

## Field Trip: Mercer Bay & Coman Tracks, Karekare. 16/11/02

Doug Shaw

Those present were: - Sandra Jones (Leader), Anne Grace, Harry Beacham, Tony Williams, Pat Seyb, Steve Benham, Francois Raymond, Leslie Haines, Maureen Young, Enid Asquith, Paul Asquith, Juliet Richmond, Helen Richmond, Alison Wesley, Malcolm Simpson, Margaret Peart, Peter White, Clive Shirley, Shirley Smith, Ewen Cameron, Doug Shaw, Elaine Marshall, Mike Wilcox.

We all assembled at the car park at the end of Te Ahuhu Road under a threatening sky and a rising wind. Sandra gave an excellent rundown on the history of the Ahuahu Track, Comans Track and Mercer Bay as well as informing us of plants of interest in the area.

We all headed off down the track at the end of the road with the weather clearly deteriorating and with Anne at the back to keep us all on the move and collect the species cards.

We followed the fenced cliff top of the west coast and the first break in the bush along the ridge gave us a great view of Piha beach as well as views of North Piha and further up the coast.

I was most excited when one of the first species seen was a rather sad looking parsley fern (*Botrychium australe*) - a first time sighting of this fern for me.

*Clematis forsteri* a rather local clematis for the Auckland area was seen in flower.

Shield fern (*Polystichum richardii*) was found and it turned out to be common on all the sections of track exposed to the west coast.

A rewarewa (*Knightia excelsa*) on the cliff track had an unusual stunted growth form. The combination of effect of the strong west winds and rain seemed to cause this stunted growth in many of the trees. The silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*) seemed to be affected as well. It had more and longer scales / hairs on the unfolding fronds than the tree ferns I have at home in the Hibiscus coast area.

We saw fine examples of *Blechnum fluviatile* and *Pteris saxatilis* which seemed to thrive along this section of the track. A very large gully fern (*Pneumatopteris pennigera*) was seen as well. Both *Myosotis petiolata* var. *pansa* and the *Calystegia tuguriorum* were in flower.

At this stage we had reached the top of a ridge with a view of the west coast cliffs and the sea below to our

right and ahead of us, downhill, the ground was covered with clumps of tall flax (*Phormium tenax* and *P. cookianum*).

We stopped to hear a fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata vealeae*) in the flax before reaching the end of the Mercer Bay Loop and the lookout looking south and over Mercer Bay.

As we turned to walk back up the hill the weather deteriorated to steady rain. Sandra wisely suggested that we keep going until we reached the shelter of the bush before stopping for lunch. On our right were the steep cliffs surrounding Mercer Bay and despite the weather, some serious botanising was done with great examples of *Pterostylis banksii* and *Thelymitra longifolia* being found. We finally made the bush and lunch – at last.

Sandra awarded chocolate fish (genuine Kiwi ones) to the following who had found plants she had recorded on earlier trips but not on the reconnoitre

These were: -

Anne Grace:	<i>Orthoceras novae-zeelandiae</i>
Ewen Cameron:	<i>Leucopogon fraseri</i>
Lesley Haines:	<i>Pittosporum crassifolium</i>
Enid Asquith:	<i>Melicope ternata</i> .

After lunch we stopped to study a large tree which appeared to be a hybrid of pohutukawa and rata.

Further on we noticed some *Parsonsia heterophylla* which had yellow/orange flowers instead of the usual white.

As the track wound down the hill we had the unusual experience of seeing *Pteris comans*, *P. macilenta*, *P. saxatilis*, and *P. tremula* all within 50 metres. We finally reached the Karekare hang gliding launching site high above the beach.

Despite the inclement weather, we all had had an excellent day botanising and viewing the 'Wild West Coast'.

I, for one, will be returning again in fine weather to further study and enjoy the botany and admire the views.

Our thanks went to Sandra and her team for such a well organised and reconnoitred field trip.