

Re: Newsletter 26 Supernatural beings in forest, pp 6-8

I greatly enjoyed the article by J. Bastow Wilson on supernatural beings in forests. But gremlins appear to have interfered with the interpretation provided regarding goblin forest.

Goblin forest on Mt Taranaki (Egmont) is a vegetation type not a place.

Cockayne (1928) referred to it thus:

“On Mt Egmont kamahi forest is so striking that it has received the popular and expressive name of “Goblin Forest”. It occurs as a distinct belt from the neighbourhood of Dawson Falls to North Egmont house and it probably extends right around the mountain.”

If this quote is insufficient, Cockayne’s full intent can be garnered from his 29 June 1917 field notes (MS 74 in the Auckland Institute and museum). In these notes he variously records:

P4 “*Weinmannia* branches from near the bases so that there are numerous, slightly leaning trunk-branches. As one ascends the forest gets more “goblin-like”: the branches are much mossed.”

P5 “The forest here is of the “Goblin type” but not nearly such far-spreading branches as noted near Dawson Falls.”

P5 As one proceeds the forest gets still more of the “goblin” character, the branches spreading more like extended arches”.

From the above, it is evident that Cockayne was reflecting the Taranaki usage of the term goblin forest in relation to a vegetation type not a place. This interpretation is also the one I followed in “Vegetation of Egmont National Park” (1986) and John Dawson (1988), in his book “Forest vines to snow tussocks,” uses it in relation to beech forest of similar structure and physiognomy.

If I recall correctly, others have also used the term goblin forest, for example, Greta Stevenson, in describing the high altitude kamahi-dominated forest on Hauhungatahi in the central North Island.

The term goblin forest although not as widely used as elfin forest, cloud forest, mossy forest or elfin woodland does then have a place in ecology.

Bruce Clarkson, Waikato

Cockayne & the Mt Egmont ‘Goblin Forest’ – Reply

I am grateful to Dr Clarkson for enlivening and informing this discussion. He gives, in full, Cockayne’s published (1928) comment on ‘Goblin forest’ to which I referred in my article. It is clear that Cockayne is referring to a locality, not to a botanical type of forest since: