REVIEWS


Production of this first volume of the national forest survey in time for the Seventh British Commonwealth Forestry Conference was a very happy achievement, and full credit is given to the Forest Service, and to all who were concerned with the publication of the most important piece of forest fact finding so far carried out in this country.

Accurate information regarding our remaining indigenous forest resources is obviously basic to all consideration of policy both with regard to indigenous forest management, and with regard to exotic forest utilisation and marketing.

We now have this information, painstakingly gathered and elaborated with the help of the most modern techniques in aerial photography, photogrammetry and statistical method. The whole of the great mass of data so built up has then been reduced for presentation into an extremely simple form. This form follows through unit by unit, building up to an overall picture of our timber resources which is a model of clarity and of objective presentation.

There can be no questioning the accuracy of the overall picture thus presented. The whole country has been covered, and all existing stands have been revealed by the air photos. All have been typed and brought into the orbit of the ground sampling pattern. There can no longer be any talk of unknown resources in untapped areas. Modern techniques also ensure that the elaboration of the field data is free from significant error, and the results may be accepted as correct within the limits set for the study, which are clearly indicated in the text. Merchantable timber, unavailable timber and problematical timber are defined and demarcated so that there can be no misunderstanding regarding the interpretation of the figures presented. The probable limits within which changing standards of merchantability might affect the figures are also indicated.

Consideration of the picture revealed by the survey gives rise to several thoughts.

First is a tribute to the compilers of the 1923 forest inventory. It has been fashionable of late to write down this early effort as a summary of approximation, conjectures and unsupported surmises in which no reliance could be placed.

However, if from the 1923 figure for the available merchantable softwood resource of 25 thousand million feet, one deducts subsequent
usage, 8 thousand million, together with a fair figure for timber since rendered unavailable as national parks, etc., wastage through fire and land clearing, and unreported forms of use, say 2 thousand million, the figure obtained is startlingly close to that given by the 1955 survey.

Admittedly the 1923 inventory was pushed through with inadequate staff in a minimum of time, and without the modern techniques which are now available, but the field work was honestly done by men of integrity as well as of considerable experience, and the compilation while necessarily placing much reliance on the law of averages, was nevertheless done on sound lines to as high a standard as conditions permitted.

Its overall accuracy has been vindicated in striking fashion, and we acknowledge the good work done by the foresters of the early twenties who laid the foundations on which we have since built.

Second, it is gratifying to note that the available merchantable softwood resource is as large as shown, i.e., 15,883 million ft. sawn measure. The North Island figure of 6,720 million ft. is particularly surprising to those who have watched the steady attrition of the main forest blocks in the King Country and Rotorua region over the past thirty-five years. As brought out clearly by the maps, the remaining merchantable stands are relatively small and scattered, indicating that our indigenous sawmilling industry will continue to be comprised in the main of small mills of relatively short life. The aggregate total, however, is great enough first to justify the hope that some of the indigenous softwood forests may be successfully carried over onto a sustained yield basis, and second, to extend the period of free availability of indigenous softwoods far beyond that officially promulgated five years ago—a promulgation stated to have been based on advance figures from the survey, but obviously unsupported by the final results.

The figures indicate that if indigenous softwood milling continues at same rates as last year, the available merchantable resource will last in the North and South Islands individually for 36 and 98 years respectively, and for the two islands together, a period of 57 years.

These time periods put in perspective the problem faced by the timber industry in this country in bringing about a rational integration of indigenous and exotic timber production and use.

And while at present the softwood position is that to which first attention is given, the data on the merchantable hardwood resource are also presented in most realistic fashion.

Data given regarding increments, restocking of logged over lands, and problematical timber may be regarded as unpromising, but it is essential that the facts be clearly faced, if any progress is to be made toward concrete solution of the many problems involved in perpetuation of the indigenous forests as dynamic units in a forward looking forest policy, rather than as static or slowly wasting storehouses, or as botanical museum exhibits.