

KANUKAJ. BEEVER

Until about 90 years ago no one seems to have published the name kanuka for Leptospermum ericoides and 50 years ago it was by no means the common name. Today it has become the fashionable word. As this interested me I looked into the origins and here is what I found.

Any early Pakeha settler who lived with Maoris, be he missionary, sealer, trader or pakeha-maori, soon learnt the value of Leptospermum scoparium as an easily available, versatile hardwood timber. In North Auckland where much of the earliest contact occurred and south to at least as far as Tamaki the name for it was kahikatoa. J. Polack writing in 1838 used only that name for it, but in another book a year or two later he conceded that further south the name was usually manuka. After 1840 most writers called it manuka and gradually the North Auckland name fell into disuse. Perhaps for the Pakeha it was too close to kahikatea and for the sake of clarity manuka became the 'correct' name.

To many Pakeha of course the plant was tea-tree but many were learning what the Maori had always known. There were two tea-trees, Leptospermum scoparium and L. ericoides, both were tea-tree, both were manuka. When the Pakeha needed to differentiate them he called L. scoparium red tea-tree and L. ericoides white tea-tree, presumably because of the colour of the wood. What about the Maori?

Well, until 1889, with the exception of Colenso's work no publication I have yet found had any other name than manuka for L. ericoides. Many writers, all Europeans at that stage, were even unaware that there were two species. Many that knew either ignored the difference and lumped them together as manuka or made erroneous guesses such as calling L. ericoides kahikatoa on the principle that if there were two names and two species they had to be made to fit.

In 1852 the 2nd. Edition of Williams' Maori Dictionary appeared. It was compiled by Rev.W. Williams (later Bishop), assisted by Rev.Dr. Maunsell who had abandoned compiling his own dictionary and contributed his own lists of words. Maunsell who was a fluent speaker of Waikato Maori was "considered by Maori and European alike to be the foremost living Maori scholar" (see Encyclopaedia of New Zealand). The Maori Old Testament, a monumental translation is almost entirely his work. Yet this 1852 dictionary gave only manuka (synonymous with kahikatoa) for L. scoparium. No mention is made of L. ericoides and no kanuka appears. Maru is given as the name of a plant growing in pools.

However the Maori did have other names for L.ericoides. It appears that a custom had grown up of calling it rawiri. In 1864 Colenso, who knew the Bay of Islands and Hawkes Bay well and was a leading Maori scholar as well as a leading botanist, in his "Botany of the North Island of New Zealand" calls L. scoparium manuka (p.4) and L. ericoides manuka-rauriki (p.5) and on p.44 he gives kahikatoa as a synonym for manuka. He also gives manuka-rau-riki as the name for Cyathodes fasciculata, a plant that looks like manuka to the new chum. Thus he is indicating that second rate tea-tree was called manuka-rauriki and this is consistent with other Maori tree names, for in most other cases of a single generic name for a group of trees Maoris have been prepared to add epithets after the name to distinguish the species,

exactly as is done in scientific names. e.g.

Tawhai = Beech trees (Nothofagus)

Tawhai-raunui = N. fusca and N. truncata, larger leaved forms. rau = leaf; nui = large.

Tawhai-rauriki = N. solandri and N. solandri var. cliffortioides, small leaved species. riki = small, few or dark.

Tawhai = N. menziesii.

Or take the maires:

Maire raunui = Nestegis cunninghamii

Maire kotai = N. montana

Maire hau = Phebalium nudum

Maire taiki = Mida salicifolia

Maire tawake = Eugenia maire

These both follow the pattern of manuka rauriki for L. ericoides. Thus at that time New Zealand's leading botanist and a leading Maori scholar recognized no other name than manuka rauriki.

In 1889 Kirk in the "Forest Flora of New Zealand" introduces two new names. On p.123 he says, referring to L. ericoides, "This species is one of the plants commonly called manuka by the bushmen but I believe that name is correctly applied to Leptospermum scoparium only. Mr Colenso informs me that 'rawiri' as it is sometimes called in the North Island is erroneous and that the proper name is manuka-rauriki as stated above. I am indebted to the Ven. Archdeacon W.L. Williams for informing me that it is known as 'kanuka' and 'maru' in the East Coast district." Archdeacon W.L. Williams was son of the first Bishop of Waiapu who had compiled editions 1 and 2 of the Maori Dictionary and later he himself issued the 3rd and 4th editions. For him the East Coast comprised Ngati Porou territory north of Gisborne and Ngati Kahungunu land to the south to Napier. It would seem that kanuka and maru were largely Ngati Porou dialect words because Colenso in Hawkes Bay should have known these words if common among the Ngati Kahungunu between Gisborne and Napier. Mind you Colenso was rather obstinate and no great friend of the Church Missionary Society and the C. of E. so naturally he did not agree.

Equally naturally Tregear in his Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary, 1891, lists what Kirk had said. Lexicographers don't argue with botanists on scientific detail. However he also shows rawiri and rauri as being names for an eel weir made in a wickerwork fashion using tea-tree and this is presumably how the term rawiri for L. ericoides arose. Similarly in 1892 W.L. Williams in the 4th edition of the Maori Dictionary lists virtually the same meanings.

Since then the story is largely a matter of authors copying all or part of this previous information. Perhaps the choice by Cheeseman in his Manual of the New Zealand Flora 1906 of kanuka and maru had great influence. As the prestige of the "Flora" grew and was increased by the 1925 edition, so the mana of kanuka flourished. But for many years there was no unanimity on the matter. Geo.M. Thomson, 1906, in his Classbook of Botany sticks to manuka for all Leptospermums, while

in 1909 the Forestry section of the Lands & Survey Department published a very long report on N.Z. forests which gave the official stamp to manuka-rauriki. It uses only that name for L. ericoides so officially kanuka was not recognised. In 1917 H.W. Williams produced the 5th edition of the Maori Dictionary and not surprisingly placed kanuka and maru among the alternatives as well as rawiri and rauri. Students of Maori are aware that Williams rarely gives the area in which dialectal forms are used so although kanuka was only an East Coast variant, to a Pakeha botanist it seemed a suitable name and one he could remember by association with manuka.

Since then kanuka has grown in popularity while maru and rawiri, surely more distinct words have fallen by the wayside as has manuka-rauriki, probably due to its clumsiness. Surveying Maori plant names in general, kanuka seems a rather un-maori way to differentiate a second species of manuka. As shown for the beeches and the mairies an adjective after the noun was the common way to distinguish a species. Vice-versa when a different consonant was used to replace the initial one it usually was a dialect change and did not mean a different species e.g. kanono and manono both mean Coprosma australis; mango and tango both mean Litsea calicaris; kai, mai, and matai all mean Podocarpus spicatus; mapara and kapara both mean heartwood of rimi, and so on. So why not kanuka and manuka both alternative names for tea-tree; but apparently Archdeacon Williams said no, and his family wrote the dictionaries. Recent botanists not being Maori language experts naturally just copy the Maori names from previous writers so that kanuka in about 80 years has evolved from a little known dialect form from the East Coast to become the 'in' word. So take your pick: kanuka, maru, rawiri, manuka-rauriki or even manuka.

While on Maori names some other points of interest; Hall's totara (Podocarpus hallii) was called totara-kiri-kotukutuku by Colenso's informants, i.e. the totara with the kotukutuku or Fuchsia bark, an apt description but hardly brief or neat.

As in the case of the maire, Maoris often lumped together several genera under one name if they looked alike. They called Persoonia toru and Myrsine salicina both toro. They do look rather alike. However someone heard the name as toru and somehow ousted toro so that now by International rules P. toru is sacred and the toru must not be changed. However Colenso assured us that they were both correctly called toro, not toru.

So finally, as mentioned above, Maoris in different areas often used different names for the same plant; thus I find at least nine different names for Tetrapathea tetrandra. So don't expect to always find one "CORRECT" Maori name for a tree. Libocedrus plumosa was called kaiwaka, kawaka, kaikawaka, and even kahikawaka and they are all correct depending on your dialect.

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