

OBITUARY

Ib Thulin, 1922-83

Ib Thulin, pioneer tree breeder in New Zealand, died on 7 December 1983, at his home in Rotorua. Poor health had forced him to retire from the Forest Research Institute in April 1983. He was a man of great character and courage whose mark on New Zealand forestry will remain indelibly stamped through his work with genetic improvement of forest trees and by the memory of his ebullient personality.

He was born in Denmark in 1922 and obtained his M.Sc. in Forestry from the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural College in Copenhagen in 1945. His mentor was the illustrious Syrach Larsen. As well as a thorough grounding in silviculture and forest genetics, Ib got his introduction to bridge while at university. The game was to be a lifelong passion for him and he became a very fine competitive player and stalwart of the local club.

Ib had his first taste of overseas travel in 1946 when he went as a surveyor on an expedition to Greenland. He subsequently worked as a tree breeder from 1946-50 at the Forest Experiment Station in Denmark before emigrating to New Zealand with his young family in October 1950. Employed initially under the designation of Assistant Forester at the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua, he was in 1954 officially appointed as Forest Geneticist in the New Zealand Forest Service with the task of developing a tree breeding scheme in radiata pine and conducting provenance research in other conifers.

The scope for tree improvement in New Zealand was considerable. Vast untended forests of *Pinus radiata* displayed a bewildering array of phenotypic variation: the need and opportunity for tree breeding was obvious. There were also large areas of other pines such as *P. ponderosa*, *P. nigra*, and *P. contorta*, often of evidently poor provenance. Some of Ib's first experiments were provenance trials of *P. taeda*, *P. pinaster*, *P. elliotii* and *P. nigra*. Seed was obtained by personal contact with fellow breeders in Europe, Australia and the U.S.A., resulting in comprehensive provenance experiments of great scientific value. In 1956, a colleague, the late Egon Larsen, was sent to the U.S.A. where he collected provenance seedlots of *Pinus contorta*, Douglas fir, *Abies* and various other species. There were no

IUFRO collections at that time so the N.Z. Forest Service organised its own.

The first plus trees of radiata pine were selected in the early 1950s, the first open-pollinated progeny test planted in 1955, and the first seed orchards planted in 1957. Today, these first-generation clones are still the mainstay of New Zealand's seed supply from orchards.

In 1966, Ib launched a project to grow radiata pine plantations from cuttings of selected clones. It did not work because by the time the clones had been evaluated in clonal tests, the archives had aged considerably and cuttings had lost vigour and could no longer be readily rooted. In this first project, the ortets were 6-year-old trees selected in routine plantations. Another project was initiated, this time using 3- to 5-year-old ortets selected in controlled-pollinated full-sib families, with clonal archives maintained in a juvenile condition as clipped hedges. Cuttings of his best tested clones from these sources are being planted out in 1984, though numbers are small.

From July 1963 to July 1964, Ib was seconded to FAO in Mexico to advise on seed collection practices and to train local technicians. Despite certain frustrations, he regarded this year as one of the highlights of his career. For his services, he was made in 1976 an Honorary Academic Member of the National Academy of Forestry Science, Mexico. Needless to say, he returned with seed of various Mexican conifers, the most notable find being *Abies religiosa*. His interest in Mexican species had been kindled earlier when he established a large network of trials with Mexican pines from seed collected by H. V. Hinds and E. Larsen.

In February-March 1965 he visited Ceylon on an FAO assignment, to advise on the introduction of exotic conifers.

He built up a long list of friends and contacts through his attendance at international meetings and in correspondence about seed, and believed that the international exchange of breeding material could bring considerable benefits. Thus, scions of many of New Zealand's plus trees were sent to Australia.

He made one other extended overseas trip, from August to October 1974, when he used his long-service leave to serve as a consultant on tree improvement to the U.S. Forest Service in California.

In his last years, Ib's greatest achievement was the teamwork and spirit he built up in the staff he recruited and trained. He was a most astute leader and administrator and he loved to talk, but he found writing up his results very irksome; he reckoned

he was paid to produce improved seed not to write papers. Refractory by nature he enjoyed a good battle with the "administration". But beneath the sometimes gruff exterior lay a sensitive and generous man, highly dedicated to his work, a great believer in genetic improvement of trees, and a tremendous inspiration to we who had the benefit and pleasure of working with him.

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