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Field Trip to Tomarata Lakes, 16 February 2008

Maureen Young & Mike Wilcox

There are few dune lakes on the east coast of Northland, but the three Tomarata Lakes are an exception. The dunes between the lakes and the coast are occupied by the Mangawhai Forest – a 1200 ha block of *Pinus radiata*, originally planted 1963-1984, and now being progressively harvested, with large areas replanted in second rotation trees. Mangawhai Forest was originally planted by the New Zealand Forest Service to stabilise drifting sands and prevent them spreading onto neighbouring farms. It was subsequently purchased in 1990 by Carter Holt Harvey Ltd, and in 2005 sold on to The Rayonier Deutsches Bank consortium. The soils are sandy, some very podsolised and impoverished.



Fig. 1. Tomarata Lake, Mangawhai (Mike Wilcox, 8 Dec 2004)

All three lakes have a sorry history of degradation, by having the surrounding vegetation cleared right down to the lake edges then being grazed, and in the case of Tomarata Lake itself (Fig. 1), of being planted

inappropriately, and being used, or misused, as a recreational area. The illegal release of the freshwater fish, rudd, has ensured that the natural values of the underwater vegetation are similarly degraded (P.D. Champion, pers. comm.).

Slipper Lake, the most northern of the three, was not visited by us. The largest, Spectacle Lake, has a small marginal area on the point separating the two "lenses" of the "spectacles" that is fenced and administered by the Department of Conservation. By kind permission of the neighbouring farmer we were able to drive down a long farm race and park near the point. The vegetation comprised *Eleocharis sphacelata* and *Typha orientalis* on the outer edges, moving inwards through *Baumea articulata* to a tangle of rushes and sedges tied together with pink bindweed, *Calystegia sepium* subsp. *roseata*. Also abundant were water fern (*Histiopteris incisa*), swamp millet (*Isachne globosa*), reed sweet grass (*Glyceria maxima*), alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) and *Carex longii*. *Coprosma tenuicaulis* was quite common and on the drier land were some totara trees (*Podocarpus totara*). At the northern end were attractive bright green mounds of *Hypolepis distans*, and thickets of *H. ambigua*. In the damp pasture grew *Isolepis prolifer*, and water pepper, *Persicaria hydropiper*, with very peppery tasting leaves. Farming lore has it that once the water pepper has finished seeding it loses the hot taste and stock can eat it. Sand mining is taking place on the eastern edge of this lake, and an application has lately been lodged for consent to mine below groundwater level, thus forming a new lake.

Lunch was to be a picnic in the shade of the trees bordering Tomarata Lake, but as luck would have it, a heavy shower passed over at that time, so the vehicles provided shelter. A walk around the NE side of the lake revealed a narrow border of native species. Kanuka was common, and the silky leaves caused us

to wonder if it might be *Kunzea ericoides* var. *linearis*. Manuka was less common, with *Leucopogon fasciculatus*, *Dianella nigra*, *Morelotia affinis* and *Lepidosperma laterale*. The *Pomaderris* caused comment, and Maureen's claim that it was *P. hamiltonii* although doubted by some at the time, was later confirmed by two herbarium records collected nearby – one of which was a flowering specimen with comments on the pale flowers (AK 224025), and one from as far back as 1978 (AK 269440). A good stand of *Baumea arthropphylla* ('Sparse', on Auckland Threatened Plant List) growing in the shallow water allowed us to compare this with other species of the genus, especially *B. rubiginosa*. The former has a longer inflorescence, and the lowest branchlet is very narrow and often drooping. Also seen were *B. juncea*, *B. articulata* and *B. teretifolia*. Two introduced rushes were *Juncus bulbosus* growing in wet ground near the lake edge, and *J. dichotomus*, distinguished by the difficulty one has in pulling it from the ground.

As the informal track began to peter out, we pushed through much umbrella fern, *Gleichenia dicarpa*, and occasional *Lycopodiella cernua*, and finally came to the promised *Empodisma minus* ('Regionally Critical'). This peat-forming restiad was present in swathes of bright green wirey growth. No flowers could be found, but many sheaths sported tufts of fine white hairs. This population belies the stated claim in the wetland plant book by Johnson & Brooke (1995) that it no longer occurs north of Auckland City (it is still to be found in the Far North too, notably the Shenstone Block, Te Paki Farm Park).

Acknowledgements

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A fine, but inaccessible swamp was visible on the other side of the lake, with *Eleocharis sphacelata*, *Typha orientalis*, and *Baumea articulata* on the water's edge, and grading back to a manuka/flax wetland.

Planted trees noted included coast wattle (*Acacia sophorae*) abundantly naturalised, radiata pine (*Pinus radiata*), maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*), cork oak (*Quercus suber*), brush box (*Lophostemon confertus*), willow bottlebrush (*Callistemon salignus*), crimson bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus*), *Eucalyptus botryoides*, and grey ironbark (*Eucalyptus paniculata*). On the rough bark of the ironbark an empty cocoon was found, and it took Mike next to no time to spot a large, colourful caterpillar of the gum emperor moth eating the foliage.

A few people had a quick visit to Te Arai Point, which was beautiful in the afternoon sun, and a new plant for us on the dunes was the yellow-flowered beach evening primrose, *Oenothera drummondii*. It is new for the Flora writers too, as it does not appear in Flora Volume IV – it was first collected at Te Arai by R. Smith, April 1997, AK 234463 (Heenan et al. 2002).

Attendance (22) Colleen Brewer, Warren Brewer, Jan Butcher, Lisa Clapperton, Brian Cumber, Chris Ferkins, Jo Fillery, Liz Furkert, Leslie Haines, Kristy Hall, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop, Peter Hutton, Helen Preston Jones, John Kendrick, Elaine Marshall, John Millett, Juliet Richmond, Doug Sheppard, Alison Wesley, Mike Wilcox, Tony Williams, Maureen Young (leader).

Trip Report: Waiomu Kauri Grove Track, Coromandel Peninsula, 15 March 2008

Mike Wilcox

We were blessed with a beautiful late summer day for this visit to the Coromandel Peninsula. People gathered at the Waiomu Café and then headed up the Waiomu Valley Road where cars were parked and the walk commenced.

Those attending were: Alison Wesley, Brian Cumber, Colleen Crampton, Doug Sheppard, Elaine Marshall, Frances Duff, Helen Preston Jones, Jan Butcher, John Smith-Dodsworth, James Lee, Jorma Lee, Josh Salter,

Juliet Richmond, Katarina Brink, Leslie Haines, Mike Wilcox, Pam Dale, Richard Hursthouse, Tony Williams. A species list was handed out, with promises of chocolate fish for significant additions. Such was the incentive engendered by this offer that new discoveries came thick and fast throughout the day.

The trip is best described in three stages – the lower approaches, the middle boulder-hopping section, and the upper kauri grove and beyond.