



Tutor's Tidings

No 14 - Friday 24th April, 2015

Greetings to all and special thoughts to the ANZACs this weekend

OK this week we will start with the most important of all things for wood turners...

- WOOD !

Over the past six weeks I have provided information some of about New Zealand's native trees starting with KAURI then RIMU, BLACK MAIRE, KAHIKATEA, KOWHAI, and last week's TT edition featured the mighty TOTARA.

This week the information is about a native NZ tree that is very hard, very dense, very heavy and very tough.

PURIRI - *Vitex lucens*

History & Culture

There are Puriri alive today that were standing well before the first humans set foot in New Zealand. There are some that may even be older than the most ancient Kauri trees, as they have a remarkable stubbornness when it comes to survival. Puriri can be found uprooted, grazed by stock, cut in half, mostly rotten and still producing new shoots.



The tree quickly gained the respect of Maori living in northern New Zealand where it naturally occurs. To many tribes the tree was deeply sacred and associated with mourning and burial of the dead; a connection that still lives on in some places today. After the death of a chief or person of high mana, the body would be adorned with a coronet of puriri leaves, and washed with an infusion of the leaves and water. After being left to decompose, a ritual scraping ceremony was performed and the bones entombed in the hollow of a Puriri.

Taketakerau – a giant burial tree in Opotiki, is estimated to be around 2000 years old and served as an important burial site for the local Bay of Plenty tribes. The tree was considered highly sacred and interference with it was a religious offence punishable by death. During the early phase of European settlement a storm damaged the tree and exhumed the bones, forcing the local tribes to remove them for reburial.

Despite this deep association with death, The Bay of Islands Maori also considered Puriri a symbol of joy at being alive. “Ka kata nga puriri o taiamai,” is an ancient proverb used as a greeting, congratulation or when honouring a guest. Translated its meaning is: “the puriri trees of the bay of islands are laughing with joy.” It represented a delight and happiness that nature was content and all was well with the world.

Puriri is generally associated with fertile or volcanic soil, which was highly sought after by Europeans for pasture and cropland. As a result, it was extensively milled, cleared and burned. Today, the image of a lonely gnarled Puriri in the middle of a paddock has become iconic of the species. However this may be something of an artefact of selective logging. Because only the best and straightest trees were logged, many of the ones that remain today are those that were passed over for being particularly twisted and distorted.

Uses

The wood of Puriri is **perhaps the strongest wood** in New Zealand, particularly **heavy, dense and also resistant to rot**. Though it could be difficult to work with, it was an incredibly useful and durable timber source, being described as the New Zealand equivalent of Teak or Mahogany. It was used by early colonists for buildings, framings, bridges, ship, railway sleepers, firewood, foundation blocks, poles, fence-posts, gears and engine bearings. The wood used for fence-posts was so tough that staples to attach fencing wire struggled to penetrate the wood and a special “Puriri staple” had to be developed. There are still Puriri fenceposts today that are nearly 100 years old and in Northland there are water pumps that still run on Puriri bearings.

Infusions of the leaves were used by Maori for back ache, joint pain, ulcers, sore throats, sprains, and to wash dead bodies for preservation. The Maori used Puriri timber for garden tools, weapons, defensive forts and palisades. It has been said that when these palisade walls were fired upon, shotgun shells would ricochet off the dense wood rather than lodge within it. It was the preferred material to construct eel traps with, as it was one of the only native timbers that would sink.

Puriri is one of the most commonly used trees in restoration planting as it produces flowers and fruit all year round. It is a key supplier of food to the Kereru, a very important species that is the principal seed disperser for a number of New Zealand's large-fruited plants. It also serves as the main home for New Zealand's largest moth – the Puriri Moth. The young caterpillar burrows into the trunk and lives off the tree's sap. After around 7 years it pupates into a moth and flies off to find a mate.



Male puriri moth .



Old puriri moth burrow and feeding scar in a tree trunk.

New Zealand Native trees - The PURIRI

Puriri *Viux lucens*

A massive tree up to 20 m high with stout, spreading branches and a trunk up to 1.5 m through. Found in coastal and lowland forests in Northland and the northern part of the Coromandel Peninsula.



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Fig 3 Upper surface of the distinctive corrugated puriri leaf. The upper three scales are 5-12.5 cm long and 3-5 cm wide and the petiole is 3.5-12.5 cm long.

Fig 4 Springing from drooping February (Feb 5)
Family: *Myrsinaceae*
Genus: *Viux*



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Fig 1 A tree over 100 years old on the Coromandel Peninsula, 1880
Fig 2 Clusters of puriri flowers. The leaves have curing uses of the post.



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Acknowledgement – J T Salmon

Tuesday Session Happenings

The session commenced with a presentation by Nigel McCarter who was keen to demonstrate his newly-acquired midi-sized RECORD lathe. Nigel also demonstrated his useful wood circle cutting gadget.

Members were reminded about end grain identification and introduced to a new wood for turning. "GREVILEA ROBUSTA" also known as Silky Oak.

The session continued as follows:

GARTH busied himself with pepper mill making and pen blank preparation .

DAVID M launched into pen making and produced his first pen, as did **MALCOLM** who liked it so much that he made two. Both these pen makers are no longer novices at this project as each produced a faultless, flawless pen.

JAN started an ambitious project turning a highly-figured rimu bowl and made great progress with her turning.

DAVID R and **JAMES** took up the challenge of setting a whole paua shell into bowl tops. This turning-carving project proved to be a time-consuming activity but both men stuck to the task and finished the day with neat-fit shell cavities. Well done to those two for their patience and determination. Next step is to create a bed of resin to cradle the whole paua shell in the carved out cavity.

GAIL beavered away at turning an XXOS sized bowl from a very large round of macrocarpa.



Nigel points out the advantages and what he likes about the RECORD midi-lathe.

NOTE:

Today was the FINAL session for Course No.3



JAMES and DAVID, our two turner/carvers hard at work



***GAIL** works on her big bowl but because it is so large she needs to use the outrigger system.*

***MALCOLM** - "Hey look at my highly polished pen made from Australian coolibah burl".*



Please note: The first of 5 X 6 hr sessions for course No 4 begins next Tuesday 28th April

Thursday's Turning Session

Thursday's turning session began with a demonstration of and discussion about the **RECORD midi-lathe**. Nigel McCarter, the presenter, pointed out the advantages of having one of these machines in a turner's workshop. All up a brand new midi-lathe including a few accessories would cost less than \$1,000. This is a table top model and does not necessarily need to have a separate stand. Further details about this natty little lathe can be obtained from Hand Tool House in Frankton. The lathe also comes in a variable speed model but with additional cost.

Other models and makes are also worth investigation if you are seriously in the market for your first lathe. Check out the Nova Comet, variable speed model, which is sitting on a stand in our workshop - courtesy of the club's treasurer, Robert Wiseley.

Tonight we welcomed another new turner **DAVE BLOOM** from Matamata. Dave was immediately launched into his first project, which involved turning a ferruled handle for a knockout bar. A very special welcome to the Thursday team Dave from all of your new colleagues and we hope you have many happy hours learning new woodturning skills.

NEXT THURSDAY

Calling all paper knife makers! Next week is exhibition evening for all paper knives and letter openers.

This has been another excellent group turning project with many outstanding results.

High-quality finishes on beautifully designed turnings have been achieved.

Please bring your completed (or nearly completed) knife projects next week to add to a members' special display table.

