FIELD TRIP TO IWITAHI ORCHID RESERVE

Bruce Irwin

On Sunday 1st December, 2002, twelve Society members met at the Iwitahi Orchid Reserve, an area of 14 hectares of *Pinus nigra,* within the Kaingaroa Forest, adjacent to the Napier-Taupo Road. Ostensibly I was leader for the day, but I enlisted the willing help of Trevor Nicholls of the Taupo Orchid Society, managers of the reserve. Trevor played a major role in establishing the reserve and carrying out, with a small group of supporters, the many tasks necessary to ensure viability of the project.

Once within the forest, Trevor outlined the history of the reserve, then steered the group through rapidly encroaching thickets of scrub, pointing out orchids as he went. One of the first encountered was a group of *Pterostylis* "aff" *montana* which is common on the Volcanic Plateau, but has often been confused with the much smaller *P. graminea* which is apparently absent from Iwitahi. Sadly, species normally flowering profusely in early December, such as *Aporostylis bifolia, Adenochilus gracilis,* and *Stegostylus (Caladenia) lyallii,* were still in bud. One flower of each was almost all we saw. Even the very common *Chiloglottis cornuta* was flowering rather shyly, as though intimidated by its larger, more colourful relative, C*hiloglottis valida,* a recent arrival from Australia, which was flowering profusely. *C .valida* was first found in the North Island at Iwitahi in December 1986. A colony of perhaps 200 plants bore about 40 purplish-brown flowers. Because the compartment was about to be milled, the plants were transferred into the adjacent 'old' reserve and later to the larger 'new' reserve where they have increased vegetatively at least tenfold. Strangely, other orchids native to Iwitahi, transplanted with equal care, seem not to be thriving in the 'new' reserve. Because they were so common in adjacent compartments, conditions must be unsuitable, or they would already have been present.

A surprise for most was to see yet another *Chiloglottis* species in flower. *C. trapeziformis*, another vagrant species from Australia, was found in coastal pine forest between Foxton

and Levin as recently as September 2001. The mature pines were to be milled the following year so many of the *Chiloglottis* plants were hurriedly transferred to Iwitahi, where they seem to be adapting well.

At the western boundary, *Thelymitra nervosa* was just beginning to flower. Clearly, it benefited from brighter light when the adjacent compartment was milled. Even so it manages to flower, admittedly a little later, within the forest itself.

After lunch, as we entered the eastern part of the reserve, Trevor pointed out fruiting plants of *Corybas cheesemanii* about to raise the capsules well clear of the leaf litter. Until recently this species had not been recorded at Iwitahi.

Three flourishing *Pterostylis* colonies were of interest. The flowers in one colony clearly were all *P. patens* except for a single *P. cardiostigma* bud. Close by, another colony carried flowers of both *P. patens* and *P. banksii* but how could this be? Trevor was able to explain that the plants were from two separate colonies outside the reserve but had been transplanted side by side. Normally at higher altitudes *P. patens* replaces *P. banksii* and there is no overlap. Iwitahi is the exception which 'proves the rule'. The third colony had mature flowers of *P. patens* with the long sepals strongly deflexed as is usual, but also a few immature flowers (rather like *P. banksii)* the sepals of which had not yet adopted their characteristic stance. Fortunately all plants in the colony showed a slight but consistent striping of the leaves so clearly all derived from a single clone. All were *P. patens.*

Thank you Trevor for an interesting day. Without your local knowledge, we would have been hard-pressed to locate all orchid species presently flowering.