

Turangi – Waikato & Rotorua Botanical Societies Auckland Anniversary Trip 2019

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Again this year the Waikato and Rotorua botanical societies gathered for their annual Auckland Anniversary trip. Based from a lovely little bach in Turangi (with amazingly bountiful plum trees) a group of enthusiastic bot-soccers set out to explore some of the regions southernmost walks including Lake Rotopounamu (Day 1), the Umukarikari track (Day 2) and the Kiko loop track (Day 3).

After gathering at the bach on the Friday night, the first walk of the weekend was a short stroll around Lake Rotopounamu. Sign posted as only a 2hr easy walk, surely it wasn't going to take us all day.



Setting off from Turangi in the morning the weather had the look of becoming a scorcher, inducing thoughts about swimming. Arriving at the carpark we found we were so unprepared for the wintry weather that awaited us. Setting off rugged up in whatever clothes we could muster up from the boot of the car, we started ticking the

species off the existing list, looking forward to getting to the lake. The vegetation started off a mixture of broadleaf species such as kamahi, mahoe and broadleaf and it wasn't long before we started to notice the taller podocarps. The vegetation changed very little as we headed towards the track junction. One species of note was *Asplenium hookerianum* which at first was thought to be *Asplenium bulbiferum*, the most obvious difference giving away its identity being *A. hookerianum* having the pinnules held on slender stalks.

Nearly two hours later (the total track time for the whole walk) we made it to the track junction where the track loops around the lake. From this point we started to pick up the pace, but only slightly. Helped by not seeing many new species and by our desire to complete the walk.

As we started to round the lake, we began to get into some red beech forest and we also picked up a solo *Gastrodia cunninghamii* in flower which was amazing to see. Once the lake shore was reached that slowed us down again as a debate ensued about the rush that grows in swards around the lake. After a bit of work in the evening it was eventually agreed that it was *Machaerina arthropphylla*.

The other species of interest as we wandered around the lake was several *Tupeia antarctica* growing on the marbleleaf (*Carpodetus serratus*) around the lake margins.



Gastrodia cunninghamii flower stem.



Lake Rotopounamu

We nearly made it around the lake without seeing any adventive species until the last bay before we headed back into the forest where we stumbled across the only patch of gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) that we noticed around the lake. Busily pulling it all out delayed a number of us a further 15 minutes. Hopefully we got it all.

We eventually made it back to the cars 8 hours later. Could this be the record for slowest botanical society walk? Probably not.

On Day two we set out on what was supposed to be the longest walk of the weekend (now heavily contested by day one) to get up into the alpine vegetation on the Umukarikari track in the Kaimanawa ranges. Starting off in the beech forest the walk, apart from being much steeper was going to be much different vegetation. The aim was to make it to the snowline by lunchtime so off we set.

On our way up the hill it was great to see several uncaged *Peraxilla tetrapetala* growing amongst the beech forest. Even better not to see any browse on the plants we saw.

After a steep and steady climb about 100 metres before we broke out onto the tops we were surprised by some *Caladenia atradenia* spotted flowering along the edge of the track. Soon after it was time for lunch, a very quick lunch though as the appeal of some interesting alpine botany proved too much.

Although not the peak time for flowering alpines there was still plenty going on. *Epilobium glabellum*, *Forstera tenella*, *Wahlenbergia pygmaea* and *Euphrasia zelandica* were all putting on a great show.



Caladenia atradenia
beside the track.



A great show of *Euphrasia zelandica* and other flowers above the tree-line.

Unfortunately, while on the tops we also spotted many grey willow (*Salix cinerea*) and dutifully pulled them all out as we spotted them. At last we had to drag ourselves away from the amazing botany on the tops to head down for the final trip of the long weekend.

The last trip was around the kiko loop track in the Kaimanawa Forest Park at the end of Kiko Road.



Myrsine nummularia foliage on the Umukarikari Track

Not having found a species list for the track and none of the members having walked the track before we weren't quite sure what to expect and were surprised and amazed by the majestic and ancient red beech. Unfortunately though in many places there was a serious lack of understory, potentially due to the presence of deer in the forest. We aimed to be back for lunch so in terms of a botanical society trip we did a quick whip around the track. One of the plants that caused us to pause was *Azorella hookeri*, formerly *Schizeilema trifoliolatum*. Interestingly it is supposedly widespread throughout the North and South Islands from Awhitu south but this is the first time I have come across this species in the Waikato. Very similar to a *Hydrocotyle*, it may be easily missed. One to watch out for on future trips. As we had all left our lunches we didn't linger for long and it wasn't long before we were back at the bach raiding the plum trees.

Overall a great weekend with great company and some fantastic botany. Can't wait till next year.