

John Stevenson Holloway

13th August 1944 - 1st January 1999

John spent most of the last year of his life battling a brain tumour. He died in the presence of his family, at home in Dunedin, on New Year's day 1999 very close to the places where his great grandfather and grandfather had lived.

He spent all his life in public service, making his first formal contact with forestry in 1963 when he gained a position in the New Zealand forest Service as a technical trainee, spending his initial "experience" year at Kaingaroa Forest. From there he followed the track normal for the time of part-time study for a science degree at the University of Otago coupled with vacation work for his employer, followed by study for a forestry degree at the University of Aberdeen, where he met Linda, his wife to be.

On return, he was posted to Gisborne and from thence to Tapanui and Dunedin, with a bias steadily towards soil conservation issues, mountain lands and matters of public dispute. At a time when no one on either side really knew what public participation really meant, he wrote the public discussion paper for the Southland Beech scheme "Forest Management Proposals for Western Southland Beech Forests" and confounded all the critics.

In 1980, after a year off in Edinburgh as house husband while Linda finished her post-graduate medical degree, he returned to forestry again in Head Office, where he remained, mainly as Assistant Director of the Environmental Forestry Division until the demise of the Forest Service.

After a brief spell with the State Services Commission in 1986 (hammering out the divvying up of public lands into the new departments and corporations), he joined the Department of Conservation at its beginning in 1987, being successively Director of Land and Fauna Directorate, the Estate Protection Policy Division, and finally, of the Science and Research Division.

Throughout his career John was a staunch supporter of the Institute, being the local section chairman for Otago/Southland (1976-77), editor of the Journal (1979-85), elected national council member and secretary (1985-87), and elected Fellow of the Institute in 1987. Pressure of work then took him away from office but he continued as a keen member of the Wellington section.

John's leading interests lay in mountain land management and the reconciliation of the human interest with natural values, though in the early days of his forestry career he fought shy of mountainland issues, perhaps because of his father's prominence in that field.

But for the last 15 years of his life that is where his contribution lay, encouraging study of the problems of high country and conservation lands, questioning long and dearly held beliefs and reconciling where possible the often contradictory attitudes of user and interest groups. He had no time for "Fortress Conservation". He had a visionary interest in defining ultimate objectives and a reluctance to being distracted from them by people with more

immediate priorities. He understood the political reality, but he felt that too often it was used as a shield by people, in particular senior public servants, from the ultimate reality.

So it was that the most of his time with DoC I sensed that he was never really happy. In its early years the Department spent its time reinventing itself, endlessly restructuring and reorganising so that too much of his time seemed to be spent plugging leaks while the real purpose of the job drifted further and further away. In the end with his appointment as Director, Science and Research, he felt that he had finally escaped from all that into calmer water, but unfortunately he did not hold the position for long enough to find out.

John's response to the vagaries of public service life was always the same, by sheer determination and hard work to bring people to the heart of the problem. He was very hard on himself, there was always so much to be done and it was his responsibility to get it done. His staff stood in awe of him and the sheer volume of work he got through. They appreciated his interest in their well being, his willingness to listen and to act when he could on what they said. They sympathised with his difficulties and organisation politics and knew he was on their side. They fondered on his dreadful handwriting.

There was always so much to do, and he had to be hard on himself, and self-denying to get it done. His rather puritan sense of responsibility saw any time spent on his own pleasure as wasted, so that for all the 27 years I knew him, mountaineering (which by other accounts filled so much of his early life) was a thing of the past and a dream for the future that never in the end arrived.

It made him demanding too on those close and dear to him, setting what seemed at time overly high standards and very sparing with praise. He took it for granted that people should live up to their abilities and there was therefore no cause for congratulations when they did. At heart he was proud, very proud of family achievements and he would at times, at a safe distance, admit it - but it did not come easy.

John paid the price in some respects of being too far ahead of the game in his comprehension of what conservation, biodiversity, sustainability really meant. For him they were not buzz words, but real concepts into which humanity was inextricably woven and from which it could not be removed. He would have got some pleasure from current moves towards his way of thinking - though at the same time I can hear his voice "It's only a start, there's still so much to do".

His monument remains in the seeds that he sowed in our understanding of these matters and in his family, his wife Linda and his sons John, David and Adam.

Old friend, we miss you.

John Purey-Cust