

associated with landing on the island. They said 'The Western Islet is an extremely precipitous rock of such a nature that it would be hazardous and dangerous to land on it, and after landing it would need an experienced mountaineer to scale it. To erect a light would be a difficult and tedious task, and to locate a staff there to attend to it would practically make them prisoners'. In their opinion, landings might be possible one day a month on average!

After several unsuccessful attempts, Major Johnson succeeded in landing on West Island in January 1950. He made a comprehensive collection of plants which was handed to Professor Geoff Baylis of Otago University, who has undertaken the bulk of the botanical research done on the Kings. Amongst these specimens was a new species, a member of the family Myrsinaceae, but not belonging to any known genus. Johnson returned to West Island with Baylis in January of the next year to collect further material.

Photography was impossible as the landing was made in dense fog, later described by Baylis (1958) as 'depressingly reminiscent of the circumstances primarily responsible for the wreck of the *Elingamite* about fifty years previously'.

Following this visit, Baylis (1951) formally described the new species. He noted that it was represented by 'perhaps a dozen trees . . . members of a windswept forest scrub in which the true habit cannot be seen'.

All this history led our 1982 Offshore Islands Research Group party to have small hopes of landing on West Island, but we were lucky enough to get ashore ('acliff' might be a better term!) at the first attempt. No fog this time — we were blessed with early summer sun, so out came the cameras.

The first plant was spotted in low scrub just above the wreck of the *Elingamite*. Although superficially similar to karaka, *Elingamita* has slightly lighter green leaves and very thick fleshy looking branchlets. However, one sight of the fruit (a spectacular bright red colour when ripe) makes it obvious that this is a very different species. This first-found plant bore flower panicles, bunches of green fruit and remnants of bunches of ripe red fruit, indicating the probability of a two year cycle from flowering to fruit maturity.

Climbing up through the dense two metre high 'petrel scrub' of flax, taupata and *Hymenanthera novaezelandiae* through which odd *Elingamita* trees were scattered, we came to a small area of pohutukawa forest near the summit of the island. The pohutukawas provided a more or less continuous canopy some 10–12 metres high, beneath which was an understorey of *Elingamita* from 2–4 metres high. Standing in one spot twelve mature trees were counted, each bearing hanging bunches of ripe red fruit. Dozens of seedlings were found in the rich, light humus between the rocks — there were



Bunches of ripe fruit on small trees beneath the pohutukawa canopy.

Unripe fruit, probably a year old.