

Trip Report: Waikumete Cemetery, 17 September 2016

Rhys Gardner

Participants: Jenny Andrew, John Barden, Sarah Budd, Paul Bell-Butler, Zoe Blair, Bruce Calvert, Ewen Cameron, Fraser Dale, Frances Duff, Anne and Bryan Dudley, Rhys Gardner (leader), Lance Goff, Ben Goodwin, Steven Gorinski, Sharen Graham, Oscar Grant, Leslie Haines, Peter Hutton, Mei Nee Lee, Richard and Anna Mairs, Tim Martin, Philip Moll, Peter Moosberger, Brenda Osborne, Richard Reid, Joshua Salter, Jenni Shanks, Bec Stanley, Sam Sutherland, Janie Vaughan, David Wilson, Maureen Young.

The welcome news (see our September News-sheet) that the Environment Court would be upholding Significant Natural Area status for Waikumete's gumland scrub may have been the main reason for the very good attendance above, despite it being a morning of notable natural awfulness.

Leaving the shelter of the Old Chapel we moved out among the adjacent graves, which the Friends of Waikumete, guided by the late Alan Esler, have been managing as a place for wildflowers—largely, African iris-family species. But we were too early in the season, and all we saw were a few "freeze yours" (name of the day) (*Frezia refracta*), snowflakes (*Leucojum aestivum*), and *Sparaxis* sp. or spp. Non-native grasses were conspicuous, and some of us wondered whether introducing kinds of wildflower more able to compete with the grasses might be needed to save the show. We observed too that *Watsonia meriana* 'Bulbillifera' was making a comeback, after having nearly been herbicided out



Fig. 1. *Sparaxis* plants uprooted from the lawn by a pukeko (?) and their basal 'bulbs' eaten. Image: Ewen Cameron, 16 Sep 2016.

ten or so years ago. The only native species at all frequent here, the sedge *Schoenus apogon*, is located mostly along the edges of the inter-grave strips, largely out of reach of the mower.

We tacked northwards down a tongue of graveland between the two forested eastern arms of Gaden Stream, and Ben Goodwin was first to spot this area's *Paspalum orbiculare*. It seems to have been lost from the rest of the cemetery, and its total cover here now is just a few square metres; even these, however, relentlessly 'strimmed', despite generations of consultants' advice—the plant's shin-high, upright tufts of mid-green shiny leaves are just too tempting. Several sedges occur on the forest margins nearby: *Gahnia setifolia* (leaves curved over to place their undersides to the sun), *Baumea juncea* (rather far from the coast) and *Carex longebrachiata* (no longer a feared "pasture weed of the future" but a forest-edge recluse).

We crossed the streamlet to the west, past the cemetery's largest kauri (*Agathis australis*, 80 cm dbh), noting an abundance of kauri saplings in the thickening native understorey. In this streamside forest, probably a planting almost a hundred years old, there is a good amount of young totara (*Podocarpus totara*) and kahikatea (*Dacrydium dacrydioides*), and, to a much lesser degree, of tanekaha (*Phyllocladus trichomanoides*) too. Rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) and monoao (*Halocarpus kirkii*) (at least one tree c. 7 m tall 10 cm ddb, with adult foliage) are present but no juveniles of these were seen.

Toiling up the damp "scroggy" moss and grass slope below the mausoleums, I forgot to point out the place where Ewen Cameron and I had, a day earlier, been surprised to see scatterings of pulled-up small plants of *Sparaxis*. They were missing their basal bulbs (Fig. 1) and we supposed that pukeko had done this.

The mown slope of hard clay higher up the slope was admired for its mats of low manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*). More difficult to find were the wisps of thelymitra orchids (including *Thelymitra carnea*), sundews (*Drosera auriculata*), *Lindsaea linearis*, *Gonocarpus incanus* and *Rytidosperma biannulare*. The planted pohutukawa



Fig. 2. *Eucalyptus obliqua* Illustration of Salisbury (1805: t. 15).

(*Metrosideros excelsa*) here still have skirts of *Gahnia setifolia* but the *Paspalum orbiculare* that used also to be present has finally gone. *Aristea ecklonii* is increasing hugely.

We went round the top of "Maintenance Shed Gully", a forest filled by large leaning trees of the messmate stringybark, *Eucalyptus obliqua*. This species was the first of its genus to be described; from Cook's Third Voyage collections made in Tasmania in 1777 (Fig. 2).

Lunch was taken in the dripping, degenerate, scrubby fringe (a DoC reserve) below the houses of Sunhill Road (some of the party departed early to attend the funeral of Alan Esler). The tall manuka scrub downslope from the reservoir here is known to have had, in relatively recent years, a fair quantity of *Caladenia* orchids (presumably mainly *C. chlorostyla*), but we decided to put off its exploration until some finer day. So we moved across to the south side of the reservoir and down towards the railway, into an



Fig. 3. *Corunastylis pumila* past flowering, locally common, in the low Waikumete gumland. Image: Ewen Cameron, 11 Jul 2015.

area of low manuka, *Gleichenia dicarpa*, *Schoenus tendo* and *Dracophyllum sinclairii*. These plants are making a dense knee-high growth and this by itself would be enough to prevent a good display of the thelymitras, especially *T. pulchella*, that were once a feature here.

Also, aristeas, pine seedlings, gorse, pampas grass, and wattles, are beginning to take over the margins and open patches that once had an abundance of nice things like *Dichelachne inaequiglumis*, *Schizaea bifida*, *Corunastylis pumila* (Fig. 3), the liverwort *Goebelobryum unguiculatum* and (but not for forty-something years) *Phylloglossum drummondii*.

Given the legal security the gumland scrub now has, we can hope that any deterioration of its biodiversity will be expeditiously reversed. Members of the Botanical Society would be keen to assist.

References

Salisbury, R. A. 1805: *The Paradise Londinensis*. Vol.1.