

Spring Working Weekend on Hauturu, September 2008

I can remember seeing Little Barrier on the horizon as a child and being told “no-one is allowed to visit there”. On a clear day from my office at Auckland Hospital I can see Little Barrier directly above Tiritiri Matangi (where I guide once or twice a month). On Tiritiri earlier this year someone told me it is possible to visit LBI, so I immediately joined Hauturu Supporters, read the newsletter from cover to cover and put my name down for the spring working weekend, expecting I might get a chance to visit in a year or two. I was very excited when Judy phoned me to say I was on the spring trip on 13-14th September 2008.

I didn't believe I was actually going until the night before, as the winter weather had cancelled most outdoor activities for the last several months.

Nine of us met Lyn Wade (our group leader) at Warkworth DOC at 7 am on Saturday for the quarantine check. I had scrubbed my boots so they were cleaner than ever before, but the tiny bits of dirt left between some of the cracks could have harboured seed so these were removed with a nail. We packed our gear into fishing crates, which were then sealed, drove to Sandspit, and boarded the ‘Norma Jean’.

The day was beautiful and calm, the best weather since last summer. We simply stepped from the ‘Norma Jean’ onto the Rangers boat at LBI without even getting our feet wet. So much for the waves, and clambering ashore over slippery boulders (I'm not complaining!!)

Shane, the Ranger, welcomed us to the island while we sat in the sun by the bunkhouse with a kokako in the tree above us.

Then on with the new gardening gloves to pull onion weed from among the *Muehlenbeckia*. This was the most enjoyable weeding I have ever done! A beautiful day, superb location and lots of interesting people to talk to. Far more exciting than pulling out the onion weed that is growing beside my house.

After a break for lunch we continued on, filling several huge plastic bags. It is a never-ending job however, as no matter how careful you are to remove it all, some bulbs remain, so we'll have to come back next year!

At 3pm we stopped work and could explore the nearby tracks. Then back to the bunkhouse for a BBQ dinner including scallops dived for by Shane that afternoon.

After dark we found a wetapunga on the pohutukawa tree by the stream and two more on the punga wall by the Ranger's house. Later we went kiwi “hunting” but with an almost full moon they were keeping under cover. We did hear a male and female call.

On Sunday the ten of us set out to tramp up the Thumb track and back down Waipawa track. I went to LBI particularly interested in learning more about the plants, as I am familiar with many of the birds from Tiritiri. I was impressed with the size of the nikau and kanuka. I was impressed with many of the tiny plants that I'd never have noticed without the expertise of the group. I was impressed with how much the group knew about botany and have come home inspired to learn more. So I took lots of photographs to help identify what I'd learnt: *Lycopodium*, birds-nest fungi (*Nidula candida*) and tiny orchids (*Pterostylis*). By the end of the walk I could differentiate hangehange from mangemange and mingimingi. There wasn't a single plant that couldn't be identified by someone in the group.

After lunch we cleared up the bunkhouse and Shane showed us a magnificent tuatara called Spike. His skin was so soft, not hard and scaly as I'd imagined it would be. (My children have now changed our computer's desktop to a photo of Spike.)

The sea was covered in whitecaps so we waited to hear what the plan was for getting off the island, and this time we thought we would get wet. Breakers were coming in over the boat-launching railway tracks but Shane expertly managed to get us all off the island and back onto the 'Norma Jean' hardly getting us wet.

The trip back to Sandspit was lumpier than on the way over. I stood leaning in the back doorway watching Hauturu get smaller as waves sprayed water over the boat.

What a wonderful weekend; the isolation and pristine nature of LBI, the birds, the plants, the people. Thank you for the opportunity to visit, and thank you to all those who taught me so much and inspired me with botany.

Back in the office on Monday morning, LBI was visible in the distance; I felt excited that I had been there and unexcited that instead I was working indoors. I think I need to change that!

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