

## Waimahoe Bush

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THE ten acres or so of bush that lie immediately south of the Waikanae River on the ridge above the railway bridge were fenced off by my father as a screen for the homestead when he first came to the district in the early 1890s and the rest of the farm was being logged and cleared. As a boy I was familiar with most of it, and I have been aware in a general sort of way that the bush has been changing over the last 60 years or so.

I have recently had occasion to examine the condition of the bush, and my intention is to present an outline of these changes, even if I cannot explain them. On my recent visit I listed upwards of 100 species, nearly all of which were previously familiar to me; a further 25 at least which I knew to exist in the vicinity but failed to find are of little importance considering the small size of the area. Unexpected in so small a stand was how well the bush has maintained itself as a closed community. The present owner has planted certain small areas with aliens (rhododendrons and tropical orchids) and has selectively eliminated lawyer and in one place supplejack, but otherwise the bush is holding its own.

As seen today from the main road Waimahoe Bush is one of the remnants of kohekohe forest that lie scattered along the road between Waikanae and Paraparaumu and out towards the coast among the older sand-dunes; by no means the best example since the insertion of weekend cottages along the road face, and the re-alignment of the road in the last couple of years to underpass the railway near the bridge. Still, apart from the destruction of the fringe of ngaios the pattern of the bush remains recognisable—a close canopy of kohekohe on the seaward face with very little in the understorey except such shade-tolerant seedlings as karaka and nikau. On the landward side tawa becomes dominant with a wider variety of canopy trees—hinau, titoki, rewarewa and pukatea—and much more vigorous and varied undergrowth beneath the more open crowns.

What is remarkable is the disappearance, within 75 years or so, of the number of tall trees that live in my memory and are confirmed by photographs of the 1890s and early 1900s. Most of these were podocarps, though there were one or two prominent pukateas, and immediately overlooking the house a solitary rata (dead in my lifetime) which appeared to be of terrestrial origin. On the outer slope, visible from the railway, there would have been at least half a dozen podocarps, two or three of them looking like kahikatea in the photographs, and one matai with which we were well acquainted; firstly because moreporks nested in it, later when it fell across the avenue one stormy Sunday and stopped the family from going to church. (Three good strainers were split out of it afterwards.)

Down the creek stood one magnificent rimu whose tall shaft could only be properly appreciated by scrambling down through the undergrowth to its base. This has utterly vanished now; the solitary podocarp of any size that remains is a miro further up the creek, with trunk 40 in. in diameter and its crown projecting above the canopy, but this is already past its prime and stag-headed. There is no totara; totara in this country has always been scarce and highly valued by sawmillers and fencers.

With the passing of these tall trees it was a pleasant surprise to find that all of them can be found either as seedlings or saplings. A solitary rimu on the river face is close on 25 ft. tall, with two smaller miro nearby, but kahikatea and matai seedlings along the crest of the ridge have reached only a few feet so it will be many years before these break the canopy. However it is clear that the apparent replacement of podocarp-hardwood forest by kohekohe- or tawa-dominant forest is not as clear-cut as it looks.

Both kohekohe and tawa demand warm fertile situations but kohekohe is definitely more tolerant of salt, though Cockayne does not class it as a coastal species; the difference here is clear, with tawa, kamahi and the fringing mapou where exposed to the west presenting bare twigs in contrast to the smooth kohekohe canopy.

Two other communities can be distinguished in the bush. A grove of pongas (of unknown origin but established prior to 1895) has been occupied by epiphytic kamahi, which now forms a stand on the slope between the kohekohe and the tawa. The other community is dominated by trees of akiraho (golden akeake) and occurs in two places: along the verge of the low greywacke cliff below Chaney's Flat, and again approaching the earthworks (Te Rama?) on the highest point of the ridge.

The undergrowth in the tawa forest is fairly dense. The only common tree-fern is ponga, mamaku being infrequent (a slender specimen in the lower part of the bush may perhaps be regarded as *Cyathea cunninghamii*). One small clump of *Dicksonia squarrosa* down the creek is the only occurrence of that genus. Rangiora, mahoe, mapou, hangehange and the three large-leaved coprosmas form the main components, with kaikomako, wharangi<sup>1</sup> and *Coprosma areolata*

<sup>1</sup> Although wharangi (*Melicope ternata*) is an abundant undershrub on this coast, a couple of large trees just across the railway at the former crossing (Elder's Crossing) have a special interest which should perhaps be recorded here. At important tangis on the Waikanae marae it used to be the regular practice for the wahines to visit these trees for headwreaths and branches. I can find no record of a similar use for wharangi elsewhere; the late Mr W. Carkeek thought he had some written evidence of plants brought down from Taranaki by Te Atiawa which probably included wharangi, and that these could well be the plants referred to, with some association with their homeland.

towards the margins. Other small-leaved coprosmas are rare, such typical Wellington ones as *C. rotundifolia*, *C. rigida*, *C. parviflora* and *C. microcarpa* not being sighted at all and *C. rhamnoides* and *C. crassifolia* (rather an East Coast species perhaps) only as solitary plants. One shrub of interest, somewhat of a rarity south of the Ohau River but here frequent, is the sandalwood (*Mida salicifolia*), readily confused with juvenile maire ("Olea") and in fact given the same name by the Maori. Another rare find for the district is taurepo (*Rhabdothamnus solandri*), one plant being found on the river face.

The main ground cover is supplied by large plants of *Asplenium bulbiferum* and *A. lucidum*. Blechnums are rare, *B. lanceolatum* being the only terrestrial species seen, with *Polystichum richardii*, *Asplenium hookerianum*, *Anarthropteris dictyopteris* and *Ctenitis glabella* all infrequent. One clump of *Todea hymenophylloides*, unexpected at such a low altitude, was sighted. Ferns more usually climbing in habit were also infrequent and mainly terrestrial: *Pyrrhosia serpens*, *Phymatodes diversifolium*, *Asplenium flaccidum*, *Hymenophyllum demissum* (the only filmy fern seen) and even *Blechnum filiforme*.

Supplejack is easily the most abundant climber inside the bush, while on the margins *Parsonsia*, the large *Muehlenbeckia* and convolvulus are aggressive. Both clematis and lawyer (two species) are rare for this type of bush, but I have since learned that the present owner has been cutting back both lawyer and supplejack over a period. All three climbing rata vines are abundant and kiekie tangles, as noted in a recent study of the Tiritea catchment, appear to mark the sites of former canopy trees.

The most conspicuous of the perching plants is the flax-like *Collospermum hastatum*, but there are also huge specimens of *Griselinia lucida*, topping their hosts and almost trees in their own right. Smaller but characteristic epiphytes are *Asplenium falcatum*, the small pitto-sporum with the brilliant orange lining to the seed case, and the epiphytic orchids. The grassy-leaved *Earina mucronata* was the only one of these seen, but both *E. autumnalis* and the doubtful "*E. aestivalis*" are hereabouts as well as *Dendrobium* and *Bulbophyllum*—I have no record of *Sarcochilus* in the district.

Stock have never been let into the bush except for the small area outside the fence overlooking the bridge. Stoats and semi-domesticated cats are mentioned in correspondence with Edgar Stead in 1909, but not opossums, which must have made their first appearance not long after that date. I can recall in particular one regular visitor who used to patter along the verandah of the homestead every evening on his way to the orchard. Signs of opossum browsing are negligible at present, but the present owner estimates he has destroyed hundreds over a period of several years. (On Kapiti, recent photographs show crowns of kohekohe almost completely defoliated.)