

Notes from Branches

WANGANUI BRANCH

About 20 members of the Wanganui Branch on their first trip of the year travelled to the lower Waitotara River to see the stumps of the submerged forest, which stands in a bend about a mile from the river mouth.

The trees, whose roots are below sea level, are the remains of an ancient forest drowned (many centuries ago) when a very extensive earth movement caused the coastal plain to subside several feet and the waters of the estuary to sweep through the forest floor. From this stand of tree stumps the river takes its name—"the water of totara trees"—though a chip from a stump taken some years ago by Mr W. Mead proved to be of rimu.

More than a century ago Richard Taylor described the grove in the bed of the river as so thick that "a canoe can hardly wind its way amongst the many trunks which rise up in it." In the Auckland Art Gallery there is a painting of the scene by Colonel E. A. Williams, dated 1865. The scene has not altered greatly, though a lower limb or two which then still had branched from the trunks have since disappeared. No doubt the stumps extend into the lupin-covered dunes fringing the banks of the river and have long since been buried by drifting sand.

Only carbon-dating could tell us the age of the trees and give a clue to the event which brought their death. It would be interesting to know if such a test has been made.

There is a warning in the remains of this submerged forest when we consider the possible raising of the waters of Lake Manapouri. For how many centuries would drowned timber in that lake defy the elements? The drowning of forest by a natural phenomenon is unavoidable, but deliberate submerging of miles of bush-clad shoreline, including the shorelines of 30 islands, is needless.

After threading our way through timber and other debris above high-water mark on the river bank, we eventually reached the river mouth. Many birds were about. Besides the black-backed and red-billed gulls, there were scores of pied stilts, about a dozen black swans, a formation of 100 or more ducks, and several Caspian terns.

We had hoped to spot the banded dotterel, which is often seen in this locality, but we were disappointed. However, flitting in and out of the lupins, the pied fantail was with us most of the time.

—T.M.B.

AUCKLAND BRANCH

On a sunny, warm day last winter the Auckland Branch toured local parks and learnt some facts about their history, their present state, and the future planned for them.

The Domain, once Government Gardens, was originally scrub fern, manuka, and swamp. It was obtained as a reserve by Act of Parliament in 1893, but before this (in 1867), the Acclimatisation Society had been formed and had 4 acres of the gardens. The society introduced and released birds such as starlings, gulls, thrushes, sparrows, yellowhammers, chaffinches, and some game birds, as well as

opossums, hare, deer, wallabies, etc. They also brought in and grew such plants as wheat, tobacco, bananas, fuchsia, chrysanthemums, and pines.

As the result of an exhibition at the Domain in 1913 the small pond (with island), kiosk, cookhouse, and band rounda were added to the area, and the hot-house with its courtyard and fernery was built in 1928. In the early days many a family travelled on a Sunday afternoon by horse and buggy to see the gardens and to picnic on the Domain. Auckland's first water supply—the present duck-pond—came from here, too, and was piped to a point nearer the city where people would come to collect their water. About 1948, at Princess Te Puka's instigation, Maoris at dawn one day planted a totara tree to mark the site of early Maori camps. This tree still stands, surrounded by a palisade, on a rise behind the fernery.

Eden Garden, which until about 6 years ago was a disused quarry area, is now set out with plants, native and others, which are seen from pleasant, rambling walks. Of special interest to us was an area where native trees such as kawaka, rimu, totara, and kauri have been planted.

Cornwall Park (334 acres) remains a place of peaceful attractiveness, with its green open spaces, areas of trees, stonework steps and sitting areas, and distant views.

Mount Smart Domain, a much-quarried volcanic cone of 286 ft, has been lowered in most parts to a level of 65 ft. A very active Mount Smart Domain Board has, in the last 33 years, developed the central area with a well-planned stadium for the amateur athletics association. Of special interest to us was the plantation of native trees and densely foliated fernery on the southern and south-eastern slopes of the remaining cone. These have resulted from the efforts and keen interest of the late R. L. Thornton and others. The board hopes eventually to have a unique 1½-mile bush walk encircling the whole Domain.

In the latter part of the afternoon we enjoyed a drive near the northern shores of the Manukau Harbour as far as **Atkinson Bush**, near Titirangi. Here, most of us left our bus for an hour's tramp down through the bush, with Mrs Fooks helpfully showing us, and naming, much of the varied plant life along the track. Near the beach we saw what was the highlight of the day for us. High up in the branches of a puriri tree a kereru was busily feeding, quite unconcerned by our keen interest.

—Isabel Thompson

CANTERBURY BRANCH

For some years the Canterbury Branch has been organising study group trips in addition to Saturday field trips. Being more active because of younger age, the junior study group, for those aged between 13 and 30, can venture further afield than the senior study group, for those over 30 years. Both groups make six or seven trips in a season, using all the long holiday weekends and some two-day weekends. In Canterbury long distances have to be travelled before any bush is reached; however, by leaving on a Friday night full use can be made of even a two-day weekend in the field.