



Rangitoto's sandy beaches are few and restricted

The dominant plant is the pohutukawa. As may be seen on any cliff and headland, this tree has an amazing root system, much of it along the top of the ground, pushing outward rather than downward for support and nourishment. On the inhospitable lava of Rangitoto this tendency must be exercised to the full—the sensitive and exploring root-tips, hundreds of them, pushing into the pits in the lava that may hold a little moisture. Cavities below can accommodate still more and in time a formidable root system supports a large tree. Centuries of accumulation of leafmould have gradually filled up surface hollows, the shade has allowed a growth of moss to bind it, and other seedlings have found a place to start.

On a level parade ground surfaced with fine scoria we found a patchy sward, consisting not of grass, but of seedling trees of five different kinds, pohutukawa in the majority. On the established patches of bush the undergrowth includes some of the hardier ferns and even the delicate-looking kidney fern in profusion.

Not Much to Drink

The problem of moisture is the main factor limiting plant growth, for there are of course no streams, and it is not surprising that a large percentage of the plants are xerophytic, i.e., adapted in some way for conserving what moisture they can get. Pohutukawa leaves for example have a furry surface on the underside of the leaf which acts in that way. Of plants with highly polished fleshy leaves, serving the same purpose, the most conspicuous on Rangitoto is broadleaf. It is the species which elsewhere grows mainly as an epiphyte on the branches of larger trees, but the Rangitoto specimens start from the rock and become trees themselves.

There is much more to the story of the plants, but for that you must go to the competent botanists who have written about it—to non-technical books by Miss M. W. Crookes, Miss Lucy Cranwell, Professor Arnold Wall, and others.

Animal life is not very abundant or conspicuous. There are insects, but mainly those that can live on the trees. For some reason or other Rangitoto is a cicada's paradise and their stridulating din on a hot day is remarkable. A number of birds live there too, but water

supply is a problem for them and must restrict the number that such an area should support. Australian wallabies were introduced many years ago and are still there. It seems a pity, for the plants have difficulties enough without a browsing mammal to crop off shoots and seedlings.

The marine life of the long shore-line is a story in itself, interesting enough to keep marine zoologists happy for hours in its rock pools and its rare, restricted sandy beaches. Altogether, as harbour sentinel or as wild life sanctuary, Rangitoto is both unique and satisfying.

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