

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILLIAM COLENZO AT BLOCKHOUSE BAY, AUCKLANDA. E. ESLER

If you have read William Colenso's "Memoranda of an excursion in the Northern Island of New Zealand, in the summer of 1841-42" you may have pondered over his statement about a plant he encountered at Te Wau (now called Blockhouse Bay). He wrote "..... we left Otahuhu, in a small canoe which we had borrowed, and paddling down the bay about four miles we landed on the north side of the harbour; continuing our course by the muddy winding shores to Te Wau, a little cove where the path leading to Kaipara commenced. Here, while my natives were engaged in cooking our breakfast, I, looking about, discovered a shrub of a genus altogether unknown to me. This plant bears an oblong succulent crimson-coloured bacca, containing several large angular and irregularly shaped seeds; its growth is diffuse and slender with but few branches, and its height is 5-9 feet. In habit alone it closely approaches to some species of the Coprosma genus. There were several of them here, on the immediate banks of a little rivulet which ran through this dell; I did not, however, observe it in any other locality."

One hundred and thirty two years later with son Lloyd and Dr G. Kuschel I set off to look for Alseuosmia macrophylla which seemed the plant to best fit the description. The only puzzling feature was that Colenso was unfamiliar with the plant 18 years after it had been collected by fellow botanist Allan Cunningham. And there, sure enough, was Alseuosmia on the banks of a rivulet called Wairaki Stream running into Blockhouse Bay.

The site has been preserved in the small private reserve of Mr W.A. Subritzsky. In the depth of the gully are a few miro trees which Colenso probably saw in their youth. Most of the vegetation is much younger than these trees. Probably the useful timber was removed and most of the area away from the stream cleared for farming. The upper slopes are covered with relatively young scrubland dominated by manuka. If kanuka had been the main vegetation the five finger, coprosmas, pigeonwood, kohukohu and mahoe would not have been showing above the canopy of this taller species of tea tree. Among the shrubs there are plants such as akepiro (Olearia furfuracea), Schoenus tardo and Lepidospermum laterale to remind us that this land is fairly infertile. These, and the spiny Hakea sericea, are fairly typical plants of gumland which is passing out of the tea tree phase. Colenso referred to the gumlands in this region as "open and barren heaths" and "dreary and sterile wilds."

Deeper in the gully where fires may not have been so frequent, so intense, or so recent the vegetation is taller and manuka is absent. There are a few puriri, kahikatea, rewarewa, miro and tawa but most of the canopy is made up of taller shrubs such as pigeonwood, marbleleaf, mapou, kowhai and kohukohu. Tree ferns of three species are

plentiful. The moister conditions also favour supplejack, kiekie and Alseuosmia, Kahikatea, miro, kohekohe and karaka are likely to be the conspicuous trees of the reserve in the future.

In our brief encounter we noted 45 species of trees and shrubs, 21 ferns and 21 other kinds of native plants. Quite a number of exotic plants grow beneath the canopy gaps but are not very significant. However, shade-tolerant species such as wild ginger Hedychium gardnerianum, wandering Jew and Selaginella kraussiana are likely to assume much more importance.

AN INTERESTING SERIES OF REPORTS

J. BEEVER

Recently Alan Esler of the Botany Division, D.S.I.R. lent me a set of booklets prepared by S.W. Burstall for the New Zealand Forest Service. They are entitled "New Zealand Forest Research Institute Forest Mensuration Reports Nos. 16 - 24, 1974 (unpublished), and each one lists, with comments, the individual indigenous and exotic trees of New Zealand from two or three of twenty territories which cover the entire country, if they are considered to be worthy of note because of historical reasons or because of size, age or rarity.

They make most fascinating reading and stimulate one to get out and find the more interesting specimens listed in the local area. The publication fills a need, for it has been done very thoroughly and I should think that there can be few if any important trees in N.Z. that have been omitted. Such a list is invaluable for reference and though of course any such book is out of date from the day of publication yet it records the position at present very well.

Most trees are set out with botanical names, common names, address of property and position of tree, diameter at breast height, height and canopy spread as in 1969-72. Anyone in the future who starts out to write about any N.Z. tree or group of trees must go to this publication to find out what the situation was in 1970. The number of trees specifically mentioned must be over 2500 and when you consider that each was measured and its site recorded then you realize what a mammoth task this was. The work has involved the collating of many local and national lists made by others, to whom the author gives full credit. As a forester this has been for Mr Burstall a part time occupation for over 20 years and his own lists, especially for the Waikato and Bay of Plenty, must have been invaluable.

We are all suckers for records as the phenomenal success of the Guinness Book of Records shows, so it is of interest to read in the introduction - "Much has been written about the fast growth of many