

## MT TARAWERA WILDING CONIFER FIELD TRIP

Paul Cashmore

Saturday 8 March 2014 dawned a beautiful clear day perfect for Rotorua Botanical Society (RBS) and Rotorua Forest & Bird to visit the Rotorua icon of Mt Tarawera. Since it had been several decades since RBS had had a field trip to the top of the mountain, interest was high with approximately 30 people turning out for this trip led by Department of Conservation (DOC) staff and the Ruawahia 2B Trust chairman Ken Raureti. All the groups combined at the DOC Ashpit Road Campground at Lake Rerewhakaaitu for a karakia and briefing before heading up the mountain in convoy.

Once the group had reached the end of the road / car park at a crater edge there was a quick photo opportunity and handout of gear before the steep climb up ‘the razorback’ (Figure 1). While true botanists brought up the rear, others less interested in flora and more interested in getting to the top pushed on. Eventually, by late morning, everyone had made it up the steep scoria slope to the top of Wahanga where we stopped for a brief break.

The group then wandered across the dome of Wahanaga enjoying the relatively flat terrain and the stunning views on a great summer day. Being relatively open with large lichenfields the botanists were somewhat limited in sites to look for plants, focusing on rocky areas where vegetation often persists in more sheltered sites. Of particular interest to some was the occurrence of neatly cut weathered bones scattered over this large flat area. Someone explained that this area was a black-backed gull nesting area and that they scavenged the camp-ground at the Lake Tarawera outlet then carried the pickings some 700 metres up the mountain to feed their young. Upon reaching a high point it was decided to break for an early lunch and to admire the views before starting on some serious wilding conifer-pulling work.

Everyone tucked into their lunch while Ken talked about some of the Maori history of the mountain sacred to Ngati Rangitihī. I covered the background to the Ruawahia Wilding Conifer Project – a joint initiative between DOC, the Ruawahia 2B Trust and



Figure 1: Heading up 'the razorback'



Figure 2: Hard at work pulling at wilding conifers on Wahanga Dome.

the Bay of Plenty Regional Council. The project is currently in its 5<sup>th</sup> year and involves removal of all the wilding conifers on the upper slopes and dome tops of Mt Tarawera. The project funds a five-man Ngati Rangitahi crew who live on the mountain for 6 months of the year undertaking felling-to-waste operations on the wilding conifers. To date over 700 hectares of wilding conifers on Wahanga, Tarawera, Ruawahia domes and slopes have been cleared with crews working in the ‘fan’ area in the 2013-14 work season. Contorta pine (*Pinus contorta*) is the most common wilding conifer species on the mountain, but some of the more common plantation species such as Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and radiata pine (*Pinus radiata*) are also scattered throughout.

With lunch completed we headed down into the gully and with a bit of organization managed to form ourselves into a very long line down the valley to form a ‘human chain’ to systematically ‘sweep’ across the dome tops through a ‘block’ that had been felled five years earlier. Seedlings and the larger saplings were patchy with some parts of the line moving quickly and others more slowly as they got bogged down in thick contorta. Our group moved across the slope covering a substantial area on the northern edge of Wahanga. Views from here down to Lake Tarawera and the Tarawera valley were outstanding and provided welcome relief breaks from pulling pine trees. After a mid-afternoon smoko we headed down into a valley where we encountered a dense block of wilding contorta some of which were over waist height making hand-pulling more challenging. Progress slowed due to the size and density of trees and the crew getting a bit tired. By late afternoon it was clear that we were not going to be able to clear this block as some of the keener ones had been aiming to do.

We had to abandon the chase and the group headed back across Wahanga and down ‘the razorback’ to the vehicles. Although many people were physically tired the sense of a great day and some physical achievement as well as some botanising on the side had been enough to satisfy most. We were very lucky with the weather as this could have been a game changer for the day. As a combined foray this was one of the larger turnouts for an RBS trip in recent times and as we regrouped back at the car park and

everyone was thanked by Ken and myself for their efforts, there was talk about the possibility of further workdays on the mountain in future years. Watch this space!!



Makakiti Dome from Wahanga



Typical end-of-day pose with Maungawhakamana in mid-background

## Wahanga Dome - Mt Tarawera

NZMS 260 V16 181264

G. Jane & G. Donaghy

\* = naturalised species

### Psilopsids, Lycopods & Quillworts

<i>Huperzia australiana</i>	alpine clubmoss
<i>Lycopodiella cernua</i>	arching clubmoss
<i>Lycopodium scariosum</i>	creeping clubmoss
<i>Lycopodium volubile</i>	waewae-koukou; climbing clubmoss

### Ferns

<i>Asplenium flaccidum</i>	hanging spleenwort; makawe
<i>Blechnum fluviatile</i>	kiwakiwa; kiwikiwi
<i>Blechnum novae-zelandiae</i>	kiokio
<i>Blechnum vulcanicum</i>	
<i>Dicksonia squarrosa</i>	wheki; harsh tree fern
<i>Hymenophyllum multifidum</i>	
<i>Microsorium pustulatum</i> subsp. <i>pustulatum</i>	hound's tongue; kowaowao
<i>Paesia scaberula</i>	scented fern; matata; ring fern
<i>Polystichum vestitum</i>	prickly shield fern; punui
<i>Pyrrosia eleagnifolia</i>	leather-leaf fern

### Gymnosperm trees and shrubs

* <i>Pinus contorta</i>	lodgepole pine; contorta pine
* <i>Pinus nigra</i> subsp. <i>nigra</i>	Austrian pine
* <i>Pinus strobus</i>	Weymouth pine; strobus; white
* <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Douglas-fir

### Dicotyledonous trees and shrubs

<i>Androstoma empetrifolia</i>	mountain mikimiki; bog mingimingi
<i>Coriaria arborea</i> var. <i>arborea</i>	tree tutu
<i>Corokia buddleioides</i>	korokio-taranga
<i>Dracophyllum strictum</i>	totorwhiti; grass tree
<i>Dracophyllum subulatum</i>	monoao
* <i>Erica lusitanica</i>	Spanish heath
<i>Gaultheria antipoda</i> × <i>G. oppositifolia</i>	
<i>Gaultheria antipoda</i> × <i>G. paniculata</i>	
<i>Gaultheria oppositifolia</i>	niniwa
<i>Griselinia littoralis</i>	broadleaf; kapuka
<i>Kunzea ericoides</i> var. <i>ericoides</i>	kanuka; white teatree
<i>Leptecophylla juniperina</i> subsp. <i>juniperina</i>	

<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i> var. <i>scoparium</i>	manuka; red teatree
<i>Leucopogon fasciculatus</i>	mingimingi; kaikaitau
<i>Olearia arborescens</i>	glossy tree daisy
<i>Olearia furfuracea</i>	akepiro
<i>Pimelea prostrata</i> subsp. <i>prostrata</i>	Strathmore weed; pinatoro
* <i>Ulex europaeus</i>	gorse
<i>Weinmannia racemosa</i>	kamaha; towai; tawhero

### Daisy-like herbs

<i>Anaphalioides alpina</i>	
<i>Celmisia gracilentia</i>	dainty daisy
* <i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Scotch thistle
* <i>Crepis capillaris</i>	hawkesbeard
* <i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	catsear
* <i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	ragwort
<i>Lagenophora pumila</i>	
<i>Pseudognaphalium luteoalbum</i>	Jersey cudweed
<i>Raoulia "australis North"</i>	
<i>Raoulia albosericea</i> × <i>R. glabra</i>	
<i>Raoulia glabra</i>	
<i>Raoulia subsericea</i>	

### Dicotyledonous herbs other than Daisies

<i>Acaena anserinifolia</i>	bidibid
<i>Acaena anserinifolia</i> × <i>A. novae-zealandiae</i>	
<i>Acaena novae-zealandiae</i>	red bidibid; piri-piri
* <i>Cerastium fontanum</i> subsp. <i>vulgare</i>	mouse-eared chickweed
<i>Epilobium brunnescens</i> subsp. <i>brunnescens</i>	
<i>Epilobium nummulariifolium</i>	creeping willow-herb
<i>Epilobium pubens</i>	
<i>Geranium brevicaule</i>	
* <i>Geranium molle</i>	dove's foot crane's bill
<i>Geranium potentilloides</i>	
<i>Hydrocotyle microphylla</i>	hydrocotyle
* <i>Linum catharticum</i>	purging flax
* <i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>	lotus major
<i>Nertera ciliata</i>	
<i>Nertera depressa</i>	common nertera
<i>Ranunculus reflexus</i>	maruru; hairy buttercup
* <i>Rumex acetosella</i>	sheep's sorrel
* <i>Sagina procumbens</i>	procumbent pearlwort
<i>Stellaria parviflora</i>	

## Sedges

*Morelotia affinis*

*Uncinia uncinata*

watu

## Rushes and allied plants

*Luzula banksiana* var. *migrata*

*Luzula picta* var. *picta*

## Grasses

\* *Agrostis capillaris*

browntop

\* *Anthoxanthum odoratum*

sweet vernal

*Deyeuxia avenoides*

mountain oatgrass

*Dichelachne crinita*

long-hair plume grass

*Hierochloe redolens*

sweet-scented holy grass

\* *Holcus lanatus*

Yorkshire fog

*Lachnagrostis filiformis*

tumble grass

*Poa anceps* subsp. *anceps*

coastal poa

*Poa cita*

silver tussock

*Rytidosperma viride*

## Orchids

*Aporostylis bifolia*

odd-leaved orchid

*Thelymitra longifolia*

white sun orchid