

At the Rainbow Falls

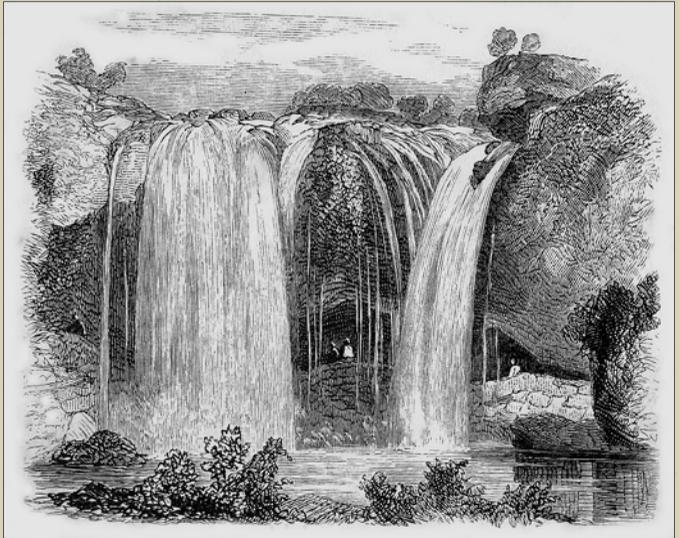


IN HIS 1884 *In memoriam*, William Colenso would recall, “I had often seen what I considered pleasing Botanical displays in many N.Z. forests and open valleys, particularly at the Kerikeri waterfall (Bay of Islands)—before it was rudely disturbed by civilisation!” [1]

Wade wrote this of the falls in 1842: “This splendid fall of the waters of the Keri Keri, which is poetically denominated by the natives, the *Wai-niwaniwa*, or ‘Waters of the Rainbow,’ is situated about two miles from the Mission Station on the right bank of that stream. There the river rolls majestically over a rock, whose perpendicular height is about ninety feet, and is received in a circular pool or basin, the margin of which is composed of loose stones, covered with Mosses and with such Phænogamous plants as love a perpetually misty atmosphere.” [2]

Allan Cunningham had been there in 1826 and the Austrian Baron van Hugel recorded in his diary for 19 March 1834, “We proposed to visit a remarkable waterfall close to Kidy Kidy, and so we sent our horses to the other side over the bridge-like rock formation mentioned and began the 1½ mile journey. The last fifteen minutes to Waiawanewa, as the Kidy Kidy waterfall is named,

had to be done on foot, with a climb of some 100 feet into the deeply-eroded river bed dry at this time of year with rare plants growing in its side-walls. The waterfall is a majestic natural phenomenon. Like all the falls that I saw in New Zealand it drops over a perpendicular cliff wall into a deep basin of perfect circular form out of which the river escapes unnoticed. The height of the fall is stated as 90 feet, certainly no exaggeration, and I have seen few waterfalls which so perfectly match the immediate surroundings, the altitude of the surrounding hills and trees, and the enormous rock masses. Behind the perpendicular fall yawns a large cave, with room, so they said, for 40 natives. Wishing to visit this cave I called a Lieutenant Thomas of the ALLIGATOR, who had brought the ship’s boat to Kidy Kidy, wanted to visit it too, but when we reached the slippery rock masses and



“Keri-keri waterfall, near Waitangi, Bay of Islands”
From Thomson AS 1859. The story of New Zealand: past and present—savage and civilized. Vol II, opp. P.19. London, John Murray.

then had to climb over a fallen tree trunk, where a slip of the foot would carry us into the depths among the rocks, he turned back. With some difficulty I clambered into the cave, which was much larger than I had expected, being some 30 to 40 feet high and running back to an equal depth, with a lateral widening at the rear to left and right, and so capable of housing several hundred people in comfort. It was astonishing to see the basin and the people outside through this veil of water, and the latter assured me that my appearance behind the thundering fall was magical, but I could not judge of that. I was able to approach the sheet of water near enough to be wet. In the cave and round about it was a luxuriant fern growth, but of varieties which I had already collected. Instead of returning by the same route I went on to complete the circle, which on account of the smooth and slippery moss was more difficult than I expected, but I got back with a whole skin to the river bank, and with the help of my guide climbed across the rock masses dry-footed. In the valley grows a unique specimen of *Cordelyne* with broad leaves winding strangely round the trunk.

“At 4 p.m. we were back in Kidy Kidy, and just taking our places in the boat, when I saw a European approaching with plants in his hand, and was sure that it must be the Director of the Botanic Gardens, whom I knew to be in New Zealand: Mr Mac... had given me a letter of introduction to him, but I had entrusted it to Mr Busby a week earlier. He had come to these islands in the *BUFFALO*, a British Government ship loading kauri for ships’ masts. The guess was right: it was Mr Cunningham who came up, and I introduced him to Capt. Lambert on the spot. Asked about his plans, he told me what was on his mind: the *BUFFALO* was in the River Thames, he had seen enough of New Zealand in his three months here, and he would be most grateful if Capt. Lambert could convey him back to Sydney, since the *BUFFALO* would not be returning to New South Wales. I said this to Capt. Lambert who at once gave him a passage application form, and Mr Cunningham then ventured to express the hope himself that there might be room in the frigate for his cases and plant-boxes too.” [3]

Richard Cunningham had arrived in 1833: both he and his brother found what AC was later to ask Colenso about, “my little darling, the subaqueous acianthus of the cavern of the great falls of Keri Keri and Wangaroa.” [4] That was the spider orchid now known as *Nematoceras rivulare*, no longer in the cavern (choked by wandering jew), but still perhaps present downstream (and certainly still at Whangaroa).

In 1841 Colenso wrote to WJ Hooker, “I trust yet to have the pleasure of seeing your son at this place and shall be most happy to accompany him to that splendid natural Collection of Ferns and Mosses, which abound at the Kerikeri waterfall – a place, where the Cunninghams, Baron Hugel, and others, have Botanized, overwhelmed with admiration at Flora’s profusion”. [5]

On 18 August 1841 JD Hooker did arrive in the Bay of Islands aboard the *Erebus* and the next day visited Colenso, no doubt to arrange botanical excursions. In an undated letter (but it must be Weds. 24 Aug.) Colenso would write to JD Hooker, “I hardly know what apology to make, for my not having ere this visited your ship; but my very numerous and onerous duties will, I trust, plead my defence. I am in hopes of seeing you tomorrow; which day and Friday I have as it were located for the pleasure of your company – pray come as early as you can. Should the weather be fine, I think we had better make the most of it, (seeing that both you and I have duties to perform,) and proceed to Kerikeri waterfall, returning the Friday evening. I have but 2 hands, as rowers, but if we start early we shall be able to get on with my *small* boat. Should

however, the wind, &c, prove unfavourable, we can proceed to some other suitable spot nearer home.”

Bagnall & Petersen record, “Many of Hooker’s botanical excursions in the days that followed were made in Colenso’s company. The first of these was on the 26th (Thursday), when they went up the Kerikeri River. At Paihia Hooker found ‘Mr. Colenso already waiting with a nice boat and a crew of 3 boys to proceed on our excursion....’ They passed through Kent Passage, landed on Taranaki Island, ‘lately sold to an Englishman for £5 for what purpose I cannot conceive.’ Mr. Kemp made them welcome at Kerikeri, where Hooker thought the site of the settlement ‘very naked, the only trees being those directly around the house, consisting of peaches, apples, etc.’ Beyond the station they inspected the falls, Hooker collecting many specimens, and returned to the mission by dark (on Friday 27th).” [6]

Hooker sketched the falls in his journal [7], and Colenso wrote, in a note to Hooker a few days later, “I hope your specimens from the Kerikeri have rewarded your indefatigable research & patient endurance of cold & cramp & wetting.”

References

1. Colenso W 1884. In memoriam. An account of visits to, and crossings over the Ruahine mountain range, Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand; and of the natural history of that region; performed in 1845-1847: *cum multis aliis*. Daily Telegraph Office, Napier. iv, 74p.
2. Wade WR 1842. Journey in the Northern Island of New Zealand. Capper reprint, Christchurch, 1977.
3. van Hugel F. Diary section entitled “Sydney, New Zealand and Norfolk Island”, 10 February to 16 April 1834. Translation into English by RA Lochore. Alexander Turnbull Library.
4. Cunningham to Colenso 4 December 1838.
5. Colenso to WJ Hooker 20 July 1841.
6. Bagnall & Petersen p.85. Refers to letter JD Hooker to WJ Hooker 21 September 1841.
7. Antarctic journal of Sir JD Hooker, Kew MS.



Waianiwiwiwa, the Rainbow Falls: in 1841 (above: pencil drawing JD Hooker, from his sketchbook; and today (below: photo Gloria Scanlen)



Seeds from Home



AS A BOY WILLIAM COLENSO LIVED IN A house in Alverton St Penzance but it was demolished some years ago for road widening. No. 16 Chapel St, where his nephew William Colenso lived, is now the somewhat noisome Ganges Indian Restaurant. Opposite is the Turk's Head pub, which serves excellent Cornish bitter. Just up the street is the Chapel Street Brasserie & Wine Bar, where we sat and sipped a nicely made French merlot, shared a poached fig and prosciutto entree, and settled back contentedly to await the main course as we listened to the mellow instrumental improvisations and warm vocals of the Johanna Graham Trio ("live from 7.15 p.m.").



The Ganges in
Chapel St

There is an unpublished manuscript by William Colenso in the Morrab Library in Penzance, written during his 50th Christmas in New Zealand, and in it he wrote,

*Early this morning my man came in from visiting a retired nook or gully in one of my hilly fields, bringing me a handful of flowering specimens from a small shrub he had found there, whose beauty and novelty had attracted his eye; and to my great delight I recognized and hailed the Cornish stranger at first sight, by name, "Tutsan"! (*Hypericum androsenum*,) very fine indeed. Now it must be, at least 52 years since I last saw this British plant growing, and then only in one well-known spot, often visited by me,—the edge of Tolcarne wood on the hill, on the left hand side of the pathway through the fields, leading up the granite steps from the highway to the Land's End, (and opposite to the high road branching off to St. Inot,) towards Newlyn—or street-on-Nowan of old time! And then, as a matter of course, whole hosts of scenes, of persons and things and plants, came trooping on and up, as if out of the same deep well, evoked by the spell of a mighty enchanter.—*

And so I welcomed and received my unexpected Cornish stranger as my Christmas Box.

The sight of the familiar plant from home started Colenso on a nostalgic reverie about Penzance and west Cornwall, his turangawaewae, that includes a list of British plants he introduced to New Zealand, and an interesting passage on a shrub he had seen in Cornwall...

In the parterre at Kenegie, just outside the green-house, and in front of a trellis on which was trained a fine Pyrus Japonica, was a circular bed, a half-mound, and in the centre of it a very strange-looking foreign tree, or stout gnarled shrub, bearing curious-looking and aromatic berries, or capsules, by some called, "the spice tree"; this shrub (so the story ran) was brought (in its seed) from the S. Seas by Capt. Cook, or by Sir Joseph Banks. That shrub was my youthful wonder, and I wished much to see its flowers, which I never did. Guess then my delight, when, soon after my landing here in New Zealand, I found it commonly growing about me, bearing both fruits and flowers in profusion. It is the Leptospermum scoparium, of Forster, and was used by Capt. Cook when here as a beverage instead of tea, and also in his manufacture of Spruce Beer for his ship's company.

Cornwall is a thin peninsula in a temperate zone sea, and we expected a green and fertile county rather like New Zealand. It was certainly that, but what was unexpected were the number and range of New Zealand native plants in the gardens. One might have predicted a few in the garden at Glen Trewithen, the house Colenso built for his son Wiremu, but cabbage trees were everywhere – for the most part disease-free, flowering profusely, healthy, species and coloured cultivars (we did later see some dying, presumably of the dread *Phytoplasma australiense* infection, in Exeter). Flaxes of all sizes and colours were another favorite, and we saw houheria, manuka, pittosporums and several more familiar plants.

Just as Colenso introduced Cornish plants to New Zealand, so he sent seeds back to Cornwall from NZ – certainly to his son, and to John Ralfs and market gardener William Curnow. No doubt other Cornishmen sent plants and seeds Home too, but it is tempting to think of these as the descendents of Colenso's.



St Michael's Mount with NZ flax



Above: Glen Trewithen; below: Morrab Library; each with NZ cabbage trees.



Tolmens, cromlechs, or quoits — and standing stones



THE THIRD EDITION (1831) of the guide-book, *Ancient and Modern History of Mount's Bay. With every civil and military transaction in St. Michael's Mount, Marazion, Penzance, Paul, Buryan, Saint Levan, Sennen, St. Just, &c.* (Penzance: John Thomas) is attributed to William Colenso, in 1831 enjoying the last year of his printing apprenticeship with Thomas.

If you look at the Ordnance Survey map of Cornwall, you will be struck by the number of places marked with Old English font: these are ancient historical sites, many of them Neolithic, but also bronze and iron age structures and sites. Colenso knew many of them well from his boyhood wanderings in the hinterland of the far west, and he noted them in his tourist guide. He mentioned that

...Lanyon, on which is a large cromleh, (which fell in on the night of October 19th 1815, a most stormy night, when the Delhi East-Indiaman was wrecked in Mount's Bay,) was for some time the seat of the Lanyon family....



Lanyon quoit:
there is a sketch from this same spot in Colenso's sketchbook in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

A cromlech, quoit or tolmen usually consists of three standing stones supporting a large flat stone, like a huge 3-legged stool. Their use is speculative, but most people believe they were burial sites, and they are mostly found here in Cornwall – 6000 years old, pre-dating the great pyramids: important enough to the people who made them to encourage them to lift a 20 ton capstone onto its legs. Colenso went on

'Beneath the cromleh at Lanyon', says Dr. Borlase, 'I caused to be sunk a pit four feet and half deep, and found it all black earth that had been moved, and should

have sunk still deeper, but that a gentleman in whose ground it is, told me that a few years before, the whole cavity had been opened on account of some dream, to the full depth of six feet, and then the fast or unbroken ground appeared and they dug no deeper: the cavity was in the shape of a grave, and had been rifled more than once, but nothing more than ordinary was found. By the black earth thrown up in digging here, nothing is to be absolutely concluded, there having happened so many disturbances. By the pit being in the shape of a grave, and six feet deep, it is not improbable that a human body was interred here; and by the length of the bank, and the many disorderly stones at the south end, this would seem to have been a burial-place for more than one person....

There is a delightful photograph of Colenso's nephew William Colenso's family sitting on the capstone of the Lanyon quoit, pasted in an album of his photographs in the Penlee House Museum in Penzance.

Not far from the aforesaid cromlech, there is a singular monument which leaves no kind of doubt, as to its being a work of art. This monument consists of three stones erect, one of which varies from the other two, in height, magnitude, form and appearance. This singular stone, which chiefly merits notice is comparatively thin and flat, it is fixed in the ground on its edge, and has a large round hole passing through its middle, of fourteen inches diameter, from which circumstance it has obtained the name Mên-an-Tol, which in Cornish signifies the holed stone.... Dr. Borlase says, that 'in 1794, a very intelligent farmer of this neighbourhood, assured me that he had known many persons who had crept through this holed stone, for pains in the back and limbs and that fanciful parents at certain seasons of the year, do customarily draw their children through, in order to cure them of the rickets....'

Men-an-Tol →
↓



Cured! but of what?

Another stone of great antiquity, lies on its side in a furze-croft, about half-a-mile north-west of Lanyon. This stone was formerly erect, and was known in the Cornish language, by the general name of Mên-Skryfa, which signifies the inscribed or written stone. The dimensions of this stone, are nine feet ten inches long, one foot eight inches wide, and one foot seven inches deep. The words on this stone are evidently contracted; but the marks of contractions are preserved with considerable care. When these contractions are supplied the inscription itself would run as follows

RIALOBANUS CUNOVALI FILIUS;

and the import is, that Rialobran, the son of Cunoval, was interred beneath the spot on which it stood.

One hundred and eighty years later we found the longstone Mên Skryfa now standing in the middle of a cattle paddock. The friendly black steers wallow in the



sandy mud at its base and then, their hair wet with muddy grinding paste, they use the stone to relieve their itches, as a scratching-post. As a result the letters are becoming almost illegible now: a pity.

Mên Skryfa

HE
KUPU WAKATUPATO,

Nā te AROHA-PONO.

“A KI ATU ANA A IHU, KA MEA ATU KI A HATOU, KIA
TUPATO HA KUI WAKAHUKIA HOUYOU I TE TANGATA.”

1842.

This Colenso booklet was offered for sale recently on Trademe. It is described in *Books in Māori 1815-1900*:

“A tract describing the service used by the Bishop of London to admit three Catholic priests as converts to the Church of England, published by Colenso under his pseudonym Aroha Pono. Colenso printed 500 copies in 1842 at the Church Mission Society press as one of his private projects published at his own expense. He enclosed copies in his letter of 26 July 1842 to the CMS, expressing his disappointment that the Missionary Committee was not prepared to publish tracts ‘against these awful emissaries of evil’.” High Church romaphile George Selwyn took him severely to task.

Phalacrocorax colensoi



Public domain image from [here](#).

The Auckland Island shag, named by Sir Walter Lawry Buller: "I have much pleasure in dedicating it to my friend the Rev. William Colenso, F.R.S., who... recorded his observations on the Shags inhabiting New Zealand nearly fifty years ago, and who has been ever since an active contributor to the scientific literature of his adopted country." (*A history of the Birds of New Zealand*, London, 1888).

This must refer to a passage in Colenso's 1844 "Memoranda of an Excursion...". *Launceston Examiner*, Launceston, 95p; "On a tall branching Pohutukawa tree (*Metrosideros tomentosa*), which grew on the rocky cliff at the northern end of the beach of Owae, I observed several Cormorants (*Pelecanus*, *sp.*) had built their nests. These birds had inhabited this tree for many years; yearly increasing the number of their nests, which they build of dry *Algæ*, sticks, and small plants. Their social habits and large nests, forcibly reminded me of an English rookery. Two species inhabit these shores; one, with entirely black plumage, which the natives call Kawau—the other, with white fore-neck, breast, and belly, and olive-black neck, back, and wings, called by them Karuhiruhi; this last is the most common."



Colenso is a free email Newsletter published irregularly by the Colenso Society. The editor invites contributions on any matter relating to the life and work of the Rev. William Colenso FLS FRS.

Such contributions should be emailed to ian.stgeorge@rnzcgp.org.nz.

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