

MT. PIRONGIA

Bot. Soc. Annual Weekend Away, 17-19 Feb. 1984

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Mt. Pirongia lies approx. 25 miles south-west of Hamilton, and is clad in completely different vegetation to that which is familiar to Aucklanders.

Nine members and friends elected to stay under canvas for the weekend, and we were joined by seven more for the hike on Saturday. After crossing some open farmland, we entered the bush and began the climb. One group forged ahead, eager to see the higher-altitude plants - the rest moved at a more sedate pace, pausing to identify the flora as we went, and to "talk" to the fantails and pied tits, and watch the bellbirds and riflemen.

Excitement grew as several new species were added to the already long list*, and some of us saw plants we had previously only read about - for me, a highlight was to see Libertia pulchella in flower. Another member found the root parasite, Dactylanthus taylori. Earina autumnalis was flowering, and Beilschmiedia tawa drupes littered the lower track. A frog, perched in the centre of a rosette of Dracophyllum latifolium leaves, provided amusement.

From about 2200 feet altitude, the vegetation changed dramatically, and the views of bush-filled valleys, and surrounding farmland were superb. I asked my companion to identify horopito by taste - she got her own back by asking me to pick a sprig of Coprosma foetidissima for identification. After a quick trip back down the mountain we returned to the campsite for a swim in the Kaniwhaniwha Stream and a delicious dinner, cooked and eaten outdoors. There was a Parsonsia vine flowering in the very top of a tall tree - bets were placed as to which species it was - then came the difficult task of obtaining a specimen for identification. Fortunately we had several teenagers with us, and they managed the job with much enthusiasm and hilarity. It was P. heterophylla, and the losers paid up with good grace; the rest gloated!

Next morning we set off in two four-wheel-drive vehicles to cross a farm in search of a valley of king ferns. We found it by mid-morning - there were several lovely specimens beside a quiet brook, and we spent some time looking at other interesting plants, e.g., Urtica incisa and Hydrocotyle sp.

We had a picnic lunch back at the camp and then packed up ready to head home. We had all enjoyed the weekend tremendously, and give due thanks to Anthony for his organization, and to Peter de Lange from Hamilton, who guided us on the walks. I hope we have a few more join us for next year's camp - we all agreed, the more the merrier.

* A.P. Druce's list no. 179 (Nov. 1982 revision) for which A.E. Wright has recorded the additions:

Lycopodium cernuum	Deyeuxia avenoides (slender form)
Grammitis magellanica	Rytidosperma unarede
subsp. nothofageti	Solanum nodiflorum
Ophioglossum coriaceum	Urtica incisa
Prasophyllum nudum	