

TO MT. HIKURANGI - DECEMBER 1974

M. HEGINBOTHAM

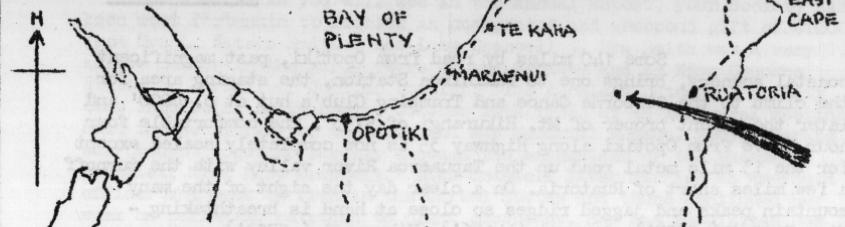
Some 140 miles by road from Opotiki, past magnificent coastal scenery, brings one to Pakihiroa Station, the staging area for the climb to the Gisborne Canoe and Tramping Club's hut at c. 4000' and later the ascent proper of Mt. Hikurangi of 5753'. The comfortable four hour drive from Opotiki along Highway 35 is now completely sealed except for the 13 mile metal road up the Tapuaeroa River valley with the turnoff a few miles short of Ruatoria. On a clear day the sight of the many mountain peaks and jagged ridges so close at hand is breathtaking - Mts. Taitai (2227'), Aorangi (4186'), Hikurangi (5753'), Wharekia (3325') and Honokawa (4678'). Some 7 miles to the north of Pakihiroa Station is Mt. Raukumara (4638') and several adjacent peaks which incidentally can be seen from Opotiki in clear weather. Though Mt. Hikurangi is about 13 miles west of Ruatoria, it is only about 28 miles east of Maraenui, near the Motu River mouth and some 25 miles from Opotiki.

The objects of my trip here, with two companions, were several. I had visited the area twice before - once in 1954 with Mr Norman Potts and again in February 1972 with friends from Auckland. This time I wished to experience again the grandeur and thrill of the mountain scenery and its alpine flora; to collect some of the indigenous plant species for the Hukutaia Domain and lastly to observe any changes in the surrounding environment since my last visit. I had heard that this area and much of the intervening forest area to Opotiki would sometime soon become a State Forest Reserve, with a walking track probably linking Ruatoria and Opotiki via Teatoa, the Mangatane Stream, across the Motu River and along the Mangatutara Stream to the Pakihiroa Station area. One had also heard of the damage done by deer, wild cattle, pigs, opossums and hares. Goats had so far not crossed the Motu River to the west.

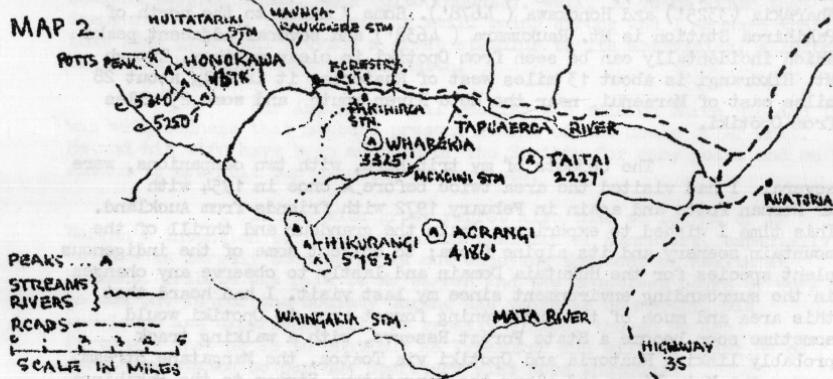
In fairness to readers I should point out that I am strictly an amateur - an amateur enthusiast interested in the New Zealand flora and ecology, yet not possessing full and comprehensive knowledge of botany etc. I imagine I could have many friends of similar capacity. However, I had done some 'homework' and also possessed a copy of the list of the indigenous vascular plants of this area prepared by Mr A.P. Druce, Botany Division, D.S.I.R., Taita, and to whom I am indebted. This list proved invaluable in recognising and correctly identifying many plant species. I have now regrettfully concluded that I failed to keep adequate records of plant species at various altitude levels - I intended to rely on memory but now realize this is insufficient for factual notes. I trust members may learn from my mistakes, and that the following narrative of the journey will be of some interest.

Not long after visiting the Station manager and parking the car near the helicopter pad above the house, it soon became apparent that a good many changes had taken place since 1972. Our vantage point read at 1250' - about 650' above the 'flats' below. Also below, across the Tapuaeroa River, were the N.Z. Forest Service Rip Station Camp and Gate Station. To the north, ascending a steep hill towards Mt. Ahipura was a winding Forestry road to about 3000 ft. Looking west towards the left of Mt. Honokawa, between the Huitatariki and Maungaraukore

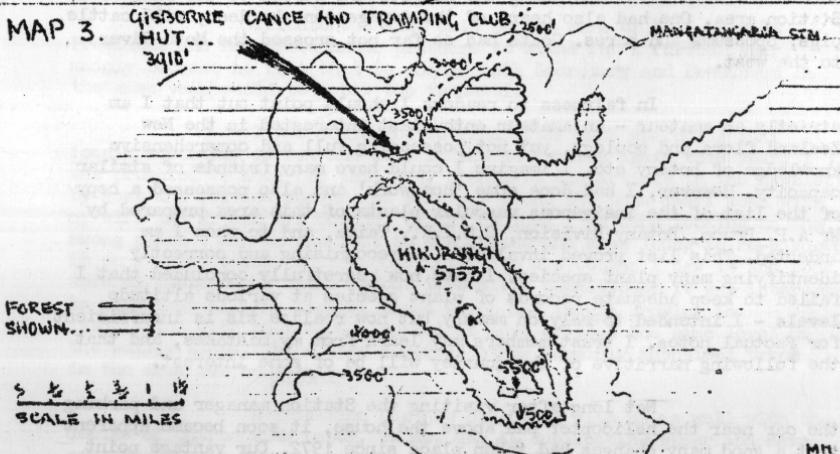
MT. HIKURANGI LOCATION MAP. 1.



MAP 2.



MAP 3. GISBORNE CANOE AND TRAMPING CLUB HUT...



Streams, were roads going several miles westward and rising to some 2000 ft. or more. Pine planting was evident in most areas in different stages of growth - a vast forest to be, as I understand now that 5000 acres are planted annually here. In the foothill approaches to Mt. Honokawa itself another forestry road wound its way up the eastern flank to an estimated 1600 ft. The whole area visible looked green in spite of the dry season and the noticeable scarcity of water, or absence of it even, in the river and streams coming up the valley. The results of dry seasons in the past few years were to become evident also at higher altitudes.

We started off from the car about 1.30 p.m., gradually climbing along a fairly new bulldozed landrover track with pasture, sheep and cattle to either side. At 1800' came the first 'yards' gate with Pratia angulata in flower on the adjacent banks. It continued on for some distance. At 2150' we came to 'pack-horse' gate in the fence with plentiful clumps of the common rush, Juncus greiflorus, in the nearby paddocks. At 2500' came the 'top yards and dip', with 'half way flat' and the end of the bulldozed road at 2650'. Here the small daisy, Lagenophora pumila was noticeable. Noticeable also was another bulldozed station road winding down the gully to our right and heading west over the ridge, above the river below Honokawa. This was new. Some 200' above where I stood was a Trig point, more or less at the junction of the track leading over to Mt. Wharekia about two miles away and which seemed to dominate Pakihiroa headquarters area and even our immediate area. Its jagged rocky outline and sheer sides were majestic.

From now on the path followed along narrow animal tracks, still in open pasture land which was now liberally dotted with old, burnt out stumps and logs, mainly beech, which were a relic of the cutting, burning, clearing and grassing many years before. At 3100', after a steep climb along a fence line, I came upon that attractive daisy Helichrysum sp. (unnamed - aff. H. bellidicoides). The silvery grey leaves of this plant are wider than the usual species. Here too were orchids of the Thelymitra sp. together with abundant clumps of prickly shield fern, Polystichum vestitum, and on my left Pseudowintera colorata. It seemed as though I had crossed from montane into sub-alpine vegetation. I was now almost at the 'bush line' and at 3200'-3300' came upon the first Coprosmas - C. rugosa and C. sp. (unnamed - incl. in C. parviflora), Gaultheria antipoda, Nertera depressa, the colourful eyebright Euphrasia cuneata and one or two sedges. At 3400' I was bordering the forest on my left while over to the west on my right the gullies and ridges were clothed in shrubs and trees. The track continued to climb up the ridge, past numerous logs and stumps, through shield fern and the dominant shrub Coprosma rugosa, abundant everywhere. At 3800' I saw the first speargrass, Aciphylla squarrosa var. and also Cordyline indivisa on the forest outskirts. It was with some relief that I came upon the Hikurangi Hut shortly afterwards at 3910' as a heavy pack and the 'thinner' air were starting to take their toll after the five mile hike which had taken almost 4 hours.

A working party of twelve Club members were in residence, however our party of three were invited to make full use of all facilities provided. From the immediate area of the orange coloured hut the views were superb, for with clear fine weather and daylight saving in force each vista presented itself with remarkable clarity. It was not long before I felt the urge to explore the area behind the hut and the 600' slip there and to renew acquaintance with the various plants I'd seen there over two years before. Between the hut and the rock debris of

the slip base were shield fern, several rushes and sedges, including Carex sp. (c.f. C. germinata), the usual Coprosmas and a clump of silver beech, Nothofagus menziesii, also Myrsine divaricata. Beyond this area were the two tutus - the feathery Coriaria plumosa with lateral inflorescences midway up the plant, and the reddish tinged Coriaria pottsiana with terminal racemes. C. pottsiana is endemic to this area. It was soon apparent that the 'free flowing' rock debris of the slip, well remembered on the 1954 and 1972 trips, was almost non-existent as grasses (mainly sweet vernal), weeds and tutu virtually covered three quarters of the slip face. Several clumps of shrubs in the central area had 'thickened' while shrub and forest borders appeared to be encroaching inwards. It would seem that this noteworthy area would be recovered with second growth completely within several years.

Plants encountered here included Craspedia uniflora var., Aciphylla squarrosa var., the well known daisy Celmisia spectabilis, Phormium cookianum, mountain holly Olearia ilicifolia, Fuchsia excorticata, Senecio rufiglandulosus var. rufiglandulosus and the small nettle Urtica incisa. Among the beeches on the west side of the 'slip', nettles almost covered the forest floor whereas filmy and other ferns or seedlings were very scarce. Animals and the dry seasons had taken their toll. The colourful Epilobiums of the February, 1972 trip, E. chlorifolium and E. glabellum, abundant on the eastern slip side also appeared to be absent.

The path from the hut to the summit of Mt. Hikurangi goes up the 'slip' to 4520', then through about two hundred yards of bush on to a tussock plateau varying between 4700' - 4850' approximately. From this area one usually climbs the north western slopes of the mountain, through low shrubs, tussock and speargrass to the rocky faces and outcrops approaching the topmost ridges. I had learned a little of the geology of the area and it seemed that the rocks belonged to the Cretaceous period (c. 125 - 150 million years ago) and consisted of mudstone, sandstone, argillite and other sedimentary rocks. The lower Cretaceous rocks are called the Taitai series while the upper Cretaceous is of the Raukumara, Mata and Clarence series. Mt. Hikurangi rocks (also Mts. Aorangi and Taitai) are of the Taitai series which consists of hard sandstone and volcanic conglomerate. The soil of the area seems to be of the yellow-brown variety.

Next morning fairly early I started out. Visibility was reasonable though mist enclosed the higher altitudes until midday when it cleared completely. At the beginning of the bush area above the 'slip' were the usual plants of this altitude - Olearia colensoi var. colensoi, Olearia arborescens, Senecio elaeagnifolius var. elaeagnifolius, Coprosma pseudocuneata var. pseudocuneata, C. colensoi, C. foetidissima and mountain fivefinger Pseudopanax colensoi s.s. - while beside the track or on banks were numerous seedlings, several ferns, sedges and herbs. Included were the small bush lily Luzuriaga parviflora, Ourisia macrophylla var., Schizelia allani, the white flowered Oxalis lactea, Anisotome aromatica and so on. Coming out of this area between the grey skeletons of dead leatherwood shrubs I was greeted by tussock grassland rising gradually to the precipitous slopes of the upper mountain itself. The tussock Chionochloa pallens var., with its wider than usual leaves, was predominant and sheltered the abundant clumps of the large, hairy leaved Ranunculus insignis which was in flower. The flowers were mostly yellow but there were also cream and off-white blooms as well dotting the landscape and reaching halfway up the mountain slopes. Another numerous flowering herb with its small whitish flowers was the violet Viola cunninghamii. Plentiful also was the spaniard or speargrass Aciphylla

colensoi, a large species with bipinnate leaves and orange midrib up to 18 inches long. Hebe venustula was in good supply and seemed to vary considerably in leaf form and compactness; some bushes were of the narrow leaved, open branched order, others were totally opposite in appearance. Other Hebes in the vicinity included Hebe stricta var. stricta, Hebe stricta var. lata with broader leaves, Hebe sp. (cf. H. corriganii and H. macrocarpa) a seemingly complex plant and hybrid plants of mixed H. stricta H. venustula parentage. In this area were a number of small rocky knolls with radiating shelves and on or around these places were growing a low growing Gaultheria sp. (unnamed - incl. in G. depressa), Coprosma pumila and the prostrate C. depressa, Dracophyllum adamsii, D. recurvum and an intermediate hybrid. The small blue leaved shrub Pentachondra pumila was also usually in evidence among the crevices together with Drapetes dieffenbachiae and the comb-like cushion sedge Oreobolus pectinatus. Among the two Helichrysums and Celmisia spectabilis in plenty often grew the less common, grey leaved Celmisia incana, also Oreamyrrhis colensoi in small patches.

From here to the higher north-western slopes was through tussock, speargrass and Hebe associations until the rockier alpine herbal communities with various smaller shrubs were encountered. At 5100' I found Coriaria plumosa again growing amidst the whipcord Hebe tetragona, Senecio bidwillii var. bidwillii, silvery mats of the beautiful North Island edelweiss Leucogenes leontopodium, Hebe venustula, Ranunculus, Helichrysums and the two Celmisias. Several hundred feet higher were the rocky ridges, outcrops, steep cliffs and debris slips - here were found Coprosma sp. (unnamed - aff. C. cheesemanii but leaves broader) and the shiny bronze leaved Myrsine nummularia along with Gaultheria, Pentachondra Dracophyllum, and in a shady cleft Geum sp. (G. parviflorum agg.). Quite often small patches of Paraehebe were observed, sometimes in precarious positions.

After reaching the summit of Mt. Hikurangi the mist gradually cleared permitting panoramic views of the country around: to the west vast indigenous forests and mountainous ranges, to the north and south forests and pastures, to the east pasture and Mt. Aorangi with the ocean as a backdrop. Retracing my path along the jagged ridge brought me in line with the Honokawa silhouettes at almost every step. It is rugged country which few people seem to have fully explored. The descent was slightly more to the west so as to come onto a small tarn in the grassland below. Scree areas and rocks mingled with the tussocks and small shrubs and around here I found a bidi bidi not encountered before. It was of bluish-grey colour, namely Acaena sp. (cf. A. hirsutula). A few rooted pieces were soon collected from the many patches. Adjacent to the tarn were several clumps of Gahnia procera, a high country plant in the North Island. Animal tracks of wild cattle and deer were obvious and the whole place was well chewed. Near here were several dry tarn and bog areas, but the only fresh plant encountered seemed to be the small sedge Scirpus pottsi which was abundant. From here up the dry watercourses, through the scrub and tussock brought me again to a rocky knoll and the familiar 'red tin lids' nailed to dead tree trunks which marked the truck to the hut.

After a brief spell back at the hut I had a quick check of the forest outskirts to the west and within several hundred yards of base. Among the thick Coprosma scrub I was fortunate in finding one plant of Pittosporum rigidum. No seedlings were apparent, so cutting material was collected. Tall plants of Dracophyllum pyramidalis were dotted among the silver beech trees and numerous seedlings were seen below. Several huge boulders lay within the forest outskirts and here I saw sprawled over one

the fern Microsorium novae-zelandiae and below it in the ground Hypolepis rufobarbata. One or two other ferns were about and hundreds of small nettle plants. Thus ended most of my plant hunting activities of the trip, which had been enjoyable and worthwhile. All that remained was the two hour descent next morning and the drive back to Opotiki.

AHURIRI ESTUARY THREATENED

Prof. V.J. CHAPMAN

Some members of the Botanical Society will know of, or will have seen, the Ahuriri estuary and the adjacent ponds just before the Taupo-Napier Road reaches Napier. The large lagoon, known as the Westshore pond is a reserve under the control of the Wildlife Trust. Recently the Napier City Council proposed a scheme to develop a large marina in the estuary and in association with this to carry out extensive dredging operations. The Trust, which leases the pond and adjoining reserve from the City Council, at the same time announced plans to develop the area into a tourist attraction and cater for some 10,000 visitors annually. Among new attractions envisaged were a deer park and zoo. Both proposals have aroused considerable local antagonism and a report by a firm of consultants commissioned by the City Council has pointed out the great dangers inherent in both proposals.

The Ahuriri estuary is of considerable interest botanically because, although the halophytic plants that grow there are not necessarily rare, they have appeared there as a result of the Napier earthquake. I believe, therefore, that it would be regrettable if these salt marshes were to disappear in order to make way for a marina. The low tide channel, the mud flats and the Westshore Lagoon provide a major habitat for a large variety of plants and animals. The Consultants report indicates that if the proposals for the marina and the refuge are not good, neither can the ponds be left as they are because they are already silting up and unless some action is taken they will disappear.

At the moment the Harbour Board, City Council and Trust have called a halt but some positive action will be necessary in the future. There is scope for some development but anything that is done will have to proceed with great caution.

MILLER'S RESERVE, WARKWORTH

J. BEEVER

Our November trip was to a new reserve so that even older members found something of interest. It is situated on a ridge on the Auckland side of Warkworth, looking back about half a mile across green fields to the T.V. Satellite Reception Station. The bush was given