

# National forest survey : a great forestry achievement<sup>1</sup>

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I am delighted to see such a good crowd here and I am particularly pleased to see some old friends and acquaintances with whom I have been out of touch for some years. I am not mentioning names here although I may later but I would like to make exceptions for Ruth Olsen who we are delighted to see and for Julia Millen and her husband who we are equally pleased to have here.

I must also refer to the four NFS enthusiasts who thought of this reunion and have worked to organise it. They are Darby Perston, Maurice Geenty, Lew Skudder, and John Kininmonth, along with Bob Shaw. The meeting is I think a great success and completely justified. We probably owe these five a hearty clap and I suggest you give it now.

In 1947 the Fifth Empire Forestry Conference passed a resolution to the effect that within ten years each member should complete an inventory of its forest resources. In 1957 at the Seventh Commonwealth Forestry Conference the leader of the New Zealand delegation, A.R. Entrican, was able to report that New Zealand had done so. Since the conference was held in New Zealand, this was a particularly pleasing occasion, the more so because in the event New Zealand was the only country that could make this claim.

Entrican had not needed the 1947 resolution to push him. Since he was appointed Director in 1939 he had been completely convinced that no national forest policy could be successfully implemented unless the forest administration knew the extent of its resources, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The war delayed Entrican for five years; he made his first move in 1944 by intercepting me on the way home from Italy to New Zealand and sending me to the USA and Canada to study forest survey procedures. I was chosen because I had spent a year during the war with

the Home Grown Timber Production Department of the Ministry of Supply, organising the 1942 British Census of Standing Timber, and thus I was supposed to know something about forest surveys. I soon learnt that I knew very little and that it would be necessary for me to learn at least the rudiments of two techniques or disciplines upon which large scale forest inventories must be based, i.e., photogrammetry and statistical method. I spent six profitable and enjoyable months on this assignment.

Back in New Zealand in mid-1945 I was told to get on with the job and come up with a reliable figure of the merchantable volume of New Zealand's native forests, irrespective of tenure. As far as I can remember there was never any written instruction, nor any more specific terms of reference, and the methods and procedures were left entirely to myself. It was a complete start from scratch; there was no equipment, no field gear, no mapping or secretarial services, no transport and, above all, no staff. I spent the next twelve months working on the design of the survey, on the supply and specification of aerial photographs, on procedures of subsequent mapping and on putting together an organisation for the field work. The biggest problem of all was staff. I had to fight the Forest Service in all the difficulties but I had Entrican's backing and somehow or other I got through.

I think it was in the late 1940s-early 1950s that I first realised what a remarkable organisation the National Forest Survey was. I have already said here in Rotorua and I will repeat myself a little



Picture shows former National Forest Survey staff at the Rotorua reunion.

<sup>1</sup> Address to a reunion of old National Forest Survey staff at Rotorua in March, 2001

that the organisation acquired of its own accord an esprit de corps and a morale which was unique in the history of the Public Service. Jack Henry, who cannot be here today, feels the same. In a recent letter he said "Their numbers are dwindling but their achievement stands as one of New Zealand and the Forest Service's great scientific landmarks. I still believe that insufficient use was made by other parties of the valuable data that was recorded."

Somehow or other life in the bush brought out the best in young New Zealanders, building friendships and loyalties as well as moulding characters. Entrican did not realise this was going to happen; neither did I. It was in fact nothing to do with me - it was a function of the men themselves. Entrican would have been capable of repeating the survey for this reason and in 1970 I seriously considered doing this myself. But I did not have Entrican's drive or ruthlessness and there was neither the money nor the need. As it turned out, sadly, it would all have been to little avail.

The fact it was 40-50 years since the Forest Survey encouraged some loyal stalwarts to commission a book giving something of its history. For years I thought it was too late to do this but it wasn't.

Julia Millen's book which appeared last year is Forest Survey history, New Zealand bush history and in fact New Zealand history, and history does not need to be written as it is occurring. The launching of the book in May last year was just one more proof of how strong and vital the Forest Survey ethic had become.

There was a good crowd there. There were some loyal ex-Forest Survey people from Rotorua and Taupo but the most significant in the audience were the children of officers who could not come (and of some who could).

They were from the families of John Morris, Bob Lawn, the late John Wendelken, Lew Skudder, Peter Olsen and Colin Bassett. It says a lot about what these men must have felt about the Forest Survey that they had passed this feeling on strongly enough to persuade their young to attend. The book has sold well and has been widely read. I should say here that the few copies left with P.F. Olsen and Company are mostly being held for future handouts and soon there will be none available for sale.

This disturbs me as it is New Zealand history and should not go out of print; I therefore suggest to Olsen & Co. or the Institute or both that further copies should be printed.

Now I do want to mention some of the great names of the NFS. Jack Holloway, the famous forest ecologist, has been well written up and there is a lot of documentation about him. I could

tell a story or two if I had time.

The other greatest was Stan Masters. Stan and I were near neighbours in the adjacent Betula Boulevard and we became great friends. Stan and I used to play chess. It takes brains to be a good chess player and Stan had them. He had a better brain than I had and beat me regularly. Stan is or should be famous for his work in converting aerial photographs, often of hilly country, into accurate and accessible maps.

He was a draughtsman by profession and as far as I know he had no special training from the few photogrammetrists in New Zealand. He was entirely self trained and considering how difficult and intricate a subject photogrammetry was this was quite remarkable. It was a great pity he died as young as he did. Stan, however, was not alone in his work and a very good and thoughtful assistant was Des O'Leary.

To my mind, Des has been quite insufficiently recognised in New Zealand forest history and I put forward belatedly what an important place he had.

The other key person was Peter McKelvey. As you know, Peter continued after the Forest Survey was finished and did his masterly and original survey of all the indigenous forests in New Zealand. But in NFS terms, his main claim to fame was the excellent job he did or, rather, masterminded in the final published account of the Forest Survey results. Then there was a wide range of excellent and conscientious unit and party leaders starting with Bob Lawn.

I cannot quote them all without missing many, but prominent among those leaders were Bernie Guthrie, Frank Cobeldick, Peter Coates, Pat Crequer, Mick O'Neill, Jack Henry, John Rawson, John Nicholls, John Wendelken, Rae Culbert, Ralph Naylor, Quentin Roberts, 'Blue' Wallis, Bernie Hornfeck, Jim Gardner and Pete Davison. Even more important were all the men who worked in the field, mainly for long vacations only.

There were indeed over 200 of them. Perhaps more than anyone else they were the real genuine Forest Survey.

Nearly all the famous names of the New Zealand Forest Service spent some time with the Forest Survey, some are here tonight and are more than welcome. I do have a list of names but I will not quote them as if I miss some they are likely to be upset. A much shorter list would be the names of important Forest Service people who were not in the Forest Survey.

This is not a night for long speeches. I think you have been enjoying yourselves and I am only sorry that I cannot stay to the end. But it is a very great pleasure for me to have spoken and I wish you all the very best.