

THE IMPORTANCE OF AHURIRI VALLEY BUSH

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In the Ahuriri valley , on the south west flank of the Port Hills (grid reference N.Z.M.S. 260 M36/775247; altitude 40 - 200m) is a fine area of native forest, c.80ha, owned by Messrs D.P. and P.J. Graham of the Ahuriri Estate. To secure long-term protection of this area a covenant was negotiated in 1980. At the time the area was partially fenced; ring-fencing was completed in 1981, with financial support from the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust.

The forest at Ahuriri lies on a shady aspect; it is composed of extensive, dense stands of kanuka(Leptospermum ((Kunzea))ericoides) intergrading with very mixed broadleaved forest containing, as abundant canopy species, ngaio(Myoporum), mahoe(Melicytus ramiflorus), kotukutuku(Fuchsia), lacebark(Hoheria angustifolia) kowhai(Sophora), broadleaf(Griselinia), akeake(Dodonaea), and titoki(Alectryon), with scattered matai(Podocarpus spicatus), and totara(Podocarpus totara). A rich variety of other species of trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs is also present (see the list in Journal 14, compiled by Lindsay Conner). Shrubby communities occur on the slopes outside the fenced area.

Stumps and logs show that the forest area was logged for podocarps last century and it was also swept by at least one fire, attested by fire scars on most of the big podocarps. At present, however, there is a good, dense canopy cover throughout most of the forest. The forest had been grazed by stock prior to ring-fencing; sheep, goats, and sometimes cattle still venture in at times. In spite of this, regeneration of most species is occurring in at least some parts of the area.

Species and one hybrid in the fenced area, or near its margins, additional to those in Lindsay Conner's list are:

TREES

Melicytus ramiflorus
x M. micranthus

SHRUBS

Coprosma crassifolia
Pseudopanax anomalus
Sophora prostrata
Teucrium parvifolium
*(identified by Hugh Wilson)

VINES

Clematis foetida
Rubus cissoides

PARASITES

Korthalsella lindsayi
Tupeia antarctica

HERBS

Microlaena stipoides*
Stellaria parviflora
Wahlenbergia gracilis

I believe the Ahuriri Valley Bush to be one of the most important of the Banks Peninsula region, for the following reasons:

1. It is large, the second largest protected area on the Peninsula, exceeded only by Mt Herbert Scenic Reserve in Kaituna Valley. The forest area, if well-guarded from fire, herbicide spraying, and stock grazing can easily maintain its integrity.

2. The Bush and its immediate surroundings contain a great variety of native plants: podocarps at least four trees; angiosperms - 27 trees, 24 shrubs, 12 vines, 3 parasites, and 27 herbs; 20 ferns.

3. The occurrence of plant species that are rare or local throughout their range: fierce lancewood (Pseudopanax ferox), passion vine (Tetrapathaea tetrandra), and a grass (Microlaena polynoda).

4. Occurrence of species rare or rather local in the Canterbury region: miro (Podocarpus ferrugineus,)
Melicytus micranthus, milk tree (Paratrophis microphylla),
Coprosma areolata, C. virescens, kawakawa (Macropiper excelsum),
Olearia fragrantissima, Teucrium parvifolium, supplejack
(Ripogonum scandens), Tupeia antarctica.

5. Occurrence of species at, or close to, their southernmost limits: Alectryon excelsum, Dodonaea viscosa, Macropiper excelsum, Tetrapathaea tetrandra.

Some other points of interest are: the occurrence of a very large Tetrapathaea, stem diam. 10cm, the hybrid Melicytus, and the abundant bird-life. Native pigeons, bellbirds, silvereyes, fantails, and grey warblers are common. Recently seeds or seedlings of Alectryon, Ripogonum, and Macropiper have been found in the Ahuriri Scenic Reserve, on the Summit Road, which contains no adults of these species. They have probably originated at Ahuriri Valley Bush. The seeds have been transported at least 2.5km, almost certainly by native pigeons.

The Graham family can be very proud that they have so generously agreed to protect the Ahuriri Valley bush. It is a most important member of the limited number of protected areas for flora and fauna in Canterbury. It is especially important because real lowland forest survives so rarely in our region.