

LOWRY PEAKS - KAIWARA RIVER

Stan Reid

Two vehicles whose occupants had obviously not heard announcements of cancellation of the scheduled Lowry Peaks visit arrived at Culverden. In our ignorance of possible hazards it seemed logical to go through with the trip. It proved very interesting! One feature observed that will stick in our memories is that the snow patches remaining on the hills were a small remnant of what had obviously been a fairly heavy blanket - on spurs with emergent rock the Hymenanchera humps and prostrate kowhai had been neatly cropped where branches had protruded above the snow. It was very startling indeed to see all the newly-severed (white) ends to branches up to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch diameter. Aircraft were very busy in Canterbury on that day bringing food to stock weakened by starvation and those we heard and saw may have been doing that job.

Our first stop after climbing from the plains around Culverden gave us an interesting view of that area backed by the heavily blanketed ranges. Scrub remnants near that stop close to the sharp saddle from whence we followed down the Kaiwara, were especially Sophora prostrata providing initial shelter and then support for vigorous heaps of Clematis afoliato and Rubus. They like the Hymenanchera and Muhlenbeekia were appressed to the rocky outcrops, whereas the small-leaved Coprosma parviflora gave a ragged look to the silhouetted spur tops. All of them gave shelter to Pellaea, Asplenium flabellifolium, Chenopodium, Dichondra and Linum, monogynum, Pimelea prostrata? was starting to flower.

The lunchtime stop became extended through a large slice of the afternoon as the vegetation not far from the head of Kaiwara River had plenty of interest. Here, where the road before realignment had followed the course of the stream a 30 feet high rock mass was home to a variety of plants including Senecio monroi, Olearia paniculata, reminiscent of the coastal Napenape reserve visited not long ago. Species approaching tree size, a few hundred feet up the hillside and occupying the steep rocky spurs were Leptospermum ericoides broadleaf and kowhai (Sophora microphylla) but rock faces especially carried abundant Senecio monroi, Helichrysum glomeratum, Corokia cotoneaster, Olearia paniculata and O. avicennifolia with Sophora prostrata on exposed sites. Alongside the stream the shrubbery was more varied with abundant Pseudopanax (2 species), broadleaf, Hebe salicifolia, Carmichaelia, an assortment of Coprosmas plus most of the hillside species. To give a touch of spring male flowers were appearing on C. parviflora, and minute violet buds were on the Hymenanchera; but there were still plenty of orangy-red Corokia berries and one bush of Coprosma parviflora was carrying sapphire berries.

Our Botany Division companions could add a host of other plants. We were later than intended in continuing the journey - too late to look at one little patch of bush containing what looked like one or two totara trees. In fact we were beginning to discover some technical difficulties in the fords as the Kaiwara River was growing in size as we travelled east. The two deepest and widest fords were in fact just too far along the way for us to turn back. At least it seemed so until we came to a halt in the middle; a good deal of manual labour eventually saw the first vehicle through and the second sailed through in fine style. The second ford looked more fearsome with sizeable waves in the fast moving waters but we made it before dark, drained our boots and nether garments and headed for home. It was silly but we all enjoyed it!

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