

THE CHATHAM ISLANDS VISIT 27 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2007

AN INTRODUCTION

Pat Morris

There were 19 participants, 5 professional botanists, some knowledgeable non professionals and a few, like the writer, interested, but not so well informed.

We flew in a Convair 580 for 2 hours and were met by the smiling Val Croon Jnr, his parents, and Alison Davis our chief guide. Indeed friendliness and smiles we met everywhere. Val had organized our itinerary which was both extensive and varied. We were fortunate to have Alison as our driver. She was cheerful, knowledgeable and unflappable.

We settled into our accommodation –some of us at the newer Hotel Chatham and others at the lovely former hotel now called The Travellers Rest. We all ate together at the Hotel –fabulous food and great lunches to take into the field. We were also privileged to eat at some private homes, all of which had beautiful gardens, and the local community at Kaingaroa provided us with a sumptuous repast. All these meals were wonderfully varied and nutritious. Of course seafood – blue cod, crayfish, prawns, mussels etc. – were served up to us on most occasions including at Hotel Chatham. It was hard to stop eating!

The diversity of the landscape was impressive – a geologists' dream. We saw sandy shores, rocky shores, huge multi-coloured cliffs, peaty ground, red and orange rocks, black rocks, volcanic cones. Not to mention the fossilized scallops and the amazing basalt columns at Ohira Bay.

We were on a botanical trip after all and we were treated to an array of endemic and indigenous plants. Many of the plants were familiar e.g. hebes, dracophyllums, *Corynocarpus* (karaka to us but kopi to the Chatham Islander) but of course most of the species were distinct. We could not but marvel at the size of the leaves. We noted the absence of divaricating shrubs and even those that on the mainland have juvenile divaricating forms did not seem to have them on The Chathams.

For me the most impressive plants were *Myosotidium hortensia* – oh that I could grow such beauties in my garden – *Embergeria grandifolia* and *Leptinella featherstonii*. I found it fascinating, but obviously not for those

who live there, to see the spread of *Ugni molinae* (Chilean guava) –a real pest in certain areas and I couldn't even keep one alive in a pot here.

DOC has done a great job in conjunction with many of the landowners in protecting and restoring the unique habitats. There are twenty reserves on the Islands and these have seen the resurgence of many threatened plants and animals.

It was wonderful to see the Moriori dendroglyphs on the kopi trees in the Hapupu Reserve and it is sad to hear that they are diminishing in number as the trunks mature.

For me the trip to Pitt Island – a 20 minute plane trip from Waitangi – was of special interest as my teacher from Standard 3 came from there. Her great nephews were at Sumner School with my children and I remember one of them saying that his fisherman father had been eaten by 27 sharks. Small wonder that nobody swims for pleasure in The Chathams! On Pitt Island we were driven around by Bubbles, a very friendly and able young woman keen to learn as much as possible about the plants. Her sister, who was striding around with a gun over her shoulder, was married to the pilot of our little plane. Everyone seemed to be related one way or another. The inhabitants of Pitt – all 35 of them – have to be 'masters of all trades' as there are no resident electricians, plumbers, carpenters, etc. It's not just the men either. The 'number 8 wire' mentality is alive and well on The Chathams; do-it-yourself is the order of the day.

28 NOVEMBER – KOPINGA MARAE, OWENGA, RANGAIKA RESERVE

Bryony Macmillan

Being our first day this produced a kaleidoscope of impressions of the landscape, island life, Moriori history, largely endemic plants, and getting to know our guide and driver Alison Davis.

The visit to Kopinga Marae along the Owenga Road from Waitangi gave us an introduction to the Moriori revival. Built to a Moriori design, pentagonal, and opened in 2004, it is imbued with their history in modern art, explained by our host and orator Mana. We took the opportunity to enjoy and photograph the endemic species growing in the surrounding garden. Chatham Island toetoe (*Cortaderia turbaria*) in flower made a fine background.