New Zealand forest road engineering manual and operators guide
Published by NZ Forest Owners Association
150 pages and 72 pages
Price $140 for both volumes

According to the introduction this manual is a major rewrite of the Road Engineering Manual which was first published in 1999. The new Forest road engineering manual is intended to be a guide for those who have a limited engineering background – in other words it is not just for engineers. It has confusing publication dates inside – a copyright date of 2011, another date of February 2012 but it was officially published in late 2012.

The books

Liberal use of photographs, showing the good and the bad, as well as the before and after, means that even if you have limited or no engineering experience, you can easily understand what should and should not be done. It is a bit of a shame that the ‘major rewrite’ did not make the text of the manual a bit more readable in the earlier pages. The text seemed to improve as I read through, so perhaps it is just a problem in the early pages. However, there are some irritating minor errors and quite a few unnecessarily complicated sentences all the way through.

As a publisher it may be picky, and risky, to mention problems with typeface. But the special typeface which the NZFOA has used for the headings was not chosen for those who want to read what the headings say. Block capitals are never easy to read, and not to be recommended. With the edges of the letters blurred and printed in light green on white, communication fails as readability declines.

Fortunately there are no problems with the typeface, type size or layout of the pages which are nicely laid out and easy to read. It is very difficult to open and read the manual as you might normally do. All book spines are a bit stiff to begin with, but however hard I have tried, the manual would not stay open by itself. In fact it had to be held open with some strength when reading, which is quite a distraction.

The companion operators’ guide is a totally different matter. It is supplied in its own wallet and is wiro bound, meaning all the pages can be opened flat for a very easy read. This guide is chock full of photographs showing the right ways and the wrong ways in forest road engineering.

I do not intend to go through the books chapter by chapter. If you read all the way through both, you will be very well versed on the best and correct ways to build a forest road. The information is all there and the photographs and diagrams make it easy.

The verdict

I have been critical, as a book review should be. But the main question is I would buy a copy? Actually, I did buy a copy to write this review. However – now I have read it, would I recommend others to buy a copy? Absolutely.

If you are a forest owner planning a new forest road on your property or modifying part of an existing one, I would recommend you buy the manual and operators’ guide. For a mere $140 you will learn a lot. When you are discussing your plans with whoever you employ to modify or build a forest road, and it is going to cost you up to $100,000 a kilometre, the price of the manual is very little. Apart from helping you build it right first time, it will keep you on the right side of the regional environmental guidelines for floods and erosion control.