered in flowers, the plants appearing much more dense and compact in habit than usual.

At one point the bush opened out onto a plateau-like area where we found Drosera auriculata and some plants of Schizaea fistulosa, growing near some magnificent specimens of Dracophyllum pyramidale bearing their large terminal flower buds.

Climbing onwards through a very boggy area with plenty of Metrosideros albiflora, we came to a stream and those who had gone on ahead had the billy boiling for a welcome drink by the time some of us slower ones had arrived. We ate our lunch and after a short break began the steep ascent to the summit. We had to negotiate a steep, unstable scree area on which we noted two plants not mentioned on Alan's list - Lobelia anceps and Gaultheria antipoda? Having done this it was but a scramble up a very muddy and slippery 'chimney' to the summit. We were fortunate that the weather had been dry for some time, otherwise this part of the climb would have been very tricky.

From the summit we had a breathtaking view of the Hauraki Gulf, although it was a bit too hazy for decent photographs. After getting our breath back we began to look closely at the plants that were one of the main reasons for the trip. How exciting it was to see the sheets of Celmisia incana in flower in so unexpected a place. The summit of Mt. Moehau is, of course, the northernmost part of New Zealand where such alpine plants may be found, and it is interesting that it is so isolated from the other alpine areas of the central North Island. We also saw Ourisia colensoi and Drapetes dieffenbachii flowering, the latter looking at first glance a bit like a small whipcord Hebe, Viola filicaulis, Pentachondra pumila and Clearea furfuracea.

Lloyd Esler climbed down to an area of rocks and boulders on the other side of the summit and found a couple of the little native frogs, Leiopelma archeyi, to show us. They are very small, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ "- $1\frac{3}{4}$ " long and one was dark brown in colour,

After about an hour at the summit we started to make our way down to rejoin those who did not get to the top. After recounting what we had seen we continued downwards, noting signs that wild pigs had been in the area between our ascent and descent. I haven't mentioned any orchids yet - one we did see which was new to many of us was the delicate little pink Caladenia carnea growing on the floor under light bush. Others were Corybas rivularis in some quantity on an old moss-covered stump, Dendrobium cunninghamii, Drymoanthus adversus, Earina autumnalis and E. mucronata. Other plants we saw during the day which were not on Alan Esler's list were Thelymitra sp. near the trig, Parsonsia capsularis, Lindsaea trichomanoides and Gnaphalium trinerve? The highest kauri we saw was at approximately 2,350 feet in the boggy area on the plateau.

We reached the bottom of the paddocks just before six o'clock and I was glad to walk through the ice cold streams and cool my weary feet before reaching the cars. A couple of the party who unwittingly lent against an electrified fence for a rest were seen to move faster than they have done for a very long time, even though they were exhausted.

We stopped to speak to the farmer across whose land we had walked, to let him know that we were all down safely. It had been twelve hours climbing but worth every minute of it. Somehow we all managed to fit in a welcome shower before tea and after a combined effort,

with the washing up done, we all sat round the table to look at the specimens we had brought back and to argue about identification. It was unanimously agreed that it had been a worthwhile trip and that we ought to have a few more like it.

Sunday, by comparison, was a bit of an anticlimax. The weather was overcast and Mt. Moehau was shrouded in mist, so we were fortunate indeed that we had had perfect weather on Saturday. In the morning we split up into different groups, one going to see a gully of king ferns. Another group went to see a neighbouring farmer who wanted our advice on some orchids. Mr Bedford, who is most knowledgeable on the subject of orchids, was unfortunately not with us as he had trouble with his car and had remained behind to put it right. The property adjoined the shore, so after a look around the garden we had a walk along the beach, returning along the top of the cliff. Growing under the old tea tree were several specimens of Pteris macilenta.

We were first to arrive back at the bach, so we prepared the lunch in time for the king fern group on their return. After lunch there was a grand clear-up, and after sweeping out the bach we finally left for home at about 2 p.m.

We must record here our grateful thanks to Mr Brian McClure and his friend for the use of their baches, and Mr McClure for guiding us up the mountain - without his help the trip would have been virtually impossible.

Articles submitted for publication in the next issue of the Newsletter should reach me not later than the first week in October. They may be either handwritten or typed, but any illustrations should be drawn in Indian ink or Xerox copied, the same size as required in print.

Editor.