
Volunteers Wanted

Botany research students need help! Field assistants are required to help with postgraduate research projects. If you wish to help out with all sorts of weird and wonderful botanical and/or ecological field work please let us know, register your interest at the Botany Department (464 Great King Street).

Come into the Botany Department to leave your name and contact details at the reception or: contact Adrienne Markey % Botany Department P.O. Box 56 Dunedin
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Okia Reserve trip report: 19th February, 2000. By trip leader: Adrienne Markey.

With clear skies heralding an unusually summery day, members of the Otago Botanical Society filled several cars and made their way to the very end of the Otago Peninsula, near Victory Beach. The day's agenda was to visit two sites, starting with Okia Reserve and ending up at Taiaroa Bush. Retired from grazing in 1991, the Dunedin City Council has acquired this land as a scenic reserve with high conservation values. Yellow-eyed penguins come ashore and nest in the dunes here, sharing the beachfront with a breeding colony of New Zealand fur seals, juvenile male Hooker sea lions and one breeding female sea lion.

After a pleasant 15 minute walk from the carpark to the Okia reserve gate, we entered a region of dune slacks recovering from grazing and still with considerable cover of pasture weeds (*Agrostis capillaris*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and *Dactylis glomerata*). Recent planting of *Desmoschoenus spiralis* (pingao), provide a bit of golden colour to this entry point. *Pteridium*

esculentum (bracken) dominates this area, with emergent clumps of *Phormium tenax* (flax) and *Cortaderia richardii* (toetoe). Seasonally inundated regions are wetlands dominated with *Juncus gregiflorus*, *Juncus pallidus*, *Isolepis nodosus* and *Leptocarpus similis*. Small herbs such as the native *Geranium microphyllum*, *Ranunculus* spp, and *Nertera scapanioides* (which I didn't manage to spot) grow among the sedges. In areas subject to transient stream-flow, a dense cover of *Carex forsteri* tends to form a thick sedgeland.

Massive basalt columns form the spectacular Pyramids that Okia reserve is famous for, and Allison Knight found sheer delight in peering around these for elusive lichens (with elusive names!). Shrublands dominated by *Coprosma crassifolia*, *Olearia avicenniifolia* and *Coprosma propinqua* cover these drier outcrops.

With fine weather holding, we made our way to the beach for a very pleasant lunch, but not before passing through the recovering sequence of dune slacks. It is amazing how, after a century of grazing, small surprises have reappeared. Alongside the track, fruiting and flowering *Celmisia gracilentia*, *Helichrysum glomeratum*, *Gaultheria macrostigma* and *Leucopogon* aff. *fraseri* provide a bit of colour. However, the beachfront lacks native cover, having succumbed to the fate that all Otago beaches now suffer. *Ammophila arenaria* (marram grass), *Lupinus arboreus* (tree lupin) and *Senecio minimus* form an impenetrable cover in which penguins love to nest, but also occludes the pingao and *Coprosma acerosa* that would have once dominated these foredunes.

After lunch, we set off to the adjacent Taiaroa Bush. This is an exceptional remnant of lowland broadleaf/podocarp forest which is the most extensive patch left on the peninsula. Sadly, early logging has seen the removal of all of the old *Podocarpus totara* (totara), and the odd roaming sheep, cow and a ravenous herd of feral goats continue to damage the vegetation.

Taiaroa Bush is a lowland forest dominated by *Melicetyis ramiflorus* (mahoe), *Fuchsia excorticata* (tree fuchsia), *Griselinia littoralis* (broadleaf), *Lophomyrtus obcordata* (myrtle), *Hoheria angustifolia* (lacebark), *Myoporum laetum* (ngaio), *Pittosporum tenuifolium* and a lower shrub stratum of *Coprosma areolata*, *C. rubra*, *C. virescens*, *C. propinqua*, and *C. crassifolia*. These shrubs become divaricate on the bush margins and fill with berries in late autumn. These berries don't last long on bushes but are removed quickly by the hordes of bellbirds, riflemen and silvereyes that reside in this bird haven.

On the higher fringes of this remnant there is *Sophora microphylla* (kowhai) and *Kunzea ericoides* (kanuka). Both *Rubus cissoides* and *Urtica ferox* provide an interesting dimension to forest forays. Most impressively, this area of bush is bounded by high, igneous cliffs. These are still covered in an apparently intact cover of vegetation, including *Hebe elliptica* and *Poa astonii*. This site holds a lot to interest cliff-vegetation buffs, but abseiling skills are required.

I wish to thank Steve Owens, on behalf of local Maori landowners, for granting the Botanical Society access to Taiaroa Bush. Thanks are also due to Bastow Wilson, Barbara Anderson and David Burnett for accompanying this trek and being our botanical guides.

Grass Flora 20% off the price for Bot Soc members
Edgar, E. and H. E. Connor. 2000. "*Flora of New Zealand Vol. V. Grasses*". Maanaki Whenua Press, Lincoln. 650pp. can be purchased from the University Book Store for \$54.95, or from Landcare Research for \$55 (minus 20% if you've paid your Bot. Soc. subs) for Vol. 5 alone or \$100 (no discount because it's too cheap already) for the entire set of five volumes of the Flora of New Zealand. Email: mwpress@landcare.cri.nz