

TWO WEEKEND CAMPS IN THE KAIKOURA AREA

NOVEMBER 2007 AND NOVEMBER 2008

Trevor Blogg

The Society has held two exploratory outings to the Kaikoura area (coastal North Canterbury, South Island).

Of particular interest is the Blue Duck Scientific Reserve, a Crown reserve managed by Department of Conservation, Nelson District. This reserve is un-tracked and on steep land. Moving through it requires a little care in navigation, but the effort of finding one's way under the canopy is well rewarded – more details are noted below.

On the 2007 outing, 5 members stayed at the Canterbury Underwater Club's excellent facilities and, with Sally Tripp and her husband Dick, explored the following areas –

Friday morning - Mt Fyffe hinau (*Elaeocarpus dentatus*) grove. As well as an abundance of mature hinau, we also found a variety of ferns, including the "velvet fern" *Lastreopsis velutina*, and small-leaf shrubs, notably *Melicope simplex*. In addition to several small-leaf coprosmas (the 'usual suspects', *C. propinqua*, *C. rhamnoides*, *C. crassifolia*, *C. rotundifolia*) there is also *C. lucida*, *C. robusta* and *C. grandifolia*. All the reserves we visited in 2007 had abundant *Fuchsia excorticata*, in flower, as well as tall *Kunzea ericoides* and shorter *Leptospermum scoparium*.

In the afternoon we visited an area modestly labelled "Forest Walk" by DOC. This turned out to be an exceptional podocarp remnant known as the Fyffe-Palmer reserve, and is well worth a visit even for the most casual outdoors person. We were treated to very large matai, miro, the two totara species, plus rimu and kahikatea. Sally was especially impressed to find a large range of ferns including the first filmy ferns (*Trichomanes venosum*) and some *Hymenophyllum* species, the "lace fern" *Leptolepia novae-zelandiae* and large amounts of *Lastreopsis velutina* and *Tmesipteris elongata*, the latter at times drooping into the track area from the numerous tree-fern trunks.

We were puzzled by a very tall totara (genus confirmed by binoculars) whose habit is closer to that of a cedar (*Libocedris bidwillii*) than to any other New Zealand gymnosperm, and we thus deduced it was more likely to be the thin-barked *Podocarpus hallii* than *P. totara*. It is on very steep land (as is most of the Fyffe-Palmer track) and we couldn't get close

enough to confirm this. Many other tree species and tree-ferns are of exceptional size.

Three rata-vine species are present (*Metrosideros diffusa*, *M. perforata* and *M. colensoi*). Of concern, is the ingress of “old-man’s beard”, *Clematis vitalba*. We hope that DOC has plans to eradicate this invasion – we removed several smaller plants.

Saturday was predicted to be fine, so we chose this day for our investigation of the Blue Duck reserve, but first we visited the QEII covenant land adjacent to Ken and Margaret Hamilton’s Clematis Grove property – the track through the covenant provides a natural history bonus for those staying at the Clematis Grove B & B accommodation. We were joined by our president, Ryan Young, and by Sally and Tim Blunt, also Kaikoura area QEII covenant holders.

The covenant is of particular interest for the high density of *Streblus heterophyllus*, some being large trees, but has numerous other species, including the occasional nikau palm (*Rhopalostylis sapida*) and a few very large podocarps. I was particularly impressed by a hinau (*Elaeocarpus dentatus*) in full flower, where the sloping ground gave us close access to its canopy – the flower is quite remarkable when viewed through a hand-lens. Again we found the “velvet-fern”, and many others including much of the spectrum of *Asplenium* and *Blechnum* species and the tree ferns, *Dicksonia* and *Cyathea*. Mistletoes present include *Tupeia antarctica*.

We tackled the Blue Duck Reserve (which covers a good range of altitude) from the road at its base. Once we were under the forest canopy, progress was quite easy. There is a notable absence of ‘bush lawyer’ (*Rubus* spp.) to impede progress. The lianes of note were rata vines (*Metrosideros* spp.), *Muehlenbeckia australis* and native *Clematis* spp. and supplejack (*Ripogonum scandens*), some with girths up to about 25 cm diameter at their bases. We soon saw signs of deer-browse, though not severe, which no doubt helps with the under-canopy access. Significant areas near the edges of the reserve have been previously logged and now support a closed-canopy tree-fern forest. We started to spot botanical treasures such as nikau palm, the *Lastreopsis* ferns (yes, more “velvet fern”), and a curiously dark-green-leaved *Neomyrtus pedunculata*. Pigeonwood (*Hedycaria arborea*) abounds and small-leaf shrubs include much *Coprosma areolata* and *C. rhamnoides*. As with the Fyffe-Palmer reserve of the previous day, we soon progressed to an un-logged area, with a richness of very large podocarps, though very few miro (*Prumnopitys ferruginea*). Epiphytes abounded including the *Griselinia* species, *Pyrrosia eleagnifolia* and (of course) an abundance of *Tmesipteris* on the tree-fern trunks. The danger of the “widow-maker” *Collospermum*

hastatum with its tendency to fall off trees and fell those walking beneath was drawn to our attention by Miles Giller!

There were probably 2 highlights to the day, the first when we found our first tawa (*Beilschmiedia tawa*) trees. These ranged up to about 50cm dbh, with good recruitment of seedlings. Soon after lunch we found the second highlight – a recently wind-felled kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydiodes*) with a full load of epiphytes including the perching orchids *Earina mucronata*, *E. autumnalis* and *Drymoanthus adversus* brought to little above ground level. Less positive was a recently used pig-wallow we passed shortly before seeing these delights.

We made modest additions to the very thorough list published by David Norton and Shannel Courtney in the Society's Journal 34, 2000. These were – *Raukaua anomalus* and *Hymenophyllum dilatatum*. (Of the 47 fern species listed Sally Tripp identified 35, plus the new addition making 36 out of 48).

The Sunday morning trip suggested by the Gillers was Puhi-puhi reserve near the Hapuku River, where we added *Lophomyrtus obcordata* to our small-leaf shrub observations. Another 3 or 4 km further up the Hapuku valley, a limestone road-cutting revealed *Pachystegia minor*, *Brachyglottis monroi*, *Heliohebe hulkeana*, *Clematis afoliata* and *Gingidia montana* (also seen at Blue Duck reserve). Alastair Macdonald located a *Celmisia* (possibly *semicordata*) in the river bed and Miles pointed out the (purportedly-threatened status) *Vittadinia australis*.

At the road-bridge crossing of the Hapuku gorge, most of the group stopped to look at the vegetation growing on the limestone faces. This includes *Pachystegia insignis*, a lot of *Heliohebe hulkeana* and a variety of herbs including *Linum monogynum*². Sally Tripp was pleased to find *Asplenium lyallii*. As in most areas that we visited over the weekend, the *Hebes* were largely limited to variations of *H. traversii* and *H. salicifolia* (occasionally *H. stricta*). We thank Alastair for his diligent identification of all the *Hebe* variations.

Just under 1 year later, 9 members attended a camp, also based at the Canterbury Underwater Club.

For most, this included their first visit to the Blue Duck Scientific reserve. On the advice of a local natural-history enthusiast (Barry Dunnett), we started at a point where the Valley road crosses a small saddle, and allows a more gentle approach to the centre of the reserve, via a spur.

² Erroneously reported by T.B. in the Society's Newsletter as *Linum catharticum*.

This route didn't yield any new species compared to the previous year, but did allow many of us to get to the tawa trees mentioned above, and to observe the apparatus for a tawa recruitment study which the University of Canterbury has in progress. (Fig. 1). As tawa are at their known (east coast) southern limit at the Blue Duck reserve, they are of particular interest. The entrance route, moreover, was quite interesting, being a closed canopy tree-fern forest for a large part of the way. Under the tree-ferns, non-New Zealand plants were notably (and refreshingly) absent. We were also able to photograph *Libertia grandiflora* and wineberry (*Aristotelia serrata*), both in flower at the edge of the reserve.

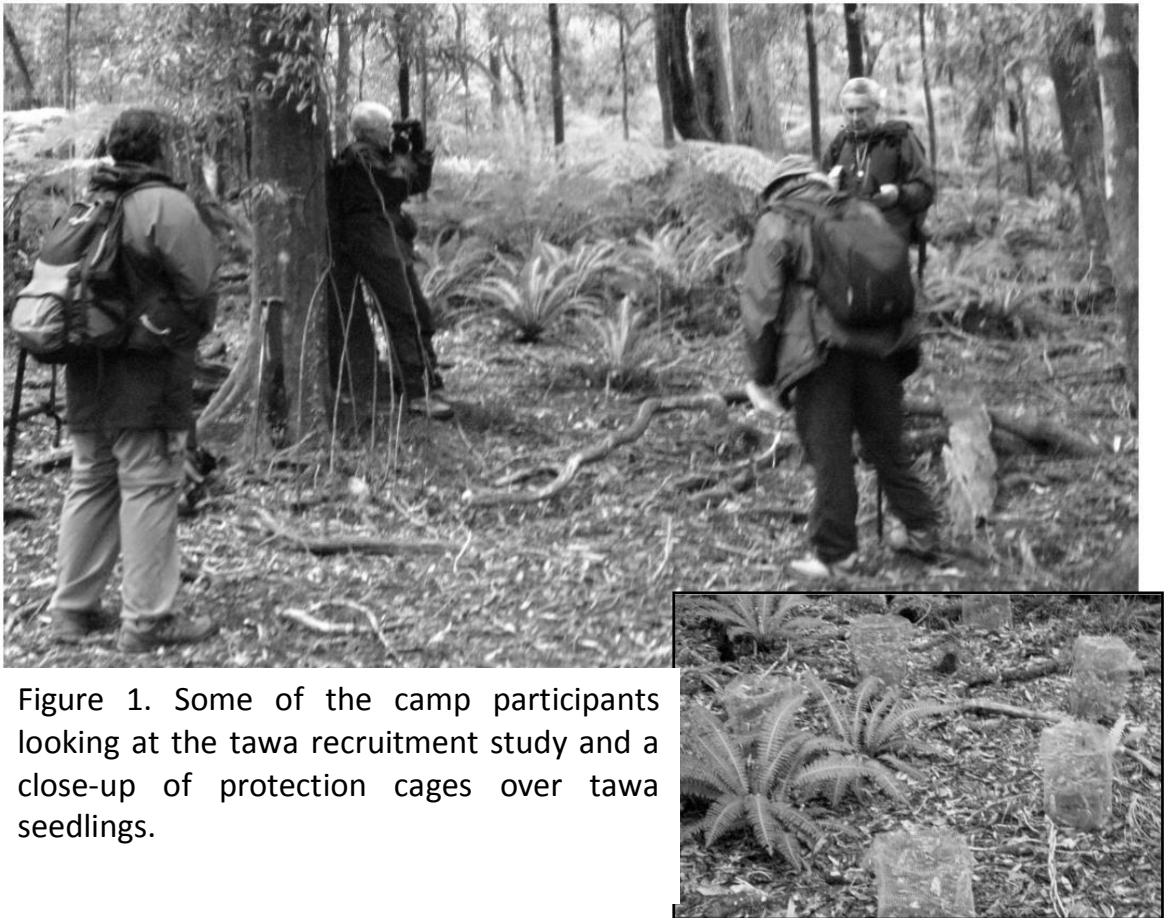


Figure 1. Some of the camp participants looking at the tawa recruitment study and a close-up of protection cages over tawa seedlings.

An early evening crossing, under the guidance of Barry Dunnett, by four wheel drive vehicles of a brisk, though not swollen, Hapuku River and a few more km of rough track brought us within an easy walk of a very large totara tree (*Podocarpus totara*) believed to be one of the largest in the South Island. We stopped to photograph orchids (*Pterostylis graminea*) nearby. There were also hinau and *Pennantia corymbosa* (kaikomako) trees in flower in the vicinity.

The following morning, we had permission to use the 4-wheel drive road up Mt. Fyffe, and drove in two vehicles as far as the DOC accommodation hut at about 1000m. While 5 members explored the rich flora in the

vicinity of the hut, four of us tramped the remaining 600 vertical metres to the summit ridge, to explore the more sparse, but equally rewarding alpine vegetation. Near the summit, the southeast slope is covered with exotic trees, primarily *Pinus spp.* which were planted in a (now seen as) naïve experiment in slope stabilization – which have likely suppressed many of the specialist scree-slope plants (e.g. *Notothlaspi spp.*, *Lignocarpa carnulosa*, *Stellaria roughii*) which would otherwise likely be found on the slope. Unless controlled in the near future, the pines threaten to destroy the remaining vestiges of native vegetation at Mt. Fyffe summit.

We were glad to have a Mt. Fyffe species list compiled by the Nelson Botanical Society, (NBS) and supplied to us on very short notice by Shannel Courtney of Nelson DOC. We were able to confirm the presence of *Hebe rigidula*, well outside of the distribution shown in Bayly and Kellow's "Hebes", and have lodged samples with Lincoln Landcare (H.H.Allan) Herbarium. Alastair Macdonald found several "iconic" alpine species not noted on the NBS list, namely *Haastia pulvinaris*, *H. recurva* and *Stellaria roughii*. He also noted *Hebe leiophylla* and *H. stricta var atkinsonii*. Other species which we added to the NBS list were – *Ranunculus insignis*, *Hebe pinguifolia*, *H. odora* and *Carmichaelia monroi*; *Brachyglottis lagopus* was common at ca. 1000m (*B. bellidioides* was noted by NBS, but not seen). Paul Maurice noted and photographed an unusual (and yet to be identified) *Celmisia* (with some *densiflora* characteristics), and a single plant of *Lobelia (Pratia) macrodon* was seen to confirm the NBS sighting.

We stopped several times during the drive down to observe and photograph various plants, including a very fine *Aciphylla* believed to be *A. squarrosa* (another addition to the NBS list). We also saw a large 'mystery' *Aciphylla* at ca. 950m which appears to share many characteristics of *A. scott-thomsonii* and *A. squarrosa* – could it be a hybrid of the two? There was a photo-stop for abundant *Heliohebe hulkeana* in full flower by the roadside.

Prior to driving back home, the following day saw the group in the Fyffe-Palmer reserve, where the abundant *Tmesipteris* was noted – only *T. elongata* was positively identified.

Acknowledgements

The author's thanks go to Gillian and Miles Giller, Sally Tripp, Alastair Macdonald and Paul Maurice for their assistance in identifying many of the species referred to in this article.