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The Hukutaia Domain, Opotiki

Museum of the New Zealand Flora

M. Heginbotham, Opotiki

THE Hukutaia Domain contains one of the finest living collections of the New Zealand flora available to the public. It represents over 35 years of continuous interest, loving care and labour by Norman Potts, one of our most eminent amateur botanists and well known to many throughout the country until his death in November 1970. Hukutaia offers bush walks through magnificent forest settings, splendid specimen plantings of trees, shrubs and ferns (many rare), rock gardens with alpine plants and a parkland full of interest, all of indigenous plants only.

Situated about 4½ miles from Opotiki, the Domain of 11½ acres overlooks the Waioeka R. valley with the Borough, the Pacific Ocean and White Island clearly visible to the north. Following the signposts, one keeps left after crossing the Waioeka bridge from Opotiki, and gradually climbs the several hundred feet along Woodlands Road almost to its end. To the east and south a backdrop of bush-clad hills and mountains completes the picture. The Domain lies on the 38th parallel and experiences climatic conditions ranging from 90° in summer to about 10° of frost in winter, with rainfall normally between 50-60 inches p.a.

In 1918 the Woodlands Estate of about 2000 acres, bordering the Waioeka R. to the west of Opotiki, was sold to the Government by Mr Hutchinson of Gisborne for Rehab. farms for ex-servicemen of World War I. In the course of subdivision a stand of native bush containing a giant puriri estimated to be at least 2500 years old so impressed the surveyor, Mr P. W. Barlow, that he suggested the area be retained as a reserve. This was agreed to, and the reserve was left in the hands of the County Council. Soon after, when one of the settlers wanted control over the reserve area, the remaining Woodlands settlers banded together to form a Domain committee, and voluntarily raised money to fence the area to exclude stock, which up till then had roamed there at will. The huge

puriri (*Vitex lucens*) within the Domain proved to be of historic interest as it was a burial tree of the Upokorehe subtribe of the Whakatohea, a tribe whose boundaries extend from Kutarere (12 miles west of Opotiki) to Opape (7 miles east) and some 30 miles inland. The tree's name was Taketakerau, and honoured dead were buried within the vast hollow base which is large enough to walk in. A strict tapu was observed, but has since been lifted. A suitably worded notice is now fastened to the tree.

In 1925-26 Norman Potts, an Opotiki solicitor, became very interested in the Hukutaia Domain, and it was largely because of his efforts that the Domain is the achievement it is today. With the exception of twenty or so indigenous species (including puriri, tawa, rewarewa, pukatea, nikau and tree ferns) providing a great canopy of foliage, nearly every other tree, shrub, fern and grass has been hand-planted over the years, largely by Mr Potts himself. Many are now naturally reproducing within the boundaries and some plantings such as *Nothofagus*, *Pittosporum*, *Sophora* and *Entelea* have attained heights of 20-50 ft.

As an amateur botanist, Norman Potts collected and identified most of the N.Z. natives he planted, going on countless expeditions throughout the country, often with botanist friends. He explored the Opotiki area extensively, from East Cape to Whakatane and southwards in the Otara, Waioeka, Waiotahi and Waimana R valleys. He was an enthusiast until his death in November 1970, and encouraged and helped countless people and organisations in Opotiki and elsewhere with the planting and collecting of native plants. His efforts in this field were recognised with the award of the Loder Cup in 1944.

Within the Hukutaia Domain he developed a natural-looking, informal planting programme, not only for aesthetic reasons but also for ease of maintenance, which has always been a difficulty. Norman Potts managed most of it himself, sometimes with a few friends, occasionally with various organisations such as the Forest and Bird Protection Society. In later years, and more particularly since his death, a fairly active Domain Committee has been working to preserve his accomplishments, and the Opotiki County Council (as legal administrators) have also proved helpful with both maintenance and finance.

Recently, by public donation, a memorial entrance gate, seat and fence has been erected at the Domain proper, and the entrance roadside upgraded. A plaque with appropriate wording has been fixed to one of the Hinuera stone pillars beside the gate. Besides the provision of modern toilet facilities, a tool shed, and water supply to the Domain, a small rock garden of about 250 sq. ft. has been built just within the entrance. This contains almost 150 small shrubs and herbs, including many alpine. The warm summer

climate of Opotiki hinders a full collection of alpine plants, which demand cool and exacting growing conditions. However chances of survival are improved in several cool open areas within the bush and in two other rock gardens. All such plantings are doing well at present.

Hukutaia now contains over 700 species and varieties of native plants, representing some 150 genera, with new species being added monthly. This provides a mass of living reference material for all those interested, as almost every New Zealand botanical family occurs. Every species has been labelled with a peg showing its botanical name, place of origin, and in many cases the Maori or common name. Hukutaia attempts to be educational to the visitor whether he be an overseas tourist, holiday-maker, or school pupil, and many hundreds of each visit the Domain each year. Some of the more interesting plants growing happily together in the area are as follows:

Just inside the entrance, in the rock garden, is *Coriaria pottsiana* from Mt Hikurangi, named after Norman Potts who discovered it. The same mountain is well represented on the rock garden with such plants as *Anisotome colensoi*, *Hebe tetragona*, *Hebe venustula*, *Leucogenes leontopodium*, *Parahebe hookeriana* var. *olsenii*, and *Helichrysum bellidioides*. Other rock garden plants include *Arthropodium cirrhatum* from the Three Kings Is, *Dacrydium laxifolium* (Volcanic Plateau), *Hebe elliptica* (Stewart Id), various raoulias, coprosmas and celmisias, *Geranium traversii* (Chatham Is) and many coastal plants from Makara (Wellington) and elsewhere. Nearby are *Pomaderris phyllicifolia* var. *polifolia* (Spirit's Bay), *Pachystegia insignis* (Kaikoura coast), *Sophora prostrata* (Nelson), *Olearia pachyphylla* (Opape), *Senecio huntii* (Chatham Is) together with a wide assortment of hebes, olearias and other plants. *Pittosporum obcordatum*, both from Kaitaia and Wairoa, grows here, as well as *P. lineare* (Butterfly Bush), *fairchildii* (Three Kings Is), *huttonianum* (Great Barrier Is), *ellipticum* var. (Waioeka), and *umbellatum* (N. Auckland). *Tecomanthe speciosa* grows up one of these pittosporums, but has yet to flower. Continuing along the left-hand path going north one passes *Xeronema callistemon* from Poor Knights Is, *Myosotidium hortensia* (Chatham Is), *Pomaderris kumeraho* (Coromandel), *Phyllocladus glaucus* (local), *Todea barbara* from the far north, most of the hymenanthemas, and *Carmichaelia arenaria* from Punakaiki (where it is now extinct*). In or near a small clearing facing west may be seen *Brachyglottis rangiora* var. *arborescens* (Three Kings Is), *Sophora microphylla* var. *fulvida* (Piha), *Phebalium nudum* (Coromandel) and the large-

* This rare species has since been rediscovered on Seal Island by Ivor Robbins, as recounted later in this issue.—Ed.

flowered *Rhabdothamnus solandri* from Great Barrier Id. Through a vast tunnel of local nikau palms we come to *Pseudopanax discolor* (Coromandel), several large kauris (Waipoua), *Helichrysum glomeratum* var. *majus* (Motu R.) and a huge vine of *Parsonsia heterophylla* (local) climbing up a large tawa. Around the coastal lookout appear *Nestegis apetala* (Poor Knights Is), *Myrsine divaricata* var. (Poor Knights Is), whau, karaka, ngaio, and many other coast-loving plants. *Nothofagus* species and hybrids abound, all N.Z. species being represented. *Pseudopanax laetum*, and *Cordyline indivisa* can be discerned amidst the attractive bush background of tawa, tree ferns, kie kie and palms. A large grove of king fern, *Marattia salicina* (Waioeka R.) lies near this area — huge plants up to 12 ft. across. Most adiantums are represented, and we pass *A. aethiopicum* (Kopu) and *Gleichenia flabellata* (Bay of Islands) to reach the large patch of bird-catching plants, *Heimerliodendron brunonianum* (Great Barrier Id) before descending slowly to one of the two creeks in the area. Here we find the magnificent *Todea superba* and the tiny *Australina pusilla* (both local), with *Elatostema rugosum* (Awakino Gorge) adding a touch of contrast. *Dracophyllum latifolium* (local) and *D. pyramidale* (Coromandel) are nearby, as well as the attractive shrub daisy *Senecio kirkii* (local). Passing the huge puriri and heading south we see Hukutaia's tallest tree fern, *Cyathea cunninghamii*, some 70 ft high, spreading above *Plagianthus betulinus* (Westland) and various coprosmas, hebes and ferns. *Coprosma obconica* (Nelson) and *chathamica* (Chatham Is) are next, among kahikateas and totaras . . . and so on. All the conifers are represented in the Domain, as well as numerous ferns, sedges, rushes, and orchids, *Ixerba*, *Discaria*, and many other species not mentioned individually. The collection of shrubby coprosmas, olearias and hebes is particularly large.

A lot of work is still envisaged at the Domain — rock gardens upgraded, new clearings made and planted, creek areas tidied, nikaus and macropiper (threatening to engulf the area) to be thinned out, while weekly maintenance and monthly plantings continue. A catalogue of species has been compiled, but needs further additions and revision. These records will eventually become available to interested organisations. Plant material is always welcome, whether wildlings, cuttings or seed, particularly of unusual and less known native plants. Correct names and location sources are essential. In this way an almost complete museum of N.Z. native plant life will become available to all, and the reputation of Hukutaia Domain will be enhanced.

