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Pittosporum kirkii on Mt Tamahunga

Maureen Young

Pittosporum kirkii (Pittosporaceae) is a small tree with thick, leathery leaves that broaden towards a rounded tip, and with red petioles. The flowers are yellow, and the large capsule has two valves. The plant usually grows as an epiphyte, but occasionally it grows on the ground, mainly on rocky bluffs. It is found at higher altitudes, mostly higher than 250 m, and is nowhere common; indeed, it features in the threatened plant lists of both Northland and Auckland (Forester & Townsend 2004; Stanley et al. 2005). Although it can be seen on the higher reaches of both Little and Great Barrier Islands, there are no modern herbarium records from the area between Waipoua Forest and the Waitakere Range. The southern limit is just south of Tongariro National Park. The type locality is Great Barrier Island, which Thomas Kirk visited in December 1867. In his paper "On the botany of Great Barrier Island" Kirk (1868) noted it there as "Pittosporum n.s. [new species]?". By the time he published "On the botany and conchology of Great Omaha" (1872), J.D. Hooker had given the plant Kirk's name.

In September 1864 a group of Waikato Maori prisoners escaped from detention on Kawau Island and set up camp near the summit of Mt Tamahunga (439m), west of Leigh. How long they remained there I don't know, but it was long enough for the local settlers to become well used to their presence. The Meiklejohn family farmed at the base of Tamahunga, (then known as Mt Hamilton), and on one occasion John Meiklejohn guided botanist Thomas



Fig. 1. Distribution map for *P. kirkii*, from records held in Auckland Museum Herbarium (AK), and from pers. obs. Open circles denote historic records, closed circles denote recent records. Drawn by the author.

Kirk to the summit. The Maori were familiar with Meiklejohn, but became very excited on seeing Kirk, as they thought he might be an army man. The two men had to mount a tree stump to escape an attack with tomahawks, and things looked grim until the wife of a local chief intervened and calmed matters.

In his paper "On the botany and conchology of Great Omaha", Kirk (1872) wrote "....on the summit of Mt Hamilton Pittosporum kirkii is epiphytic on the rata and other trees". This record excited my curiosity, as I had been searching for this plant in Lower Northland for many years, and had presumed that either there was no territory of sufficient altitude, or that pests had eliminated it. In June 2010, on being invited to accompany a small party who were visiting Tamahunga to build a stile and monitor predator traps, I carefully checked each of the large rata trees that we passed as we climbed up one ridge and down another. On the largest of these trees was a thick collar composed of Collospermum hastatum and Astelia solandri, and growing out of this was a doubletrunked shrub of Pittosporum kirkii. It grew too high up the tree to get a specimen, but on searching the ground beneath, a small twig with four fresh leaves

was found, and also a large, oval capsule. These have been lodged in the herbarium of the Auckland Museum as a voucher of this exciting find, unrecorded in the intervening 140+ years since Kirk's visit.



Fig. 2. *Pittosporum kirkii* growing on the Thumb (Mt Herekohu) Little Barrier Island, Oct. 2009. Photo: Alison Wesley.

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The lichens of Smith's Bush

Dan Blanchon, Carol Elliott and Rick Kooperberg

Smith's Bush is an important bush reserve on Auckland's North Shore. For an urban reserve, the bush has a great deal of value as it is a remnant of kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) and matai (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*) forest with large puriri (*Vitex lucens*) and taraire (*Beilschmiedia tarairi*), and regenerating kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*), mahoe (*Melicytus ramiflorus*) and kowhai (*Sophora* sp.) (Fig. 1).

The Auckland Botanical Society (ABS) has a long and somewhat bittersweet association with the reserve. In 1942/1943, the ABS, the museum council and Lucy Cranwell campaigned and raised money to purchase Smith's Bush as a reserve (Anon. 1952). Unfortunately, despite vigorous protests, the Northern Motorway was subsequently built through the middle of Smith's Bush, reducing the reserve to two blocks of 6 and 1.25 ha in 1959 (Cameron 1988). ABS has visited and recorded the plants twice, in 1952 (Anon 1952) and 1977 (MacArthur 1977), but it



Fig. 1. Smith's Bush, Northcote. All photos: D. Blanchon, 29 Sep 2010.