

Acknowledgements

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For further reading

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Field trip: Upper Nihotupu Valley. 17/09/05

Rhys Gardner

The andesitic plateau high in the middle of the Waitakere Ranges contains a very nice piece of habitat, the damp and sheltered headwaters of the Nihotupu Stream. Today leader Sandra Jones would be showing us what the Ranges offers there in the way of a "subtropical submontane" flora.

We began along Cutty Grass Track in from the Anawhata Road. The vegetation is secondary, dominated either by veteran manuka over dense *Gahnia xanthocarpa*; or by kanuka, rimu, and the "how do you tell them from quite a long way away?" hardwoods: quintinia, ixerba, lancewood, toro, and hinau. We saw *Nestegis cunninghamii*, *N. montana*, plenty of Hall's totara (no ordinary totara), stiff-leaved mats of *Blechnum procerum*, thigh-lapping clumps of *Blechnum discolor*, and waist-high treelets of *Blechnum fraseri*. Many of the flowers of *Alseuosmia macrophylla* had been slit open, a novel practice on the part of silvereyes we were told.

We turned down the top end of the Ian Wells Track, where much *Hymenophyllum lyallii* was to be seen on the trunks of the silver tree-ferns, and began the gradual descent to Sandra's wintergarden. Soon we were tiptoeing past trackside groups of *Corybas* (*Corybas*) *oblongus*, then returning the salutes of their less bashful brothers *Corybas* ("Nematoceras") *acuminatus*, very martial-looking with their pointed helmets and red-braided leaves.

The first crossing of the Nihotupu Stream was explored, where this winds between rocky bryophyte-clothed banks under a canopy of pole podocarps (some larger Hall's totara at the stream edge) and tall tree-ferns (*Cyathea smithii*, *Dicksonia squarrosa*). On the bases of kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) there are a few colonies of *Grammitis pseudociliata*, and near the water's edge *Libertia micrantha* grows,

this being one of the two only Waitakeres localities for the species. On the stream's true left bank Sandra showed us a colony of cave wetas, in a drive she said had been dug by manganese prospectors long ago.

Rain accompanied us now through the irregular terrain left after the old-time milling and burning of large kauri here (stumps of c. 2 m diameter, hollow and charred). Cutty grass and manuka were relieved in one place by *Astelia grandis* and in another by *Eleocharis gracilis*. The hard clay retains water and makes the track a succession of sloughs, wallows and "brooks too broad for leaping", but thanks to the cutty-grass no-one went too deeply astray. We did make one short planned lateral to admire a group of wheki ponga (*Dicksonia fibrosa*), imperturbable in their cloaks and woolly underwear. The divaricating shrub *Raukaua anomalus*, malformed in orthography as well as morphology (cf. feminine *Ackama*, *Corokia*, *Hoheria*, *Mida*, *Tupeia*) was puzzled over. Easier to recognize were the trackside pelts of *Sphagnum falcatulum*, a moss that looks, as Jessica Beever has suggested, exactly like a drowned kitten.

A short way along the Nihotupu Auxiliary Reservoir road Sandra showed us a find of Harry Beacham's, a pair of 4 m tall horopito (*Pseudowintera colorata*) and a young *Phyllocladus toatoa* nearby. This only occurrence of horopito in the Ranges might just be some tricky bushman's planting; we had to suppose. Both individuals are multistemmed, are growing well, and had a profusion of flowers, but for some reason (the rain?) seedlings were not conspicuous in the damp scrub around. Because of a lack of data a lesser argument, about *Phyllocladus toatoa* as a rare plant in the Ranges and where the largest one might be found, fizzled. A pretty cool day thank you Sandra, may your flash-cards always be returned unfolded.