

Te Araroa, East Cape

F. Still

TE ARAROA ("The Long Path"), situated twelve miles west of East Cape, is dominated by the 800-foot Whetumatarau ("Sea of a Thousand Stars"), with its sheer face, and flora of wide diversity. This stronghold where Ngatiporou warriors defended their rights against invasion has developed over the years a wealth of legend, but whereas events have sunk into the mists of the past, its mantle of plants has survived and is of great interest to the botanist.

Most fascinating of all the district plants is the parasitic "wooden flower", *Dactyloctenium aegyptium*, found on the table-top of Whetumatarau. The flowers, appearing through the ground in the autumn, are fleshy and numerous. When they have died away a hard knobby crust can be uncovered which, when removed, leaves a reddish-brown pulp covering the actual "wooden flower". This pulp can be cleaned off easily, leaving the typical hard-wood base of rosette form. At East Cape itself is found the parapara or "bird-catching tree" (*Pisonia*), another most interesting species of the New Zealand flora. Also found in this area is the tawapou (*Sideroxylon*). The whau (*Entelia arborescens*), fast becoming scarce in most areas, is found now in deep gullies at the foot of Whetumatarau, where its luxuriant growth and beautiful white flowers render it most attractive.

Many Maori names for native plants about Te Araroa had their origin in local tribal folk-lore, resulting in some delightful titles such as rau-aroha ("Tree of Love") for *Senecio perdicoides*. The common manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) has the local name of kahikatoa, and *Leptospermum ericoides* the name of maru.

Altogether there are probably more than 150 species of native plants on Whetumatarau; most of them are widespread, but the following are mentioned as being northern plants: *Pittosporum ralphii*, *Olearia furfuracea*, *Dracophyllum adamsii*, *Carmichaelia solandri* (?), *Angelica rosaefolia*, *Sophora tetraptera*, *Hebe parviflora*, *Gahnia lacera*, *Vitex lucens*, *Clematis hexasepala*.

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