

## Between City and Forest, or Sky-High on Saint Patrick's Day The Bendall's Bluff trip on Sat 17 March 2001

Alistair MacArthur

A driver may take the West Coast Road through Waikarua, rounding some steep, sharp corners, to arrive at the Scenic Drive junction. Turning left then to go a few hundred metres southwards along the Scenic drive, there is a stopping place by a spot where a steep, cascading stream passes under the road. Looking out towards the city, the view is dominated by an unusual, forest covered ridge, a kilometre or a little less away to the east, beyond the steep valley where the stream descends. In April 1992, I descended straight down from that point, led on by the many weeds that were spreading down from the garden rubbish dump. Strange are the tales I could tell of stolen suitcases I found, or at least they looked like that, and I could feel mysterious round things inside that caused me to sniff around with some apprehension. You can ask me later about the sequel when I returned to the area on a Saturday and hauled the lot to the Henderson Police station. A very new, tall and comely young lady constable came to the reception desk, and I asked if she would like a game of ten pin bowls. In a few days someone in Palmerston North got their stolen goods back. On that occasion I made my way across the valley and found well used unauthorised tracks, places where other "weeds" had been grown, and climbed up to the summit of the massive rocky ridge. This is known as Bendall's Bluff, I am told in memory of a farmer who owned land in that vicinity in earlier times. I have often heard it called "The Cockscomb" on account of its curious shape. I was well rewarded with a magnificent view of the city then, and indeed so were 24 of the Auckland Botanical Society members and friends, when I returned with them by a much easier approach, down a ridge nearer to the Rangemore Track entrance.

We were lucky with the weather, which threatened to rain but only troubled us a little as we made our way out. Anne Grace and Harry Beacham led us very well, having taken evident trouble to study the area to be able to show us interesting plants and other points of interest. Anne stopped us all as we came down to the stream, and showed us eels in a pool, and some koura, or fresh water crayfish. As we climbed up to the high points of the jagged ridge I

heard someone say that leading geologists have commented that much more research needs to be done to understand why this mass of sandstone is positioned in such a spectacular fashion. We had our lunch on the southern high point, surrounded by remarkably weed-free native forest. This was perhaps remarkable considering our proximity to the houses in Bush Road far below us to the east, and the Scenic Drive with the garden rubbish dumps mentioned earlier. Perhaps Harry, or Anne, or both, keep the place weeded! We saw *Melicope simplex* shrubs in more abundance than most of us would have seen in all our wanderings in the Waitakere Ranges.

After lunch we made our way down the south end of the bluff, looking across a deep, steep gully towards the kauri knoll on Rangemore Track not far distant. Deep down there we passed the base of the largest kahikatea I have ever encountered in the Waitakere Ranges, and wished I was carrying a tape to measure its splendid girth. Many of us took a side trip a little way up from the stream to where Harry knew where we would see several fine matai. Again we saw something new to most of us, and were fortunate that Juliet Richmond, an entomologist, could explain that we were looking at gigantic relatives of the mealy bugs we sometimes see in gardens. They were similarly white, and mealy, but something like ten or more times larger, and living about eye level on the trunk of one of the matai. Somehow they added to the wonder of this place, where they could still live their ancient, quiet lifestyle below a ridge where we looked out to the Skytower, and a down on most of west Auckland. Thanks again to Anne and Harry for the trouble they took before leading this interesting trip. We had young overseas visitors who would carry away special memories of an experience off the usual tracks.

### Species list opposite