

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Goblin Forests continue to haunt us

Further to my earlier comment:

1. I note that two sentences from my letter on goblin forest sent to you on 15/5/01 (see below) were left off when it was published but no indication was given that the letter was abridged.
2. Dr Wilson's reply, in which he continues to deny the existence of a goblin forest type, is unconvincing and introduces new difficulties, as the summary of some relevant literature below shows:
 - a. Cockayne (1919) in describing the New Zealand subantarctic islands refers to: "lands of brown hills, enclosed by thick woods, weird and grotesque - in truth goblin forests, patrolled and sentinelled by uncouth monsters of the deep; such impression may far-off subantarctic islands give at first."
 - b. Cockayne (1928) used the term (which he borrowed from local Taranaki usage in which the term referred to a vegetation type) and went on to describe the characteristics of the vegetation type and its composition and distribution. He also noted another location, Hauhungatahi, where the forest was more or less of the same character.
 - c. As outlined by the Oxford Companion to the English Language, the usage of capitals and/or quotation marks (which is often inconsistent) can be ascribed to highlighting a special or unusual word which is not the writer's own e.g., in the same way Cockayne (1919) referred to the Taranaki name for herbfield vegetation - "moss". It does not follow that the term refers only to a place.
 - d. Others (by no means an exhaustive list) who have used the term goblin forest (in various combinations with capitals or no capitals, single quotation marks or double quotation marks) include Schweinfurth (1962; Mt Egmont), Stevens, McGlone & McCulloch (1988; Southern Alps), Millener (1946; Mt Egmont) and Dawson (1988; wet beech forests in New Zealand).

I have never noted the term gremlin forest in the ecological literature.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Clarkson (Taranaki born ecologist and researcher of goblin forest)

References:

- Cockayne, L. 1919: New Zealand plants and their story. Government Printer.
Cockayne, L. 1928: The vegetation of New Zealand. Englemann (Cramer).
Dawson, J. 1988: Forest vines to snow tussocks. Victoria University Press.
Millener, L. 1946: Auckland Botanical Society newsletter.
Schweinfurth, U. 1962: Erdkunde 16.
Stevens, G. et al.: 1988: Prehistoric New Zealand. Heinemann Reed.