

Tangihua Ophiolite; serpentinite being softer erodes more freely, hence this description] to a depth of approximately one chain, and is about two chains across the front. It slopes down very steeply from the general plateau level in a deep bowl-like formation. The gales have swept bare the vegetation from the top edge for seven or eight feet back, leaving a collar of red volcanic clay almost giving it the appearance of having been cleared by man. This clear belt may possibly prove to be a blessing in disguise at some future date (in the way of a fire break) should the herb field on the plateau above happen to be fired during a very dry summer, as parts of it have been in the past. The rough nature of the position has also proved a definite advantage, as stock cannot enter, otherwise it would have been eaten out ages ago. However, it is very pleasing to see all the plant life intact and flourishing, probably just as the late Mr. Cheeseman saw it in 1896, when he first discovered the quaint little *Pittosporum*.

After collecting material for pressing and planting, we turned our thoughts to retracing our steps of the past day and a half. By three o'clock of the following afternoon we were back at our starting point, being slightly tender-footed but not tired, and with no regrets. Actually, we had expected the trek to have taken four days instead of three. The distance covered was not less than forty-six miles. The weather from start to finish was perfect, and as on the previous trip with the big three mentioned at the commencement of this report, we have very pleasant memories of it all.

Reference:

Taylor, M. 2002: Meanings and Origins of Botanical Names of New Zealand Plants. *Auckland Botanical Society Bulletin* 26.

An appreciation: Ross Michie (1894 – 1987)

Maureen Young

"You can't miss Ross Michie's house," Lucy Moore told Frank Hudson and me in July 1985 when we took her north to Kaitaia. "It has a giant concrete tulip in the middle of the lawn." Few people can drive through Kaitaia and not notice, and be astounded by, the amazing pink concrete house at 45 South Street. It does indeed have a "giant concrete tulip" in the middle of the lawn, and growing out of this colourful structure is a tall Kentia palm. The concrete fence is a crenellated symphony of pink and blue, with tiles and shells to add to its glory. The plants, rather than growing in beds, are contained in large concrete pots, again painted in pink, blue and other pastel colours, and freely decorated with shells (Fig. 1).

All these "rainbows of the naïve eye"¹ were the work of Ross Henry Michie (pronounced Mickie) (Fig. 2), and although the property is now somewhat faded and neglected, an idea can still be gained of what it was

Footnote about the aforementioned "big three".
(by Maureen Young)

Andrew Davidson Beddie (1880 – 1962). Scottish born stonemason who lived in Petone, NZ. He was a foundation member of the Wellington Botanical Society and collected many seeds and plants to stock Otari Native Botanic Garden. (Taylor 2002: 28).

Norman Potts (1886 – 1970) of Opotiki, grandson of T.H. Potts. He collected and grew NZ plants especially those of eastern North Island, NZ. (Taylor 2002: 146). Norman was a lawyer, and chairman of the Hikutaia Domain Board. He was awarded the Loder Cup in 1944, and was a foundation member of Auckland Botanical Society.

Maclean Cameron (Cam) Finlayson (1898 – 1969) was a bagpipe-playing Waipu Scotsman who lived in Warkworth for many years, where he worked for the Waitemata Electric Power Board. He was well known locally for his botanical interests.

Between three of the men on the 1944 trip, these plants were named in their honour: *Pittosporum michiei* [and a snail *Placostylis ambigiosus michiei* – endemic to the Surville Cliffs], *Chionochloa beddiei*, *Coriaria pottsiiana*, *Scirpus pottsi* [*Isolepis pottsi*], and *Myosotis petiolata* var. *pottsiiana*. Potts Peak in the Raukumara Range is also named for Norman Potts (John Kendrick pers. comm.)

like in Ross's heyday. His working life was spent farming near Kaitaia, and in the 1950s he bought a rough section on the outskirts of the town, and set about building the house and grounds that must have proved startling to his conservative farming colleagues. Ross came from a family with wide interests. His brother Charles was well known in astronomy circles, and Ross was a natural historian with several strings to his bow. He was interested in birds, and his observations were recorded in the Ornithological Society Journal "Notornis" in the 1950s. A species of flax snail from Kerr Point, North Cape, was named after him (*Placostylus ambagiosus michiei*). But it was as an amateur botanist with an extensive knowledge of the flora of the Far North that he was best known. Botanists and scientists from all over the country consulted Ross when they ventured north, and he could be relied on to lead them to the plants or sites that interested them. His specialty was the genus



Fig. 1. Ross Michie's house. Photo: B. Ikin & P. Wells, Reproduced with permission from *Art New Zealand*, Issue 18, Summer 1981.

Pittosporum, and when he showed us around his garden I counted eight species growing there. One of these was the little prostrate plant from the Surville Cliffs – “Lucy kindly gave it my name, *Pittosporum michiei*”, he said. RC (Bob) Cooper, then botanist at the Auckland Museum, consulted with Ross before he left for the USA to work towards his PhD in that genus. Bob reduced *P. michiei* to a subspecies of *P. pimeleoides* (*P. pimeleoides* subsp. *major*, now *P. pimeleoides* subsp. *majus*) – “Arrant nonsense, when they’re so clearly dissimilar”, said Ross.

To get back to our 1985 visit to Kaitaia - we drove to 45 South Street and were pleased to see an ancient form bending over the workbench in the garage. Ross was putting the finishing touches to gaudy pot number 1427. He was delighted to meet Lucy again, and called Mrs Michie outside to say hullo. He couldn't remember my name (he was quite severely deaf), and introduced me as Angela Winterbottom. After he had regaled us with many of his forthright opinions, Lucy persuaded him to show us his garden. Ross had visited the Three Kings in 1962 and had brought back plants including *Davallia tasmanii*, the fern that is endemic to those islands. He had a healthy patch in his garden and happily shared it with me. I still have it growing, and it gives me pleasure to trace it back to Ross's garden, and from there back to the Three Kings, 1962.

Two years later Frank and I again called on Ross. “Do I know you?” he asked. I bellowed in his ear, “I’m

Angela Winterbottom.” He roared with laughter, and knew then that we had been there before. We gave him the sad news that Lucy was fading away. “Poor girl,” he said. “The two Lucys were always so kind to me.” I couldn’t miss the opportunity of buying one of his distinctive pots – a small one with a pattern of diamonds but alas, no shells (number 1731). He wanted to give me a plant to put in it, so I requested some *Psilotum nudum*, as this was popping up freely



Fig. 2. Ross Michie. Photo: B. Ikin & P. Wells, Reproduced with permission from *Art New Zealand*, Issue 18, Summer 1981.

in most of his large pots. The *Psilotum* did not survive, but I still treasure the pot, and hope soon to have some *Pittosporum michiei* (I still cling to that

name) to grow in it. We were afraid that we were tiring the old man, but had great difficulty stemming the flow of stories and opinions.

Lucy Moore died a few days later, on 9 June 1987. Mrs Michie passed away quietly in her sleep on 11 July 1987, and Ross followed her, aged 93, on 27 October of the same year.

Like Joe Rawlings (Esler 2006), Ross was a character who could fairly be described as an unstandardised man. He had strong and unconventional opinions on many subjects, and had no compunction about expressing them bluntly. He came from a generation that had not heard of Political Correctness, and tact was not an attribute that he valued. Every visitor to the workshop in his garage would have come away with a clutch of colourful quotes. His pithy description of the propensity of *Pittosporum fairchildii* to hybridise with all and sundry, does not bear repeating in this

polite publication. He spoke in scathing tones of one scientist with whom he spent time in the field. "Anyone can be cheerful at the beginning of the day, but at the end of the day, when you're worn out, that is the time that tells what kind of person you are. I can't be bothered with tantrums and sulks". I always try to keep this in mind when I'm tired at the end of a long day's botanising.

Katie Mays wrote a short obituary to Ross Michie in the Auckland Botanical Society Journal (Mays 1988), with line drawings of five different leaf forms taken from the one tree of *Pittosporum virgatum* in Ross's garden.

There are thirty-one R.H. Michie specimens in the Auckland Museum Herbarium (AK), all from the Far North. These include a suite of *Pseudopanax* hybrids, mostly collected from Ninety-Mile Beach. Ten more specimens are from Ross's garden but lodged by other people.

References:

- Esler, A.E. 2006: An appreciation Joe Rawlings (1906-1978). *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 61:128-129
Ikin, B.; Wells, P. 1981: Rainbows of the Naïve Eye. *Art New Zealand* 18
<http://art-newzealand.com/Issues11to20/naive.htm>
Mays, K. 1988: Ross Michie. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 43: 39-40.
Michie, R.H. 1963: A visit to the Three Kings Islands: *Auckland Botanical Society Newsletter* 20: 3-6.

Book Review:

"Wild orchids of the lower North Island" by P. de Lange, J. Rolfe, I. St George and J. Sawyer. 2007. Dept of Conservation, Wellington. 194 pp. \$19.95.

Reviewed by Rhys Gardner

Despite the limited (though, ever increasing) number of native orchid species in this country, our enthusiasts are well served by the popular literature; a third edition of the NZ Native Orchid Group's field guide has recently been offered (St George et al., 2005) and second-hand copies of the classics (Cooper 1981; Johns & Molloy 1983; St George 1999) can still be obtained.

The small print under the present book's title suggests it too might be "just" a Field Guide, but in some respects, particularly the detail of the maps and descriptions, Flora standards are approached. Only the Manawatu Gorge to Cook Strait region is covered however, in which there are 72 species (or aggregates), that is, just 3/4 of the NZ orchid flora as currently named.

An introductory illustrated table presents eleven recognizable groups: epiphytic orchids, greenhood orchids, sun orchids, spider orchids (for the *Corybas* s.l. species, which I would have called helmet orchids), *Caladenia* orchids (none of which have been retained in this genus), etc. A second such "finder" sets out by altitude and habitat the kinds of places the species can be found in, and includes the encouraging figure of 28 for "plantation forest", very relevant to restoration

projects in the region. A third finder groups the orchids by flower colour, and a fourth (printed rather alarmingly in black, the only non-colour section in the book) sets out their flowering times.

The taxa are treated alphabetically. The lengthiness of the descriptions is partly because the generic characters have to be repeated, but also because extensive notes on colouring are given. There is a highlighted "recognition panel", sometimes lengthy too but ensuring a good filling of the page. The two or three colour photographs of each taxon are crisp and well-framed, with only a couple of exceptions (I have yet to see a really good photo of a *Spiranthes*). The principal contributing photographers, Ian St George, Jeremy Rolfe, and Eric Scanlen, and also newcomer Michael Pratt, are to be congratulated for carrying out what must have been many months of damp-fronted searching.

In the photographs, the size of the plant, inflorescence or flower has to be deduced from the text. I favour having scale objects in photos, human body (parts) in particular, but admit that a muddy hand around the base of an orchid stem is inartistic and could send the wrong message. (One of the photos here contains an "old five cent piece", not quite as convenient-sized as