

<i>Uncinia uncinata</i>	lc	forest
<i>Vulpia bromoides*</i>	lc	dry, open, coastal banks & rocks
<i>Winika cunninghamii</i>	s	epiphyte in main forest

## Rangitoto remembered at ninety

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### Before World War II

I was born on 10 May 1919 at Devonport, Auckland, almost on Cheltenham Beach. Nurse Brown's nursing home fronted on to Vauxhall Road at the Vauxhall end of the beach, and backed on to the beach itself. Had I been precocious enough to climb to a back window my first view of the multiverse would have been of Rangitoto Island across the Rangitoto Channel.



**Fig. 1. Eric Godley enjoying a joke at his 90th birthday party at the University of Canterbury Staff Club. Photo: R.E. Beever, 10 May 2009.**

During the next few years I passed through the amphibious stage of my ontogeny, in and out of the water, either at Devonport Beach, Duder's, Cheltenham, or Narrow Neck; and I gradually explored my territory: "up the hill" (up Mt Victoria); "down the shore" (down to the Devonport shopping centre near the ferry wharf); "down the muddy" (down to see the mangroves on the mudflats that bounded Devonport on the north); and, further afield, "over to town" (across on the ferry to Auckland City); and then, when I was about 7 or 8, "down to Rangitoto".

The Devonport Wolf Cub pack, which I joined soon after entering Devonport District School, shared a hut on Rangitoto with the Devonport Boy Scouts, and at some time in c. 1926 or 1927 we Cubs went down there for a weekend. I cannot remember anything about this trip except that my mother made me a cake to take down, and that we were all so excited that we couldn't go to sleep and kept our two leaders awake for much of the night. But the visit itself was

the same in outline as any of our weekend visits before the War. Soon after lunch on a Saturday we would assemble at the launch steps on the Devonport wharf (people still worked until midday Saturday at that time). Then, soon after 1 pm, in the distance up-harbour, we would make out a flotilla coming our way. Its "flagship" would be the little steamer *Onewa*, with its permanent list, belching smoke on its way to Waiheke; and there would be our own launch, either the *Olive Rose* or the *Olive Jean*, which would soon peel off to pick us up at Devonport and take us to the Rangitoto wharf. It then went on to Islington Bay, before returning to Auckland later that afternoon. In her book on Rangitoto, Mrs Woolnough (1987) notes that there was also a ferry boat service to Rangitoto. But this went from Auckland via Orakei, Kohimarama, and St Heliers.

The Scouts' hut nestled under a pohutukawa about 100 m from the wharf at the junction of the routes to the Beacon, Islington Bay, and the Summit. It was built in 1923 (Woolnough 1987) and as I remember it, was simply a single-doored bunkroom with a stove opposite the door. On either side of the door and the stove, and at one end were bunks in two tiers. At the other end was a window. There was a water tank and we used the public lavatory nearby.

After I graduated to the Scouts, visits to Rangitoto increased. I particularly remember the training camps for patrol leaders run during the May or August holidays by the District Scout Master, "Skipper" Marks. An undated clipping from the *North Shore Gazette* (Scribe 1933 or 1934) describes the third of these. We arrived at 10.15 am on Monday, 28 August and left on the afternoon launch on Wednesday 30 August. There were two leaders and 18 boys, all drawn from No.4 District which extended from Devonport to beyond Albany, where "Skipper" taught at Coatesville.

Each morning we would wave to the prisoners as their truck passed, taking them to work. I do not recall any instruction in natural history at these camps. Nor did I become greatly interested until 1935 when I began Botany for Matriculation in the 5<sup>th</sup> form at Takapuna Grammar School under Miss Adams. By that time I had left the Scouts but not Rangitoto. During 1937–1941 when I was at Training College and University,

and until Rangitoto became a prohibited area in 1941, a few friends and myself would rent the bach, particularly during the August holidays, and swot for the coming examinations. Or sometimes with old Scout friends I would explore the island, on one occasion walking round the road to the Beacon, then around the outer coast to Islington Bay, and then back by the road or coastal track (I forget which) to the hut.

Whenever we were down at Rangitoto at the weekend we were likely to see two men arrive on the Sunday morning launch and set off purposefully up the summit road. And in the afternoon they would reappear in time to catch the launch back to town. After much debate we decided that they were going to a place that we called "Lumsdens" (I do not know the origin of the name or how we learned it). We had discovered this place by following a faint track across a lava field to the left of the summit track just before it reaches the ancient crater rim. This led round the base of the ash cone to join the road up from the Beacon. Halfway round the track we had found signs of human activity: a fire place, & paths defined by lines of stones winding through the trees as part of an attempted flower garden. This, in fact, was the Wilson's track mentioned by Mrs Woodnough (1987) wherein she tells of two Englishmen, Leary and Wilson, who in 1915 planned to create a park in this area. The story is taken up in the Auckland Botanical Society's book on Rangitoto (Wilcox 2007) which has an area prominently marked as Wilson's Park to the seaward side of the track. I wish that I knew the source of Mrs Woodnough's story. There were certainly two men. We saw them. But were they Leary and Wilson, still going down to Rangitoto after 20 years? We had the chance to find out one day when we came across them having lunch at their bivouac, but we were too shy or too young to ask questions. We should have particularly told them that we knew their retreat by the name "Lumsdens", and sought the origin of the name.

Looking back on those years before WW2 do I have any special memories of plants seen on Rangitoto? The answer is that there are four species that I remember quite vividly, all seen there for the first time. The first two are the little terrestrial orchids, *Acianthus sinclairii* and *Cyrtostylis oblonga*. I would find them in shady depressions in "hundreds", forming flowering carpets. The only orchid bed that I have seen to compare with these was of *Corysanthes rivularis* (*Nematoceras rivulare*) along the banks of a rivulet during a Field Club trip to the Hunuas. The third was my first encounter with *Earina mucronata* in flower. It hung at eye-level over a local track near the store. The fourth example, being a grass, needs some explanation. I was probably typical of young botanists of my generation in knowing very little about native grasses. The few that I knew had forced themselves upon my attention by either being very

large (toetoe) or by growing in large numbers, usually in strange situations, such as spinifex on sand-dunes, or the bush rice-grass *Microlaena avenacea* which I saw when I climbed Mt Te Moehau in the school holidays of January, 1936 with my friend Ralph Jenkins. My Rangitoto grass was the coastal needle grass, *Stipa teretifolia* (now *Austrostipa stipoides*) which was not only common on the coastal lava flats opposite the store, but was the first tussock-grass that I had seen.

## After World War II

Early in 1948 I returned from the war and Cambridge to become lecturer in Genetics, Evolution, and Systematic Botany at Auckland University College. Before I left Cambridge I had happy reunions with Laurie Millener who had recently come over to Pembroke (Prof. Chapman's old college) to do a PhD. We reminisced about our times with Field Club and Botanical Society. These now seemed part of some distant paradise, silhouetted as they were against six years of World War; and he told me what had happened to all the people and places that I knew including, of course, Rangitoto. This meant that I returned to Auckland well briefed and was soon immersed in Botanical Society affairs.

One of these was noted by Miss Crookes in *A Brief History of the Auckland Botanical Society*. "Rangitoto Island, described by Cockayne as 'one of the most remarkable plant associations in New Zealand', has always been our special concern. On Tuesday 1 June 1948, Dr Godley agreed to prepare a report on the number of pines on the island. Result: a 'spotting expedition' was undertaken by members of the Society. The report was forwarded to the Rangitoto Domain Board. In June 1948 we received a message from the Domain Board to say the pines had been cut down."

Unfortunately I did not suggest that a copy of this report be published in the Auckland Botanical Society Newsletter, nor have I been able to find any of my own copies. I therefore take this opportunity of describing what we did. Having become familiar with the use of plane tables in artillery observation positions during the war, I set out for the summit of Rangitoto with a few Society members and a card table. This was placed on the summit, and then, working round the 360 degree view, we would spot a clump of pines, estimate the number present, then make a compass bearing to it, recording this on the card table. This map, with a brief text was sent to the Rangitoto Domain Board under the title 'Pines on Rangitoto', and was immediately acted on, as Miss Crookes reports. Miss Crookes goes on to write, 'later a further stand of pines, discovered near the wrecks was mentioned, and in November 1953 members again sallied forth, and in July 1954 a combined effort with other societies was made.' Later the July expedition was described by Brian Hannken (1954).

The Seventh Pacific Science Congress was held in the first and third weeks of February 1949 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively. At Auckland there was a memorable excursion to Rangitoto Island. On a beautiful sunny day we were landed at Islington Bay and worked inland from there (perhaps the geologists were landed at Rangitoto wharf to prevent traffic jams). I remember that Dr Allan was there (perhaps collecting lichens?), and that he was being asked by two American botanists, Drs Carl Fosberg and Egbert Walker, for identifications, and I remember him suggesting that I help them. Dr Walker had an amputated hand – probably a war wound – and pulled branches toward him with a hook.

Since leaving Auckland in 1951 to join the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research at Lincoln, I have only visited Rangitoto twice.

On 31 May 1972 I set off by car from Lincoln for Auckland, via Picton, Wellington and Taupo. On the evening of Friday, 2 June, there was a Field Club reunion, and then on Saturday, 3 June, we went to stay at the YMCA camp on Motutapu Island for the Queen's Birthday weekend. Old friends attending

were Frank Newhook, Joan Dingley, Dick Matthews, Charles and Peg Fleming, Bob Briggs, Nita Steele, and Jean Livingstone. On Sunday we climbed Rangitoto and had lunch on the top. And that evening, as Peg Fleming reported, 'we went to the beach where there was a huge bonfire, fireworks, singing with guitars – song books and all, and sausages cooked on the fire.' (McEwen 2005). On the Queen's Birthday we looked around Motutapu and returned to Auckland.

The last visit was described by Andy Thomson (Godley & Thomson 2000) as follows: 'A highlight of the Auckland University Centennial celebrations in May 1983 was an ascent of Rangitoto on Sunday, 8 May by a large party of participants at the celebrations (including Lucy Moore, Charles and Peg Fleming, Eric Godley, Jack Rattenbury, Warwick Silvester, and Diane and Andy Thomson) led by Laurie Millener, who gave us the benefit of his observations on the vegetation over many years. In a somewhat characteristic manner Laurie, grasping a sheaf of notes, arrived at the Auckland wharf just before the boat left for Rangitoto. Laurie had perhaps the greatest knowledge of anybody about the botany of Rangitoto'.

#### Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are usually devoted to people or organisations, but here I would like to say: 'thank you Rangitoto for becoming part of me; please don't get angry with us – we mean well'. I also thank Mike Wilcox and his committee for so kindly giving me a copy of the lovely book on Rangitoto produced under his editorship by the Auckland Botanical Society. I also thank Maureen Young (Warkworth) and Peter Heenan (Christchurch) for help with references, as well as Wendy Weller (Christchurch) for her typing.

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## Reminiscences of Muriel Fisher

### As told to Maureen Young

As a child in Wellington I was not at all good at schoolwork but I was always interested in plants. Often on Sundays, instead of going to Sunday school, my father would take me for walks over the hills. He didn't know many plants, but taught me what he knew. There was rangiora, tutu, fuchsia and prickly shield fern. The fuchsia was always known as konini down in Wellington – it was the name of the fruit. One day I collected some of the plants and took them to school to show my teacher. For once, instead of being ridiculed for not being able to do my arithmetic, or not completing my homework, I was held up as an example to the rest of the class – "Oh, look at what Muriel has brought along." It was a tremendous boost to my confidence and made a difference to my attitude and my schoolwork. At secondary school my

mind was made up to matriculate and go to university to major in botany, but in 1931 the great depression hit and my father could no longer afford to keep me. I had to leave school and work in an office, which I hated.

Although I had walked all around the low hills, I longed to get up in the mountains and see the alpine plants. I had a fight on my hands with my Victorian parents – "No daughter of mine is going to don khaki shorts and go tramping in the mountains!" I joined the Tararua Tramping Club, despite my father's protestations. Within the club was a little botanical circle, and this became the nucleus of the Wellington Botanical Society, which was founded on 18 July 1939. I was a founding member and am now the