

Future Foresters/NZIF Meeting, Gisborne, 26 September 2024

This event arose from a conversation between some Future Foresters and Mary & me at the recent NZIF AGM & Conference in Nelson. When she heard we would be in Gisborne shortly afterwards to visit my older brother David, who is in care, Jess Bourke used her initiative to ask if I would be able to give a talk while there. “What about?” I asked and her response was “Your career”. After seeing if we could change arrangements to have a bit more time in Gisborne I agreed and the meeting was arranged.

Appropriately enough, David had a hand in my career. When he was in year 13 at college and I was in year 11, David brought home a bundle of career pamphlets. I looked through them as well and saw one from the NZ Forest Service (NZFS) on forester trainees. I thought it looked interesting and two years later, at the end of 1961, I applied and was accepted. Nearly 63 years later, I have no regrets about that choice.

Another reason for agreeing to talk came from the NZIF/Future Foresters/International Network of Professional Forestry Associations “Global Virtual Field Trip for Young Foresters” in May last year. I enjoyed hearing why today’s young foresters got into forestry and where they saw their careers going. When there was a comment from one presenter about old fuddy duddies stuck in their ways, I thought why not ask some of them and find out why they got into forestry and how their careers developed. Here was my opportunity.

Mary & I were both born towards the end of WWII, so we are pre-baby boomers and part of the “silent” generation. We met at Victoria University and started married life when I was doing a forestry degree at Aberdeen, Scotland. This was before the current School of Forestry at Canterbury was established and the NZFS trainee scheme involved one year in the field (the single men’s camp housing about 200 guys in Kaingaroa Forest was a bit of a shock for a school leaver from Upper Hutt!), then a Science degree at a NZ University, followed by a forestry degree at an overseas university. After that my career (and Mary’s and my life) has been in three parts:

- Working in general forestry, research and setting up a computer network for NZFS. Mary also worked at FRI (Scion)
- In late 1984, a young National Party MP, Marilyn Waring, told PM Rob Muldoon (National had only a one seat majority) she was going to cross the house and vote with Labour opposition for a nuclear free NZ. Muldoon announced a snap election, Labour won with PM David Lange, Ministers like Roger Douglas, Richard Prebble and David Caygill and the revolution was on. In September 1985 government announced it was going to reorganise the Public Service and create a number of State Enterprises. Two days after the announcement I was told I was seconded to a new entity within the State Services Commission known as the Environmental Administration Reorganisation Secretariat, affectionally (or otherwise) known as EARS. From all this, NZFS and other parts of the public service were disestablished, NZ Forestry Corporation and several other State Enterprises were established, as was the Department of Conservation, Ministry for the Environment and other entities. The next 20 years of my career were set in place and included the corporatisation and privatisation of the commercial assets of NZFS and several Treaty settlements involving forests. Meanwhile Mary had worked for the Biological Resources Centre (where she was the editor of the NZ Ecological Regions and Districts of NZ), then at DoC and also at the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.
- Around 2002, Mary told me I would need a hobby during retirement. “What about doing something with NZIF – you are always complaining about it”. Little did she know NZIF would become such a demanding hobby and give rise to so much ongoing enjoyment.

So that is how this old fuddy duddie got into forestry and his career developed. Hopefully he is not yet too stuck in his ways to be of some use.

Andrew McEwen, NZIF Registered Forester and member of the NZIF Registration Board

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