

PUKAHUNUI VALLEY FIELD TRIP

W.B. Shaw

On 3 December 2000 a small convoy assembled in Rotorua and proceeded to southern Kaingaroa and the upper reaches of the Pukahunui Valley. We picked up a keen cyclist member, Bernie Salmon, and John Jordan who had driven from New Plymouth that morning, at the Fletcher Forests' Waiotapu Forest headquarters. It is a lengthy drive into the Pukahunui and we travelled down the valley, past the site of the old Pukahunui Hut (in Whirinaki Conservation Park, adjacent to the track to the Upper Te Hoe River), and regrouped at an old hut adjacent to the Pukahunui Stream. This is in a large (11,200 ha) area of private land known as the Pohokura Block.

The party set out on foot and fanned out through the monoao (*Dracophyllum subulatum*) shrubland on the low terraces that extend back from the valley floor. There used to be a timber mill on the main terrace and remains of mill machinery (and one of the ancillary buildings) are still evident, along with various vehicle tracks. We botanised the terrace, with tempting views of stands of *Pittosporum turneri* on terraces and hillsides further downstream. There were scattered wilding contorta pine (*Pinus contorta*) in the monoao shrubland, and party members pulled out smaller specimens when they were able to (younger members collected some as Christmas trees). Contorta has considerable potential to expand and become a major problem in the monoao-dominant communities in the lower valley. There was lively discussion of interesting finds, including a *Caladenia* sp.

Our travels took us up a steep disused vehicle track into manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) scrub 2.5-3 metres tall, with occasional *Hebe parviflora* agg. and mountain toatoa (*Phyllocladus alpinus*). *Sticherus cunninghamii* was locally common, and dominant on track margins. We then proceeded up on to the ridge and a road in better condition, continuing on into red beech (*Nothofagus fusca*) forest near the top of the ridge. It was evident that much of this

area had been affected by previous fires and logging, as shown by the secondary nature of some of the red beech stands.

The party then returned to the hut and vehicles for lunch, before botanising a small wetland. Younger party members pursued tadpoles of an introduced frog species (*Litoria* sp.) while we explored a small patch of raupo (*Typha orientalis*) and manuka on small mossy “islands”, and local patches of comb sedge (*Oreobolus pectinatus*) and *Blechnum penna-marina*. There was local harakeke (*Phormium tenax*), *Carex sinclairii*, *C. virgata*, *Eleocharis gracilis*, *Cyathodes empetrifolia*, and *Ranunculus amphitrichus*. There was considerable debate over a mystery plant that was eventually assigned to *Spiranthes sinensis*.

We then crossed the Pukahunui Stream and traversed another terrace, on the true left side of the stream. There were scattered bog pine (*Dacrydium bidwillii*) on the terrace, with monoao and silver tussock (*Poa cita*). A small area on a hillside which was burned c.1996-97 is now covered predominantly with silver tussock with abundant *Leucopogon fraseri* and occasional *Celmisia gracilentia* and catsear (*Hypochoeris radicata*). From a high point above the terrace we had an excellent view of numerous *Pittosporum turneri* on a large terrace on the southern (true right) side of the stream, but time did not allow a visit to this area.¹

On the way out of the valley we stopped at the old Pukahunui Hut site and walked along the start of the track to Upper Te Hoe before heading off along a small stream. The canopy was c.4 m tall *Hebe parviflora* agg., *Coprosma propinqua*, and broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*), with manuka, mountain toatoa, and *Olearia virgata*. *Myrsine divaricata* and *Corokia cotoneaster* were present in the understory, with *Polystichum vestitum* locally abundant adjacent to the stream. We also found one seedling of *Pittosporum turneri* c.110 cm tall (DOC had put tin bands on larger specimens along the track, to keep possums at bay). We also found some *Botrychium bifforme*, and occasional *Hypolepis millefolium*, *Carmichaelia australis*, and *Aristotelia fruticosa* along the track.

Party members: Willie Shaw (leader), Sarah Beadel, Annabel Shaw, Sam Shaw, Joh Taylor, John Hobbs, Bernie Salmon, John Jordan, Chris Ecroyd, Paul Cashmore, Graeme Jane, Gael Donaghy.

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¹ I had previously written a report on the vegetation of the Pohokura Block and also undertaken counts of *P.turneri* in the Pukahunui Valley.