Experience, knowledge and a great sense of humour

John Trevor Miller 1926 - 2004

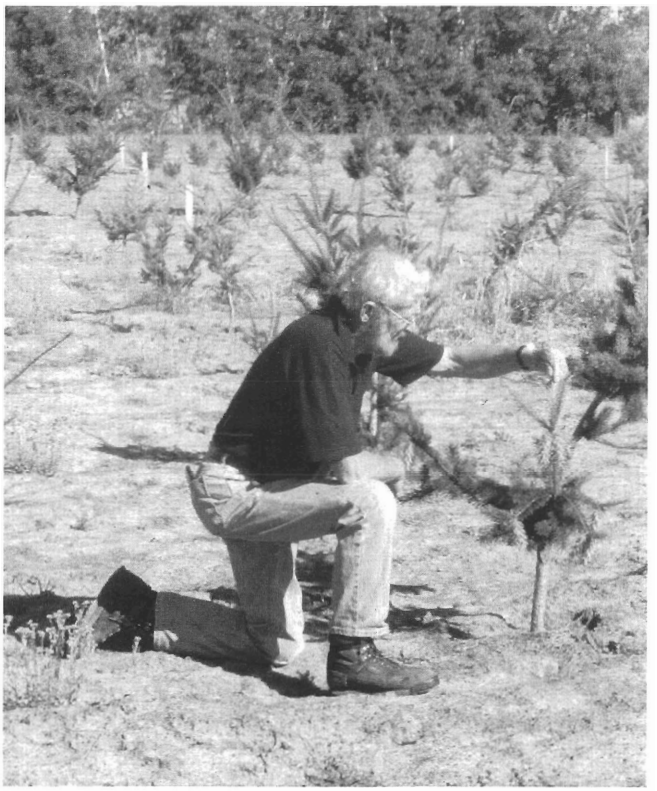
John Miller of Rotorua died on the 20 November 2004, and his funeral was attended by his family and many old friends and forestry people. His death was greeted by universal sadness, but at the same time, with affectionate memories of his good nature and humour, and his enthusiasm and great knowledge of exotic trees.

John was of Scottish ancestry, but grew up in Northumberland, where his father was a schoolteacher. After graduating with a forestry degree from the University of Edinburgh, John came to New Zealand in 1948 and joined the NZ Forest Service. His early postings saw him variously attached to the Wellington, Westland, Canterbury, and Southland Conservancies, and he had a good deal of involvement in the layout of Berwick and Rankleburn Forests when he was based in Dunedin.

John joined the Forest Research Institute at Rotorua in 1959, and became heavily involved with Ib Thulin in the establishment of provenance trials of exotic conifers thought to have ongoing potential in New Zealand as backups to *Pinus radiata* – *Pinus nigra*, *Pinus ponderosa*, *Pinus pinaster*, *Pinus contorta*, *Larix europaea*, *Larix kaempferi*, and *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, to mention the main ones. In 1960 John was posted to Rangiora where he looked after all the Genetics & Tree Improvement (GTI) work, which included the South Island replications of the provenance trials, and the South Island selection programme for radiata pine, culminating in the layout and establishment of the original Amberley Seed Orchard, and the first, pioneering progeny tests of radiata pine in the Berwick and Golden Downs Forests.

He was a great helping hand to his GTI colleagues, giving enthusiastic support in all the necessary tasks of site selection, trial establishment, assessments, maintenance, and in organising and overseeing the registration of seed stands. He also took a leading role in the genetic improvement of several species, notably *Pinus contorta*, the larches, and later on, the cypresses. His good nature and humour was much appreciated by all who worked with him – he brought a sparkle to many a smoko room.

Growing radiata pine from cuttings is commonplace standard practice these days, but it took some years to develop the process into a dependable, routine technique. While cuttings set outside readily took root in Rotorua nurseries, it was much more difficult and uncertain in the dry air of Canterbury. After several failures at the FRI Rangiora Nursery, a glasshouse was set up to provide the necessary humidity and protection, and a promising batch of cuttings was duly propagated in readiness for the first field clonal tests in the South Island. One weekend in April a particularly vicious nor-wester struck Canterbury, with



widespread damage to trees and infrastructure. Ib Thulin was very worried about the precious cuttings and called John first thing on Monday morning. "Ib here – what has happened to the cuttings?" Said John, "Your cuttings are fine Ib, your cuttings are fine ..... but the glasshouse is in Kaiapoi!"

On returning to FRI, Rotorua, 1979, John continued his work with a wide range of exotic conifers. He had become a dendrologist of considerable note, and his career culminated in the production of a series of carefully compiled bulletins - mostly in collaboration with Chris Ecroyd and Barbara Knowles - on the exotic tree species. These handbooks are essentially monographs on each species or group of species, documenting the experience and research results in New Zealand on provenance variation, growth and yield, pests and diseases, and wood properties.

We were lucky to have John Miller in GTI. He brought experience, knowledge, and inevitably good sense and humour to any situation, be it planning the forward programme, fronting up at a symposium, researching the silviculture of a species, organising work with Conservancy staff, or getting on with the many practical tasks necessary for a successful applied tree improvement programme.

Mike Wilcox