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Cabbage Trees

James Beaver, Auckland

In September 1981 the Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin contained an article, "The Origin of the Name Cabbage Tree for Cordyline Species in New Zealand" which I had contributed. Less than two years later the publication of "The Resolution Journal of J. R. Forster", ed. Michael E. Hoare by The Hakluyt Society, London 1982, revealed information that has confirmed fully the main premise of my article. This was that our modern use of Cabbage Tree for Cordylines stems from the earliest sailors to visit New Zealand, who, when confronted by this new tree which looked to them like a palm mistakenly called it by their usual name for a palm viz. "a cabbage tree".

In his journal, J. R. Forster refers to Cordylines more than once, of which the following quotations are typical.

Dusky Bay. May 7th 1773 . . . "we met with a great many Cabbage-palm trees as they were commonly called by our sailors, but upon examination we found them to be a kind of Dragon tree (*Dracaena* Linn.): for we met with fruit and flowers of them . . ."

Later (p277 Hoare 1982), summarising work at Dusky Bay he writes, ". . . with an infinite variety of high trees and shrubbery, among which the New Zealand Dragon-tree (*Dracaena antarctica*) is very remarkable. (N.B. our sailors called them the Cabbage-Palm but it is different; though the middle most leaves may be eaten and taste almost like sweet fresh almonds)."

November 9th 1773. Queen Charlotte Sound. "George and Mr Sparman went out to Indian Cove and George shot two curlews and discovered a new *Dracaena* in flower, but they were not able to get it for want of a hatchet . . . The next morning the weather was very fine, and I went with Mr Sparman and my son to the Indian Cove, where we got the *Dracaena*, having taken a hatchet with us. This *Dracaena* is a kind of tree about 15 or 20 feet high: the Stem was rough and naked, the branches are soft and spongy and have still the marks of the places, where the leaves have been growing to it; these are in tufts at the top of

the branches, and out of some, the flowers come out near the top . . . In several points the plant looks like *Dracaena Draco*, in other respects it has a similarity to the *Dracaena* we discovered at Dusky Bay . . .”

Almost a year later at Queen Charlotte Sound he writes (20th October 1774) . . . “In the afternoon we accompanied the Captain to Cannibal Cove . . . I found there on the hill to the north a young stock of a true Cabbage tree (*Areca oleracea*), which is the more remarkable as this place is so much to the south . . .”

From J. R. Forster's account these points emerge.

- (1) The Forsters discovered *Cordyline indivisa* at Dusky Sound.
(In 1786 George Forster published it as *Dracaena indivisa* in *Florulae Insularum Australium Prodrromus*);
- (2) The common sailors called this tree a Cabbage-palm tree (or Cabbage tree) but the scientists knew it was not a palm.
- (3) The Forsters found “a new *Dracaena*” at Queen Charlotte Sound which is clearly our common New Zealand Cabbage Tree (*Cordyline australis*).
(G. Forster published this as *Dracaena australis* in the above *Prodrromus* 1786.)
- (4) Later the Forsters found a young Nikau Palm in Queen Charlotte Sound which J. R. Forster called “a true Cabbage tree”.
(Although he then classified it as *Areca oleracea*, his son, George, published it as *Areca sapida* in *De Plantis Esculentis* 1786 and then in the *Prodrromus* 1786. Today it is known as *Rhopalostylis sapida*).

It might be helpful to note also from reading the Journal that the Forsters and Sparrmann never landed or botanised in the North Island. They did not see *Cordyline australis* in Dusky Sound but found one later at Queen Charlotte Sound.

Kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) as an Accidental Epiphyte

F. C. Duguid, Levin

Downstream from the lower Otaki Gorge the river in former times cut into deep deposits of gravel leaving a semicircular amphitheatre with a sheer 12 m wall. Between this and the river there is a low sheltered terrace where there are remnants of bush dominated by kohekohe which flowers and seeds generously. Against the base of the high terrace is a swampy area where the air remains moist. Here a wheki (*Dicksonia squarrosa*), now dead, became host to a kohekohe. The seed germinated about 3.5 m up the trunk, and when noticed in May 1979 it was a healthy young tree from which a number of roots ran down to the ground. The largest was about 15 cm in diameter but there were several other large roots also.