

# A Five-Hundred-Mile Tour

By E. T. FROST

A TOUR of the North Auckland peninsula between Kaitaia and the Waitemata Harbour proved of great interest.

The first thing that the nature lover notices is that this is a "Kowhai year," and as one travels around harbour foreshores and on roads running parallel with the many streams a blaze of yellow meets the eye almost at every turn. Especially so was this noticeable south of Whangarei between Mangapai and Waipu, where for miles the golden heads of this beautiful tree were interspersed with the white titree (*Leptospermum ericoides*), kohukohu and karaka. The glory of this tree culminated in Kowhai Park at Warkworth, where, in the shelter of the valley they were seen at their best. Associated with this abundance of nectar-producing flowers were to be seen the tuis, and I noticed them from isolated trees on the Hokianga Harbour right down to Albany, a distance of nearly 200 miles. There is no doubt that this beautiful bird is more than holding its own, and such a year of profuse flowering of the Kowhai attracts them from far and near.

The Waitangi Trust Board planted out a grove of about four hundred Kowhai trees, many of which flowered this year and were soon found by the tuis, which, by the way, are nesting close by, and it is to be hoped that they will increase and become a feature of that beautiful reserve. Here and there isolated heads of the red rata were to be seen in all their beauty.

A most interesting place at which I called in and spent several days was Helena Bay, on the Whangarei-Russell Road. Here is a real naturalist's paradise. The headmaster of the school has evidently got the pupils very much interested in all kinds of native study. In an enclosed space, with plenty of bush mould and leaves, I saw specimens of native snails collected in the vicinity of the school. They were the "Kauri Snail" (*Parypantha busbyii*) the *Parapantha rhytida*, and the Pupuharakeke or Flax Snail (*Pacystylus hongii*).

The fine beach, about two hundred yards from the school, yields many specimens of shell life, which the pupils also collect.

Attached to the school is an area which is planted in many and varied specimens of

native trees, and which in a few years will be of great interest to later pupils and a thing of beauty for the district.

Many other schools could take a lesson from this little school on the shores of Helena Bay. From Helena Bay to Russell the road winds over bush-clad hills and through fertile valleys but evidences of summer fires are on all sides, especially as one nears Russell, and the gorse is creeping out from that historic centre, and as it is a great fire carrier it is assisting in the destruction of many isolated patches of native bush.

I saw several such areas in which almost all the trees were dead or dying. The same thing is occurring between Paihia and Kawa Kawa, where there has been much fire damage during the past few years.

From such a depressing scene of gorse and dead timber it was pleasing to arrive at the beautiful farming district of Ngapuhi, four miles south of Kaikohe. Once covered with a dense forest, it is now a first-class farming area, and it was pleasing to notice the areas of native bush that the farmers have set by as reserves. Here again, the tui is very much in evidence and his bell-like notes can be heard from almost every grove.

A feature of this district is the persistence of the totara. After the bush was felled, about 40 years ago, many young totaras came up with the grass, and one can notice today, especially around a large totara stump, the way in which this beautiful tree persisted in spite of the grazing. Today there are small groves of pure totara besides many isolated trees dotted here and there over the paddocks, which now provide shade and shelter for the numerous sheep and cattle. Totara seems to thrive on hoof treading and rubbing by stock, which is something that few of our native trees can stand. Neither do they seem to require shelter during their early growth.

The final lap of my trip was made by aeroplane, yet at the height of 2000 feet one could not escape the glory of the bush in spring time. Looking down as we were crossing the Mangamuka ranges, the dense bush appeared as a carpet ranging in colour from the yellowish green of the kohekohe to the dark green of the taraire. Splashes of white indicated clusters of clematis which had cleared the treetops.