

## LAKE SURPRISE TRIP (TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK)

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Three Rotorua and two Waikato Botanical Society members gathered in Ohakune on Friday night. On Saturday morning after a final check of the weather forecast (Saturday fine, Sunday - 85kph westerlies with rain showers) we amended our programme and divided the weekend into two day-trips: an alpine walk to Lake Surprise on Saturday, and a bush walk on the Blythe Track for Sunday.



Lake Surprise (mid-left) and Hauhungatahi (mid upper right) Photo: John Hobbs

The weather on Saturday indeed proved to be beautiful as we left our vehicle about 1km below the Turoa ski field and set off for Mangaturuturu Hut .The first part of the walk is a descent from 1500 m to 1200 m through red tussock and alpine herb and fell field vegetation to a large cascading waterfall. The shrubs *Podocarpus nivalis*, *Phyllocladus alpinus*

and *Halocarpus bidwillii* were scattered throughout, and pigmy pine (*Lepidothamnus laxifolius*) was also present. *Dracophyllum recurvum* was abundant. Although still early in the season, some of the alpine plants were beginning to flower including the shrubs *Ozothamnus vauvilliersii*, *Pentachondra pumila*, *Gaultheria colensoi*, *Pimelea microphylla* and the small, beautiful *Kelleria dieffenbachii*. *Celmisia* mountain daisies had not yet begun to flower but large patches of *C. incana* were very striking with their silver/white foliage.



*Pimelea microphylla* growing amongst fine debris above the cascade. Photo: John Hobbs

The descent of the cascade involved a few minutes of rock scrambling and below this point the track passed through alternating patches of mountain beech (*Nothofagus cliffortioides*) and open areas containing lower alpine zone species such as *Hebe odora* and *H. tetragona*, although still with a good representation from alpine herbs such as *Ourisia glandulosa*, *Forstera*, *Parabebe hookerianum*, and *Celmisia spectabilis*. *Leucopogon fraseri* was flowering, as was *Anisotome aromatica*. *Luzula banksiana* var. *migrata* was present and

although very few weedy species were observed, heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) was scattered throughout.

The final few hundred metres to Mangaturuturu Hut (at about 1250 m) crosses a wet seep area and the track is boardwalked in places. Wire rush (*Empodisma minus*) and tangle fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) dominate the vegetation here with the sedge *Carex coriacea* present but having died back after winter snows, and with green shoots emerging again. A highlight of this area was the sundew *Drosera spathulata* which was found in patches as we approached the hut. After a brief snack we crossed the Mangaturuturu stream and continued towards Lake Surprise, hoping to arrive there and vacate the track before the arrival of the first runners on “The Goat” mountain race, which was being held on the same day.

Between the hut and Lake Surprise the track climbs through low forest dominated by mountain beech, but containing scattered mountain cedar (*Libocedrus bidwillii*) and *Halocarpus biformis* (pink pine). *Coprosma pseudocuneata* was common, while the trackside was marked by the occasional large *Gabnia procera*. Alpine species such as *Epacris alpina*, *Anaphalioides bellidioides*, and *Ourisia macrophylla* were present in open areas. We arrived at Lake Surprise (1360 m) in time to avoid most (but not all!) of the runners, and after lunch spent a pleasant couple of hours exploring the lake and surrounding seeps.

*Drosera arcturi* was reasonably abundant here, while the community was dominated once again by wire rush and tangle fern. Many of the alpine species such as the comb sedge (*Oreobolus pectinatus*) and herbs such as *Gentianella* and *Craspedia* showed that they are able to tolerate a wide range of wet conditions. Once again *Carex coriacea* had died back over winter and was re-emerging vigorously in the seep areas. *Viola cunninghamii* was just beginning to flower, while John managed to find a single specimen of *Microtis* sp. before we headed back towards the road and Ohakune.

Day two of our weekend involved dropping one vehicle at the bottom of the Blythe track. This 2.5-3 hour track runs downhill from about 1200 m, roughly parallel to the Turoa ski field road, and so takes in an altitudinal vegetation sequence down to approx.

920 m. The walk turned out to be really interesting, with a diverse flora as we passed through not only montane forest but also open dry clearings and boggy wet areas, both forested and unforested.

The first part of the track follows the Round the Mountain walk, and is mountain beech forest with *Halocarpus biformis* and *Raukawa simplex* also present, and a diverse shrub tier which included *Cyathodes juniperina*, *Coprosma pseudocuneata*, *Neomyrtus pedunculata*, and *Phyllocladus alpinus*. A highlight in this area was the beech mistletoe (*Peraxilla tetrapetala*) which was seen on *Nothofagus cliffortioides* at several points (all DOC monitored or protected). Umbrella fern (*Sticherus cunninghamii*) and *Blechnum procerum* were abundant here. Numerous alpine species such as *Coprosma perpusilla*, *Viola cunninghamii*, and *Gentianella bellidifolia* were present in occasional open areas.

Continuing down through the high level forest, we traversed some open wet areas dominated by *Gleichenia* and *Empodisma* and containing a very similar community to that seen in the vicinity of Lake Surprise. In a wetter forested part of the track we also encountered the silver pine (*Manoao colensoi*), and it was great to find the distinctive grey filmy fern *Hymenophyllum malingii* in large, lush patches on the trunks of some mountain cedars in various places along the track.

As altitude was lost we began to see silver beech (*Nothofagus menziesii*) in the canopy and eventually also scattered red beech (*Fuscospora fusca*), while at the lower elevations pokaka (*Elaeocarpus hookerianus*) and the podocarps miro (*Prumnopitys ferruginea*) and rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) began to appear. Along the track side mountain cabbage tree (*Cordylone indivisa*), and the filmy ferns *Hymenophyllum rarum* and *H. pulcherrimum* provided interest. We finished the day in a good way with a quick look (courtesy of John) at a specimen of the mistletoe *Alepis flavida* outside the old DOC base at the foot of the Turoa access road.

All in all an interesting and botanically varied weekend in a beautiful part of the Central North Island.