

Trip report: Duck Creek Reserve and Glen Kowhai Reserve, Mahurangi, 17 October 2015

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Duck Creek is a small tributary of the Mahurangi River, and two reserves stretch uphill from the true right bank of the creek: Duck Creek Reserve is a 14.6 ha reserve purchased in 1980 and administered by the Department of Conservation, and Glen Kowhai Reserve is a small 4.4 ha reserve purchased by the Rodney Council in 2005, and it is now administered by the Auckland Council. For a map of the reserves see Young (2011). The latter was once part of the Glen Kowhai property owned by the Morrison family of orchardists.

Three periods of habitation have left a mark on the land, and the participants of the field trip had these pointed out to them –

- (1) In pre-European times the whole area was a food basket for the Maori inhabitants.
- (2) The kauri along the Mahurangi and tributaries was logged from the early 1820s onwards for most of the 19th century, and a second cut was taken from Duck Creek between 1926 and 1930 (Esler et al. 1987).
- (3) Before the mid-1930s the Morrison children crossed Duck Creek and walked through the bush to the banks of the Mahurangi to catch the school launch.

A kindly farmer allowed us to park on his property, and we accessed Duck Creek Reserve by the start of the Morrison children's school track. Although we could step from rock to rock across the creek (Fig. 1), a rusty bolt remained affixed to a rock where there was once a small bridge for the children. While still on the creek-side rocks we were confronted by a spray of the greenish male flowers of *Clematis cunninghamii* (Fig. 2), and we later saw female flowers (Fig. 3). Also on the creek edge were several plants of *Libertia ixioides* in early flower. A couple of large matai (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*) marked the beginning of the track, which then led uphill past the first plant of the velvet fern (*Lastreopsis velutina*), and button fern (*Pellaea rotundifolia*).



Fig. 1. Duck Creek looking downstream from crossing point. Photo: J. Salter. All photos taken on 17 Oct 2015.



Fig. 2. *Clematis cunninghamii* male flowers. Photo: P. Moll.



Fig. 3. *Clematis cunninghamii* female flowers. Photo: J. Salter.



Fig. 4. *Cyrtostylis oblonga* in flower. Photo: P. Moll.



Fig. 5. *Corybas oblonga*, single plant, in flower. Photo: P. Moll.



Fig. 6. Enigmatic old kettle hanging from a branch. Photo: J. Salter.

Soon we left the track and headed up a ridge on a trail that had been marked previously with pink tape. The ridge had a covering of third-growth kauri rickers. On the forest floor there was a mass flowering of the gnat orchid, *Cyrtostylis oblonga* (Fig. 4), a single plant of tiny *Corybas oblongus* in flower (Fig. 5), *Pterostylis agathicola*, *P. graminea*, and the remains of what could reasonably be identified as *P. brumalis*. A tuft of kauri grass, *Astelia trinervia*, marked the first two kumara pits seen on the day. A small blackened old kettle hanging from a branch was presumed to be a left-over from the old-time bushmen's smoko (Fig. 6).

The marked trail then diverted around the head of a gully towards a deep groove on the neighbouring ridge. This groove marked the path of logs as they were dragged down the ridge to the creek edge when the second cut of kauri was undertaken. Mairehau (*Leionema nudum*), a scarce shrub in the

district, grows quite commonly beside the groove, and was in early flower (Fig. 7), which kept the cameras clicking. The many plants of *Alseuosmia macrophylla* held on to a few flowers (Fig. 8), the remains of a mass flowering of a couple of weeks earlier. As we headed to the higher part of the bush a cluster of buds was seen on a vine of *Parsonsia*; two buds had opened sufficiently to identify the vine as *P. capsularis*, the least common of the two species in the area. A nice surprise, and an appropriate one considering the connection of Dr. W.M. Hamilton to the district, was a tall flowering plant of *Pomaderris hamiltonii*.

Near the fence line we came to six well-defined kumara pits, and decided that this was a suitable place for a lunch stop. After lunch we retraced our steps downhill and rejoined the track. The character of the bush changed to lush riverine forest, with huge titoki (*Alectryon excelsus*) a feature on dry,



Fig. 7. *Leionema nudum* in early flower. Photo: P. Moll.

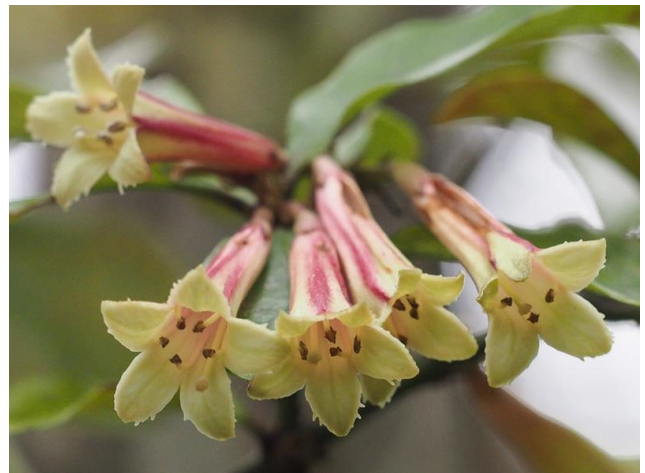


Fig. 8. *Alseuosmia macrophylla* flowers. Photo: P. Moll.



Fig. 9. Large kauri at edge of Duck Creek. Photo: J. Salter.



Fig. 10. Tall beech trees in Duck Creek Reserve. Photo: J. Salter.



Fig. 11. Fresh green leaves of beech seedlings. Photo: J. Salter.

rocky slopes. Plants suited to this habitat include *Rhabdothamnus solandri*, *Asplenium lamprophyllum*, *A. bulbiferum*, *Polystichum neozelandicum*, and mangleo (*Litsea calicaris*), but even kauri were thriving at the creek edge (Fig. 9). A group of mature hard beech trees (*Fuscospora truncata*) grow in a gully (Fig. 10), with occasional seedlings beneath (Fig. 11). By searching, drying anthers and stamens of male beech flowers could be found on the ground, from what must have been a prolific flowering. A flower of tutukiwi (*Pterostylis banksii*) underwent the traditional "tickling" of the irritable labellum to watch it flick backwards. Plenty of kowhai (*Sophora chathamica*), which gave the name to the Glen Kowhai property, was in evidence, though it had just finished flowering.

As we followed the upper arm of the loop track we came to some ladder fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*), growing for a few metres only; this could quite easily be removed. By this time the density of climbing asparagus (*Asparagus scandens*) was increasing from the occasional plant to an infestation of massive proportions. Both of these plants would have been escapees from the garden of the Morrisons, keen horticulturalists. The track zig-zagged down to the creek-edge again, and the first of two plots of the giant maidenhair, *Adiantum formosum*, was seen. This fern has only ever been found growing naturally in New Zealand on the west coast of Northland and in the Manawatu Gorge. Some detective work uncovered the mystery of its presence here; in 1935 it was planted by Dr. W.M. Hamilton (Director General of the DSIR 1953-1971) who was a friend and neighbour of the Morrison family, and later married a Morrison daughter. Further along the track we came to a second plot of the giant maidenhair, equally lush and natural looking. A third escapee from the Morrison garden is the Chinese fan

palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, and this, spreading only slowly here, could also be quite easily eliminated. Although there are occasional exotics growing along the creek edge, and even an arum lily (*Zantedeschia*



Fig. 12. Perching arum lily in a fork of the large kauri in Fig. 9. Photo: J. Salter.

aethiopica) perching high in a kauri (Fig. 12), the only other weed of note is *Selaginella kraussiana*. We soon completed the loop track and returned to the creek crossing and back to the cars.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to farmer David Nicolls, for allowing us to park on his property, and the Parsley Pot for after-trip coffee (Figs. 13, 14, 15).

References:

Esler, A.E.; Hamilton, W.M.; Hudson, F.; Young, M. 1987: *Scenic Reserves near Warkworth* Lucy Moore Memorial Pamphlet.
 Young, M. 2011: Four reserves and a river – Warkworth. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 66(2): 134-138.



Fig. 13. Parsley Pot café, a lovely spot in which to round off the day. Photo: J. Salter.



Fig. 14. From left: Frances, Bev, Val, Alison, Helen, Lesley and John. Photo: J. Salter.



Fig. 15. From left: Claire, Juliet, Maureen, Ewen, Colleen, Geoff. Photo: J. Salter.

Appendix: A list of indigenous vascular plants for Duck Creek and Glen Kowhai Reserves was published in 2011 (Young 2011). Additions (including weeds) seen on 17 Oct 2015, are listed below. * = exotics

Lycophytes

Selaginella kraussiana *

Ferns

Asplenium gracillimum

Nephrolepis cordifolia *

Gymnosperms

Pinus radiata *

Dicotyledons

Apium nodiflorum *

Euonymus japonicas *

Genista monspessulana *

Ligustrum sinense *

Parsonia capsularis

Pomaderris hamiltonii

Monocotyledons

Asparagus scandens *

Corybas oblongus

Cyperus congestus *

Isolepis prolifera

Isolepis reticularis

Schoenus maschalinus

Trachycarpus fortunei *

Tradescantia fluminensis *

Zantedeschia aethiopica *