

NORTHERN: SCRUB

As a result of stocking and burning of the more open country and prolonged browsing of the whole area by deer, there is perhaps no natural scrub formation left in the area. Forest undergrowth (List 8) appears to have developed into a dense, divaricating scrub form, particularly where mountain beech is dying out and ceasing to form a canopy. *Olearia colensoi* only occurs towards the southern boundary; seedlings of *Senecio elaeagnifolius* are remarkably widespread on protected sites, but the rarity of adult plants suggests that this species has been reduced by browsing.

Towards the NE extremity of the range fire-induced manuka scrub is extensive up to about 3,500ft. This resembles the scrub of the Kaweka Blowhard in species composition and relative abundance of *Leptospermum ericoides*. Its heavy defoliation, presumably by opossums, behind Kereru is a recent (1962), and on the steep slopes, an unwelcome development (List 11A).

An open scrub community on higher exposed crests, particularly the Otupae Range and Te Koau Ridge, also shows affinities with that of similar situations in the Kaweka Range. Manuka takes the same prostrate form, but the frequency of clumps of *Griselinia littoralis* huddled in the lee of small hummocks is peculiar, especially in the presence of deer (List 11 B).

NORTHERN: LIMESTONE CLIFF

Besides the river-cliff communities which have been described in an earlier section several limestone blocks (Aorangi, Rakaunui a Kura, and Potae) exceeding 4,000ft in height, which are striking features along the southern margin of the NW plateau, support a distinct assemblage of plants on their cliffs and in the numerous clefts of the plateau itself (List 12).

WESTERN RUAHINE (Maps 3 and 4)

The clear-cut line of cedar forest across the end of the Mangaohane tussock marks the northern margin of the Western Ruahine forest. Cedar forest occupies most of the Mangatera basin and runs south along the outer flank of the range till the Oroua River emerges, then continues in an increasingly modified form as far as the mouth of the Pohangina Gorge, where it is indistinguishable from the forest of the Southern Ruahine in which cedar is no longer dominant.

Although cedar occurs throughout the range, as does *Dacrydium biforme*, it is only where mountain beech is absent that one or the other species can dominate the timber line, so that on this basis the boundary between Central and Western Ruahine follows the edge of the mountain-beech forest. This boundary begins near the divide at Potae and runs obliquely SW across the Mangatera valley to the Mokai Patea. A narrow strip of cedar forest continues south along the western face as far as the Whanahua Range. Cedar continues to dominate on the outer face of this but on its inner side *Dacrydium biforme* becomes increasingly important in a wide belt running obliquely SE across the Oroua and Pohangina valleys to the Hawke's Bay side of the range.

As earlier stated, the upper Pohangina valley could be treated as a separate natural area, but for simplicity's sake is here considered as an extension of the Western Ruahine area, which then is distinguished by the absence of mountain beech, the presence of red beech, and the dominance of cedar and/or *Dacrydium biforme* at the timber line.

The Western Ruahine thus consists of two main areas, a triangular one in the north and an oblique band across the range in the south, joined by a narrow outer strip across the foot of the Mokai Patea tussock.