

Anniversary Weekend trip to Motu Kaikoura, Hauraki Gulf, 23–26 January 2026

Geoff Davidson (Compiler)

Friday 23 January

Getting there

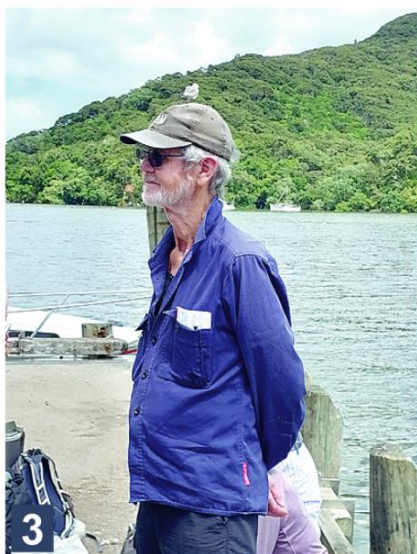
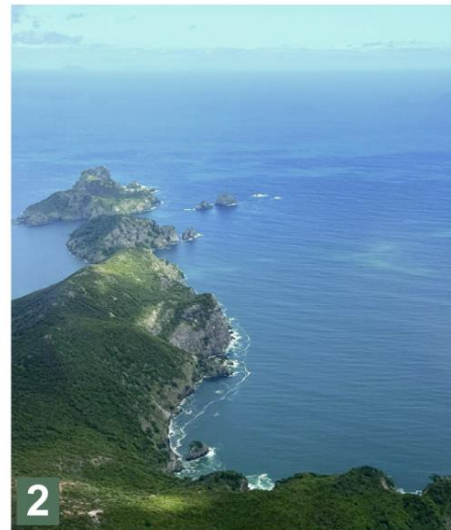
Anne Dudley

After a week anxiously watching rough weather causing floods, slips and disaster, we were relieved that Friday was clear for a botanical Anniversary Weekend on Motu Kaikoura.

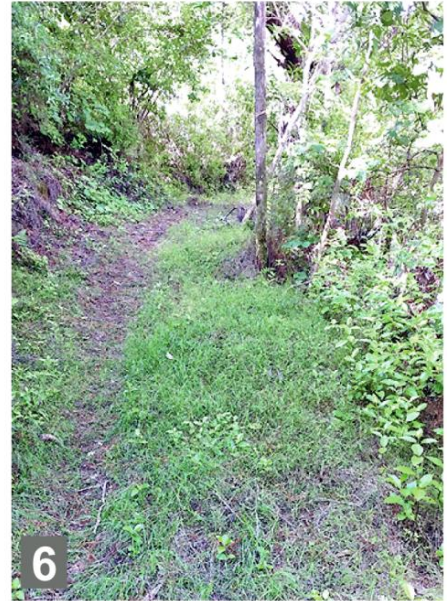
This 564 ha island is situated adjacent to Great Barrier Island, in Port Fitzroy Harbour. It was purchased by the Government in 2005, after intensive fund raising and lobbying by the Native Forest Restoration Trust. Although DOC now owns the island, management is by a charitable trust, The Motu Kaikoura Trust, which employs Clint Stannard as caretaker.

Fifteen Botanical Society members gathered at North Shore airport, had all our luggage weighed, and excitedly climbed into our allocated positions in two nine-seater "Island Aviation" planes (Fig. 1).

Participants were Bella Burgess (BB), Ewen Cameron (EC), Jenny Chamberlain (JC), Amanda Charlton (AC), Helen Cogle, Geoff Davidson (GD) (leader), Anne Dudley (AD), Wendy John (WJ), Christine Major, Nathan McKenzie, Ella Rawcliffe, Mere Roberts, Peter Scott, Liz Walker (EW) and Maureen Young. Photographs were contributed by BB, EC, JC, AC, GD, AD, WJ and EW.



Figs. 1–4: 1. Loading our luggage into one of the Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander aircraft at North Shore Airport. Photo: AD. 2. Motu Kaikoura's western tip with Nelson & Motuhaku Islands beyond. Photo: AC. 3. Waiting for the boat to Motu Kaikoura – and a second seagull to land. Port Fitzroy Harbour. Photo: GD. 4. Clint's ketch arrives at Port Fitzroy jetty. Photo: GD.



Figs. 5–11: **5.** Approaching the jetty at Wharf Cove, Motu Kaikoura, near the Lodge. Some of the bunk rooms visible amongst the kanuka; note the surrounding pine forest. Photo: AC. **6.** *Microlaena stipoides* at the beginning of East Track near the Lodge. Photo: GD. **7.** *Daucus glochidiatus*, a native carrot, amongst the *Microlaena stipoides* in Fig. 6. Photo: GD. **8.** Lower pond fringed with flax and *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontanae*. Photo: GD. **9.** Botanists who have lost the 'plot' on Motu Kaikoura, by upper pond. Photo: GD. **10.** Geoff collecting a leaf from an unusual *Brachyglottis*. Could this be *Brachyglottis* "gigantea"? Near lower pond on West Track. Photo: EW. **11.** Maureen dwarfed by a leaf of the unusual *Brachyglottis*. Geoff's handspan is 200 mm. Photo: EW.

Unfortunately the pilots were unwilling to land on Motu Kaikoura because of cross winds, so took us to Okiwi airfield on the north eastern side of Great Barrier. We enjoyed spectacular views on the half hour flight (Fig. 2). Landing at Okiwi meant that we needed shuttles to transport us the 7 km to Port Fitzroy and then a boat to ferry us to Motu Kaikoura.

The shuttle vans turned up quite quickly and soon drove the short distance to Port Fitzroy, but securing the services of a boat and skipper took considerably longer. Clint, the Motu Kaikoura caretaker, who had been expecting us to land on the Motu Kaikoura airstrip, eventually received a late request to pick us up from Port Fitzroy. In the fine warm conditions it was enjoyable to wait on the jetty watching Great Barrier locals going about their day (Fig. 3). While children played in the sea, vehicles were filled with fuel, and fishermen filleted their catch, some of us wandered up the road to the well-stocked local store for ice-creams and drinks. As time wore on, we ate our packed lunches and, at last, Clint arrived in his family ketch (Fig. 4).

We loaded ourselves and our gear all over the deck and then were sailed sublimely to the jetty in Wharf Cove on Motu Kaikoura (Fig. 5). Once we had carried our gear up to the lodge and sorted ourselves into bunk rooms, we were ready for an afternoon of botanising.

The East Track*

Geoff Davidson

Having arrived at the lodge about 1.30 pm (Fig. 5), settled in and lunched, it was mid-afternoon before we set out on the nearest walk along the East Track. Starting near the jetty, it follows the eastern coast from a stand of large Monterey cypress or macrocarpa trees, (*Hesperocyparis macrocarpa*, formerly *Cupressus macrocarpa*). The long-term plan is to eliminate all the macrocarpas and pines (*Pinus radiata* and *P. pinaster*), but the task of removing them is huge and, as the macrocarpa provide some shelter for the lodge, they remain. Beneath them there is not much regrowth, but once beyond their influence, the vegetation becomes lush and thick. The track itself has a carpet of *Microlaena stipoides* (Fig. 6) and the sharp-eyed among us saw that it was sheltering the slender tracery of the native carrot (*Daucus glochidiatus*) (Fig. 7). Unlike the weedy wild carrot so abundant on waste land throughout New Zealand, this native species is a 'Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable' biennial which grows to about 1.0 m tall and is also native to Australia. Perhaps its distribution on Motu Kaikoura is representative of its endangered state throughout

New Zealand. It spread over a 2–3 m stretch of the path and that is all we saw, over the extent of the island we traversed, although it has been recorded in several places previously.

Moving further up the track we could look down upon the small headland forming the eastern arm of Wharf Cove. Twenty years previously there were a number of Apple of Sodom (*Solanum linnaeanum*) plants here. Repeated weeding attempts eventually diminished it to the point where (optimistically) it can be said to be eliminated. Certainly, the growth of the native species, mainly manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) and kanuka (*Kunzea robusta*), has reached the point where these shade-intolerant weeds will not thrive.

As time had passed and the botanist pace had not taken us very far, we decided to turn back, some retracing their steps, and some taking the Tower and Link Tracks back to the lodge for dinner. The evening meal, prepared in a flurry of well-ordered organisation, was devoured with relish.

Saturday 24 January 2026

The West Track

Bella Burgess

The whole group began walking from the lodge along the western track on Saturday morning to explore some of the taraire (*Beilschmiedia tarairi*) forest remnants along this coast of the motu. The first botanical stop was the pond (Fig. 8).

A new record for the island was collected from the water margin and identified as *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*. *Ranunculus urvilleanus* with distinctive reflexed sepals was noted growing in damper places along the pond-edge track and another hydrophile, *Hypericum pusillum*, was spotted growing in a wet area along the track. Maureen felt sure one of the vegetation survey plots was located at the head of the pond, but no trace could be seen (Fig. 9).

The group walked along under a kānuka canopy with a regenerating understory of *Coprosma rhamnoides*, hangehange (*Geniostoma ligustrifolium*) and silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*). Rounding a corner, the group found a perfect morning tea spot on a rocky outcrop alongside plants of *Pelargonium inodoratum* (which Geoff assured everyone does contrarily have a pleasant scent), as well as both *Cheilanthes distans* and *C. sieberi*. The group moved on and spread out widely along the track, fragmenting into smaller groups at different paces. Those with sharp eyes in the front group spotted *Schizaea fistulosa*, an excellent example of *Psilotum nudum*, and *Gonocarpus incanus*.

* For tracks and other locations, refer to the map in the report on the previous trip in 2011 (see Fig. 4, p. 2 this issue).

There were gasps of incredulity at the size of a rangiora (*Brachyglottis repanda*) leaf which NZPCN says is "Petiole stout, grooved, 80-100 mm long. Leaves leathery, 50-250(-300) × 50-20(-30) mm". Island gigantism is a thing, but is this it? The leaf blade measured 325 × 240 mm with a 115 mm-long petiole (Figs. 10, 11).

Entering the first gully with remnant bush, the leading group admired the larger trees, with miro (*Pectinopitys ferruginea*), taraire and tawaroa (*B. tawaroa*) noted. A rockface under this canopy supported specimens of more lithophytic species: rengarenga (*Arthropodium cirratum*), *Peperomia urvilleana* and *Rhabdothamnus solandri*. Along the track a large fallen pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) and a slippery detour caused some of the group to turn back. The remainder continued into the larger area of remnant taraire on the island in search of the cryptic orchid *Danhatchia australis*. Here a tall canopy of taraire, pūriri (*Vitex lucens*) and kohekohe (*Didymocheton spectabilis*) stood above a vigorous understory of new saplings and seedlings, demonstrating the regeneration that has occurred since deer were eradicated from Motu Kaikoura. Eager to find our elusive orchid, the team swept the leaf litter like spoonbills, before retiring to the shelter of a large rock outcrop to shelter from a shower of rain and have some lunch. Refreshed and dry, the hunt began again, and we were rejoined by the tail-end of the original group. Despite the keen enthusiasm and careful searching, no *Danhatchia* were found. The group were still pleased to see large areas covered by *Arthropteris tenella* and to find seedlings of both nīkau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*) and coastal maire (*Notelaea apetala*).

At this point the group divided again and some returned the way they had come. The remaining five continued westwards and back into younger, kānuka-dominated bush, where a single, healthy toro (*Myrsine salicina*), more than 2 m tall, was seen and admired (Fig. 12). The track folded back up the spine of the island, past the recently discovered rimu sapling (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) (Fig. 13), and some five finger (*Pseudopanax arboreus*), which are uncommon in the Motu Kaikoura flora. The group also admired some *Echinopogon ovatus* and *Galium propinquum* (Fig. 14), growing on the track. Following the ridge, the track led to the airfield, past a notably twisted kauri (*Agathis australis*). On the edge of the airfield a sample was taken from a tangle fern, which was later identified as *Gleichenia dicarpa*.



Figs. 12–14: 12. Toro (*Myrsine salicina*) with Bella and Christine. West track. Photo: WJ. 13. A healthy young rimu sapling. Ridge Track. Photo: BB. 14. *Galium propinquum*. Ridge Track. Photo: BB.



Figs. 15 – 17: 15. Young plants of *Gleichenia* sp. on roadside near old farmhouse. Photo: GD. 16. Sapling kauri encountered amid the inhabitants of the Badlands, on the side of a wind-swept ridge. Photo: EKC. 17. Christine weeding around the *Adiantum aethiopicum*. Photo: GD.

with fertile fronds providing an excellent example of the paired sporangia this species exhibits. The group finally made their way back towards the lodge along a track which showed some stunning red soils eroding from cutting edges, along with sporadic cohorts of kumarahou (*Pomaderris kumeraho*).

Saturday 24 January

Day Two Walk – a non-botanist's perspective

Jenny Chamberlain

Three and a half hours into the West Track walk, ("somewhat rugged in places" Geoff Davidson described it -- in the deceptively relaxed way experienced botanical rambblers do), we encountered a track-blocking fallen tree so huge I could neither scale it, nor clamber round it, without popping a hip or making an idiot of myself, so I turned back. Luckily, so did Peter. We walked back to camp, breathing in ocean-laced forest air, between stands of tall manuka and kanuka, underspread with billowing tree fern umbrellas. The return took just 45 minutes because we were not botanising. But how carefully real botanists walk! No plant is overlooked. Nothing escapes examination, appreciation, or informed discussion. No rare find goes uncelebrated or unrecorded. Full immersion field botany alongside experts is a joy which online or AI can never match.

Once we reached the lodge building, Peter disappeared, so after coffee I re-found the clifftop track we'd taken the day before and walked alone, slowly and quietly, hoping to see kaka stripping *Pinus pinaster* cones or banded rail darting across the path. Instead there were bees, tiny moth-like insects, jittery grasshoppers, akepiro (*Shawia furfuracea*) in scented flower, turutu (*Dianella nigra*) hung with violet-blue berries, clumps of waving grasses hiding seedlings of the native carrot (Figs. 6 & 7), and everywhere a multitude of seedlings: hangehange,

kawakawa (*Piper excelsum*), *Coprosma rhamnoides*, kanuka – all growing in the path, or on its banks, each tiny plant confident of making it to adulthood to join the thick cloak of native regeneration with which Motu Kaikoura is gradually covering itself, in the absence of deer.

Yes, there are interlopers. Wilding pines are on the march and urgently need reduction before they wreak total havoc. But to an urban conservation volunteer, Motu Kaikoura is a miracle and a visitable national taonga. A whole island sanctuary in a peerless ocean setting, freed of browsing mammals, rat numbers held in check, no rubbish dumping or stream pollution, no infill housing, no dogs off leash, no walls of montbretia, meadows of *Aristea ecklonii*, strangling canopies of honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)...nothing but hundreds of species of glorious, ancient New Zealand native plants the likes of which I never expected to walk among. Whatever time is left to me for helping push back the tsunami of mainland weeds will be inspired by four magical, unforgettable days of botanizing on Motu Kaikoura.

Sunday 25 January

Mt Overlook

Geoff Davidson

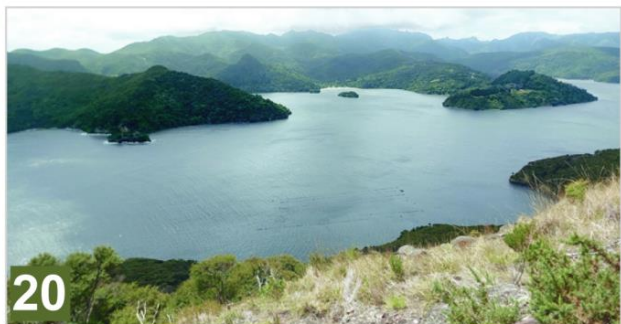
In the morning, all 15 of us, set out for Mt Overlook, the north-east high point of Motu Kaikoura. Walking up the only road on the island to the air strip, some of us had to divert to pull out a vigorous moth plant (*Araujia hortorum*), which fortunately was quite young with only immature seed pods on it. Our roadside walk was further interrupted by the joys of finding an abundant colony of the leek orchid (*Prasophyllum colensoi*) which was growing in the clay/gravel along the road for several metres. On the adjacent roadside bank were even more numerous sporelings of one

of the two species of *Gleichenia* we found on the island. (Fig. 15). Although individuals chose their own path and pace, for most of the day our group was Amanda, Bella, Christine, Geoff, Nathan and Peter.

We caught up with the advance guard who had accompanied Ewen, and were busy surveying the grass airstrip for unusual plant species, new arrivals, and changes in vegetation patterns. To my eye at least, the changes were significant. Having walked the perimeter with a spray pack on my back 10 years

ago, trying to eradicate the dominant gorse, I was pleased to see that the edges of the airstrip are now a thick wall of manuka/kanuka.

From the northern end of the strip we found the start of the track to Mt Overlook, which traverses some of the red dry clay referred to as the 'Badlands'. Here most plants struggle, and the resulting vegetation is prickly and defensive as if to repel intruders from their domain. The manuka is still trying to grow beyond the sparse, almost prostrate form that has struggled to establish on the barren



Figs. 18–22: 18. Four view-shafts from Mt Overlook, as shown in Figs. 19–22. Red = N; purple = E; blue = SW ; brown = W. Topomap modified by Joshua Salter, using map from the Herenga a Nuku/ Aotearoa Outdoor Access Commission. 19. View from Mt Overlook north over Port Abercrombie and Gt Barrier I. Photo: GD. 20. View east over Port Fitzroy Passage; summit of Hiramimata (Mt Hobson) in cloud. Photo: GD. 21. View southwest over airstrip and Mitre Peak. Photo: GD. 22. View west over Boulder Bay and Stanley Point; Bradshaw Cove hidden by the Point. Photo: GD.



Figs. 23–25: **23.** Christine, Bella and Nathan in a jungle of vines. East track heading down to Boulder Bay. Photo: GD. **24.** Parsonsia & Passiflora battle for supremacy and light. Photo: GD. **25.** Gnarly pūriri. East Track. Photo: GD.

clay. Even gorse has almost given up, leaving the Australian shrubs, prickly hakea (*Hakea sericea*) and the even more acute, downy hakea (*H. gibbosa*), to vie with manuka for dominance. In this harsh environment we were surprised to find a seedling kauri looking well-established and ready to push above the low canopy of its neighbours (Fig. 16). Our small group left the 'real' botanists, and moved ahead a little faster.

We passed a volcanic outcrop of near-bare rock where *Pyrrhosia eleagnifolia* thrives with no competition. Then we found a thriving patch of *Adiantum aethiopicum* growing on an exposed ridge, in nearly full sun, demonstrating just how hardy this most delicate-looking fern can be (Fig. 17). I was particularly pleased to see it, because I had searched in vain for a patch I remembered growing near the lower pond.

Arriving at the summit of Mt Overlook (179 m), the view opened to the glory of 360 degrees, overlooking to the north, Port Abercrombie and across Nagle Cove to the Mokohinau Islands; east, to the western flank of Great Barrier Island and Mt Hobson (Hirakimata); southwest, over the airstrip and Mitre Peak (185 m) to the Grey Group of Islands; west, across Craddock Channel to the mainland. No doubt the term 'Craddock Channel' fell into disuse about the same time Motu Kaikoura was last referred to as 'Selwyn Island' (Figs. 18–22).

Retracing our steps, we met up with the main group, before diverting again, taking the East Track along the northern slopes to Bradshaw Cove, although we were a considerable distance from the coast. Here the Badlands had been conquered, and the vegetation was mostly manuka and kanuka

overhead. Underneath there was a flush of broadleaf and fern species. The most prominent, perhaps one every 50–100 m, were vigorous puriri saplings, some up to 5 m tall and starting to flower. The first new species was haekaro (*Pittosporum umbellatum*), about 2 m tall, then a small seedling of tawapou (*Planchonella costata*). A pigeon must be dispersing the seed. As we progressed we found another 5 or 6 saplings of tawapou, scattered randomly along the track.

Then we came across a scene straight out of the Amazon jungle, minus the animals. Rampant climbers, vines and lianas smothered all other vegetation (Fig. 23). Trees that once stood proudly had been dragged down by the weight of the vines, all fighting for space and light. The ground was covered with tendrils searching for something to climb up, and had we left the track we surely would have been tripped. The two main protagonists were the native passionfruit (*Passiflora tetrandra*) and the native jasmine (*Parsonsia heterophylla*) (Fig. 24).

In the battle for supremacy, supplejack (*Ripogonum scandens*) and bush lawyer (*Rubus cissoides*), far from being dominant, were definitely runners-up. The two *Clematis* species recorded on the island, (*Clematis paniculata* and *C. cunninghamii*) may also be entangled in the jungle, but it was difficult to discern them. Most of the broken and fallen trees were kanuka, but even a gnarly, large old puriri (Fig. 25) was feeling the weight of the vines.

Moving on, we found a healthy patch of *Veronica plebeia* (Fig. 26) which provoked some debate as to whether it was / is indigenous. I doubt that I convinced anyone, when I said that, according

to the NZPCN, it is now regarded as a native (<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/veronica-plebeia/>). This population on a remote offshore island adds credence to the argument that it is a native of New Zealand.

There was a scattering of 1–3 m tall sapling puriri and tawapou, all looking exceedingly vigorous and clearly intending to be the forest giants of the future. An occasional kohekohe and taraire added diversity although they tended to be smaller, as though the birds had not been spreading them for so long. All, of course, have grown since the removal of the deer and ship rats in 2008. Kiore still survive, but are controlled to low levels.

To quote Mike Lee’s report in 2024 for the Motu Kaikoura Trust: “Ship rats which were the predominant species on this island, and on nearly all

islands and mainland forests where rats are present, continue to be suppressed at a level termed ‘near eradication’ (Innes & Saunders 2011 [in Lee 2024]). Individual ship rats still swim to the island, from the nearby Great Barrier mainland and presumably from Motu Hāku and Nelson Islands – especially in late summer.....” (Lee 2024).

And then we found the first seedling of a tawaroa on this side of the island. Although only 20 cm tall, it appeared healthy and had the glaucous undersides of tawa, but was unlike any tawa seedlings we were familiar with. Had our illustrious leader from Canterbury, Anthony Wright, been with us, he would surely have agreed, having named it a separate species in 1984. It was a joy to see it colonising land that was regarded as inhospitable such a short decade ago.



Figs. 26–28: **26.** *Veronica plebeia*. East Track. Photo: GD. **27.** Looking east from East Track to a rocky bluff. Two *Hakea* species in foreground. Photo: GD. **28.** Bradshaw Cove with a large pohutukawa, its high branches bearing two rope swings. Two BotSoccers beachcombing near another larger pohutukawa further along the beach. Photo: GD.



Figs. 29–31: **29.** *Psilotum nudum*. A very fertile plant with synangia at all stages of development. Ridge Track. Photo: EW. **30.** *Asplenium haurakiense* with typically crowded fronds. Before the pond on West Track. Photo: GD. **31.** Part of an *Asplenium haurakiense* frond showing basal acroscopic pinnules. Photo: GD.

From one vantage point we looked back to see a steep rocky bluff with deep cracks and fissures. It looked the sort of place we should endeavour to explore – next time (Fig. 27). The photo shows how well the revegetation process has progressed on the once-barren hillside. In the foreground are the two exotic species of *Hakea*, *H. sericea* on the left with large woody nuts, and on the right, a pale soft green clump of the downy *H. gibbosa*, which belies its needle-tipped foliage.

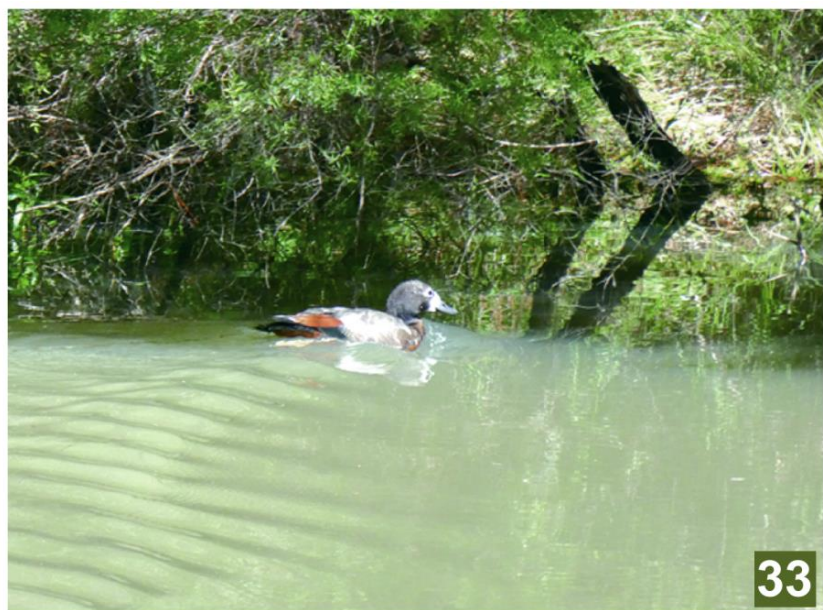
When the East Track met the road, we turned down-hill to Bradshaw Cove (Fig. 28), where some combed the beach, and several of us went for a swim. While in the water, I observed a kereru swoop along the length of the beach, before settling on the sand by a rock, just beyond the tide. There it stayed

for some moments strutting around as though we were intruders, and it was marking its territory. Then it flew to an adjacent pohutukawa to rest and observe us, before patrolling the length of the beach again. May it go about its business in peace, spreading puriri and tawapou fruit far and wide, but perhaps not along the mid-tide level. Our return to the Lodge was a relatively hasty trek up and over the road, with little time spared to observe the roadside vegetation.

Ridge Track

Liz Walker

Later we broke into groups, with one small group including Maureen Young, Anne Dudley, Liz Walker and others, exploring the Ridge Track that starts at the airstrip and runs NW along the ridge towards the western-most point of Motu Kaikoura.



Figs. 32–33: **32.** Upper pond. Photo: GD. **33.** On the Saturday a secretive juvenile female paradise duck was spotted on the upper pond. Photo: EC.

Just after lunch, we saw a good clump of the distinctive fork fern, *Psilotum nudum*, at the side of the Ridge Track (Fig. 29). This indigenous species is also widely distributed in the tropics and subtropics.

Psilotum is easily recognised by the most distinctive broom-like growth habit, with numerous twiggy, coralloid branches typically bearing bright yellow, globular tri-lobed synangia. and highly reduced, scale-like leaves. Having previously only seen a cultivated plant at Western Springs, without sporangia, I was pleased to see the yellow synangia for the first time (see NZPCN – <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/psilotum-nudum/>). The ancestral features present in living psilophytes represent a reduction from a more typical modern fern plant (Wikipedia).



Figs. 34–36: 34. Tagged kanuka branches – evidence of previous plot surveys by the Upper Pond. Photo: GD. 35. Maureen estimating the canopy height. Photo: GD. 36. Senescent kanuka with youthful ponga as understorey. Photo: GD.



Figs. 37–40: 37. Grape vine running amok on the old homestead. Photo: GD. 38. Hounds tongue fern (*Zealandia pustulata*) on barn roof amidst macrocarpa. Photo: GD. 39. The offcut wood pile from the sawmill. Below the old Farm House. Photo: GD. 40. A last farewell to the cabins above the Lodge. Photo: JC.

Monday 26 January Pond Loop Track

Geoff Davidson

We were booked to fly out directly from the island, but the airline contacted us, saying to prepare to take boat and bus to the Okiwi airfield where we originally landed on Gt Barrier I. This caused some consternation and a hurried effort to locate suitable transport that, fortunately, was successful, and all went according to the new plan. We packed up and

cleaned our lodgings in the morning and took the group photo while we could still be gathered together (see Fig. 41).

That left time to do a hasty trip back up the road to the Pond Loop Track in order to check out more thoroughly one of the 5 vegetation plots that Maureen Young had established in October 2007 and resurveyed in November 2013.

The first plant of interest near the start of the track to Taraire Valley, grows on an exposed rocky surface, slightly raised above the surrounding ground level. The debate centred on whether it was a terrestrial *Asplenium flaccidum* or the local endemic *A. haurakiense*. The consensus was the latter. To the casual observer it is remarkable for the number of fronds it has in a dense cluster (Fig. 30). Among *Aspleniums* it is notable because on most pinnae the basal pinnule closest to the frond's rachis or midrib is abnormally long, (<40mm) as compared to the pinnules next to it (<20mm) (Fig. 31). The technical description is "an elongated, basal acroscopic pinnule on each pinna, frequently much longer than that next to it".

Back at the lower pond we continued up the Pond Loop Track alongside the stream, to reach the upper pond (Fig. 32) where Ewen spotted a juvenile female paradise duck (Fig. 33). For the record, there is a third artificial pond on the northern side, halfway

along the airstrip, created as a water supply for firefighting, and useful for filling spray tanks for weed control. There is reputed to be another one further west on the Badlands, but I have not seen it.

Reaching the survey plot site, we were able to establish the dimensions of the plot and could see the individually tagged trunks of the established trees (Fig. 34). Not so easy to ascertain was the degree of change over the past 12 years (Fig. 35). There appeared to be more silver ferns (Fig. 36), and newly arrived, a few seedling taraire. The numerous *Coprosma rhamnoides* did not appear to have grown much, and there were still bare patches with perhaps a seedling hangehange. It was the older hangehange that showed the greatest growth and we had to remind ourselves that there would have been none at all in the time of the deer farm.

So it is a miracle. The island is preserved. The pests are being managed. Nature is doing the rest. Long may it be so.

Returning to the lodge, some of us passed the old 'Tophouse' farmstead (Fig. 37), now in advanced decay, along with an assortment of barns (Fig. 38), sheds and other remnants of the 'early days'. A more recent eyesore was a pile of off-cut timber from a working sawmill (Fig. 39). The cut timber is exported to Port Fitzroy, which is putting to good use the felled pine trees.



Fig. 41. The group photo. L to R: Back Row: Peter Scott, Bella Burgess, Emma Rawcliffe, Nathan McKenzie, Maureen Young, Ewen Cameron, Mere Roberts, Geoff Davidson. Front: Jenny Chamberlain, Christine Major, Wendy John, Helen Cogle, Anne Dudley, Liz Walker. Missing: Amanda Charlton. Photo: WJ's camera.

The trek back to the Lodge (Fig. 40), and transporting of our luggage to the jetty, finally happened. We were transported in three expensive crossings by water taxi along the Port Fitzroy channel to the jetty on Great Barrier Island, then via minicabs to the Okiwi airstrip for the flight home. Fortunately, our group photo, alas minus Amanda, had already been taken at the Lodge (Fig. 41), in case there was not time for it in the last rush to pack up.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the operators, who provided the services permitting us the pleasure of a long weekend on Motu Kaikoura Island, and a safe return. A special thanks to the Motu Kaikoura Trust, and Clint Stannard, Motu Kaikoura caretaker, who kindly assisted us throughout our stay on the island. Thanks also to all the congenial participants who made the weekend such fun (and well worth the 'stress' of organising it).

References

Lee, M. 2024: <https://motukaikoura.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Motu-Kaikoura-2025-rat-management-progress-report.pdf>
NZPCN <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/psilotum-nudum/>
Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psilotum>

Field trip to Mahurangi West Rd / SH1 intersection and Waihunga Moirs Hill Scenic Reserve, 18 April 2026

Maureen Young

Participants: Tricia Baird, Bev Davidson, Geoff Davidson, Leslie Haines, Jetta Laurenson, Philip Moll, Peter Moosberger, Helen Preston Jones, Alison Wesley, Dave Wilson, Maureen Young (leader).

Perhaps the small size of the group meeting at the intersection of Mahurangi West Road and SH1 (Fig. 1) was due to the forecast for showers in the morning and rain in the afternoon, but perhaps it was because of the high cost of fuel due to the current attack against Iran. Fortunately, the weather ignored the forecast and we experienced a fine day. It was planned to do a survey of the many plants of mistletoe (*Ileostylus micranthus*) growing on the totara (*Podocarpus totara*) trees around the intersection, but when permission was sought from

the owner of the property, she explained that a lot of earth moving was being carried out and OSH (Occupation Safety and Health) would not allow visitors. This meant that we could only check out the roadside trees, but fortunately there was a low-growing plant of mistletoe that was fruiting prolifically, with the green fruit starting to turn yellow (Figs. 2, 3, 4). Nearby was a large tree where we could see some plants high up among the branches, and also the stems of plants that had died (Fig. 5). A short walk up Mahurangi West Road took us to another totara tree that had two mistletoes on it.

Almost all mistletoes, including *Ileostylus micranthus*, with green leaves are hemi-parasites, able to photosynthesise but relying on the host tree for water and minerals. The danger of being dependent on a host is that the death of the host means the death of the mistletoe.

We then left for the second part of the day, driving north along the road with the informal names of Schedewys Hill and Windy Ridge. At the end of Windy Ridge we turned left onto Moirs Hill Road. This winding road took us well uphill to where there is a repeater station. A short distance on was the entrance to Waihunga Moirs Hill Scenic Reserve (Fig. 6). The Old North Road used to pass over this hill, and the Moirs had stables there so travellers could change horses. This little-known DOC track is gravelled and it only takes non-botanists an



Fig. 1. Field trip participants at the Mahurangi West intersection. All photos taken during the field trip by Philip Moll.