TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

BOTANY

VOL. 1

No. 23

August 3, 1962

[Continued from Transactions of the Royal Society of N.Z., Volume 88, Part 4.]

The Flora and Vegetation of Old Man Rock, Mercury Islands Group

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[Received by the Editor, November 28, 1961.]

Abstract

A description is given of the vegetation and soil covering Old Man Rock, a small islet off the coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. A list of the plants found is included.

OLD Man Rock is a precipitous-sided stack, less than an acre in area, which rises straight out of the water to a height of 225ft. It lies approximately 12 miles north-east of Whitianga in Mercury Bay, is $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the Coromandel coastline at its nearest point, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-west of Ohena Island. A rock specimen collected was identified by Dr W. A. Watters (N.Z. Geological Survey) as basalt.

The writer had a chance to visit the islet on July 11 and 12, 1961, when the battery-operated navigation light was being serviced from H.M.N.Z.F.A. Hauraki. Landing is difficult except during calm weather.

The scrub which covers Old Man Rock looks undisturbed, and it is possible that this vegetation was never burnt during Maori times. It is therefore worthwhile to put on record details of the composition of the islet's plant covering together with a list of the species found.

The vegetation of the upper two-thirds of the islet is a Paratrophis-karo-houpara scrub in which the dark green foliage of karo (Pittosporum crassifolium) contrasts with the paler greens of Paratrophis banksii, houpara (Pseudopanax lessonii) and other shrubs. The scrub canopy is for the most part 5–10 feet high with a few trees emerging to a height of 14 feet. An understory is practically absent apart from the fern Asplenium lucidum. The soil is a shallow powdery loam with many shattered rocks exposed at the surface. Bluffs are numerous. The scrub covering the small flat-topped summit of the islet contains a high proportion of wharangi (Melicope ternata) and a soil profile here showed:—

in—dark brown loam; loose; fine granular structure.

12in—dark brown loam with stones; very friable; moderately developed very fine crumb structure.

Roots throughout; well drained.