

REPORT ON HIMATANGI BUSH

Himatangi bush is a remnant of a much larger forest which blanketed dunes and flats in the Himatangi Block about 3 miles WSW of Rangitoutu and 6 miles from Foxton.

The forest developed on soils of the third dune - building phase described by J.D. Cowie (N.Z. J. Geol. & Geophysics 6: 268, 1963). It is estimated that these dunes were stabilized 2,000 to 4,000 years ago. At the western extremity the forest spreads on to dunes of a more recent phase (dunes fixed 500 to 1000 years ago).

This bush is of particular scientific interest because it is the only place between the Manawatu and Rangitikei (and possibly in the whole of the Western Wellington sand country) where any of the native dune vegetation of these ages remains. Even at the time of pakeha settlement dune forest was rare and it is remarkable that any has persisted to this day. The flats which the Himatangi bush covers are associated with the third dune building phase and it is only in the Round Bush reserve that original vegetation of this class of soil still remains. The dated sequence of soils and of vegetation on dunes and flats provides an outstanding opportunity to study the processes of soil formation. Vegetation is one of the factors giving the soils their peculiarities and it is important to know as much as possible about the original vegetation and to preserve representative samples for future study. Himatangi bush, though modified, is typical of some such vegetation but, with the formation of new roads and subdivision of land, the bush is unlikely to remain for many more years.

Apart from this value the bush has considerable scenic merit and from a high dune at its western extremity there is an unequalled panorama of the Manawatu lowlands and hills.

The bush including its numerous scattered fragments, covers about 150 acres. Most of the area is in a single elongated irregular block filling wet inter-dune flats and extending almost to the crests of the dunes on the northern and western margins. Kahikatea was milled from the flats during the Depression and in most of the outlying remnants vigorous, and almost pure stands of kahikatea have developed. In the main section of the bush pukatea is dominant. Much of the original understorey has been destroyed by cattle and supplejack has taken its place. However, many species are represented, some by only a few individuals but regeneration of understorey in this type of forest is very rapid when protected by fencing.

The dune forest is of particular interest. Many tree species make up the canopy - among them tawa, titoki, mahoe, rewarewa, ngaio, mapou, kaikomako, hinau, lancewood, pigeonwood, akeake (Dodonaea), kowhai, kohuhu and kanuka. The understorey is not dense but quite varied. It contains Coprosma rhamnoides, C. crassifolia, mingimingi (Cyathodes) Melicope simplex and a native broom. These are mostly plants unpalatable to livestock and therefore not fully representative of the original shrub layer. The ground is everywhere covered by the native grass Quilismenus, and smaller quantities of N.Z. ricegrass and some ferns.

Himatangi bush contains at least 120 species of native plants. They include 15 trees, 15 vines, 31 shrubs, 27 ferns, 20 grasses, sedges, orchids and other monocotyledons, 12 herbaceous dicotyledons and 27 ferns. It is possible that with further examination the list will exceed 130.

As this bush lies in a region where native trees are a rare feature of the escape it warrants preservation for its aesthetic and scientific worth.

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July, 1968