



Obituary

C.D. Gleason

The President of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters, Curt David Gleason, died quietly in Hamilton on Saturday, July 12, 1986, just a month after he had received head injuries when hit by a car while jogging in Rotorua.

Born in the United States of America, Curt came to New Zealand as a youth with his family, who settled in Christchurch in the 1960s. Quick to make friends and noted for a great sense of humour, Curt also possessed a keen interest in sport, particularly running and rugby, that he always retained.

He excelled at University, attaining a Bachelor of Forestry Science with First Class Honours. For 17 years he worked with the New Zealand Forest Service, the last 13 on the West Coast.

Curt arrived in Hokitika in June 1973 and was almost immediately seconded for four years to the West Coast Beech Project based at Reefton. On the Beech Project he participated in the investigation and planning for the proposed intensive management of North Westland beech forests, and the associated establishment of pine plantations which together were to be the basis for a large regional forest industry. This work excited his interest in the scientific management of the region's forests, especially its beech, for the long-term supply of high-quality native timber to New Zealand; and he joined the staff of the Forest Research Institute, becoming the resident scientist at Ahaura. Here, he undertook, over a period of three years, major initiatives in classifying West Coast forests, growth studies of natural and plantation forests and reporting on ecological reservations for the South Westland Land Use Study. During this period he was also secretary for the scientific committee which selected reserves in North Island State forests, furthering the comprehensive ecological understanding of New Zealand forests which was possessed by few other foresters of his generation.

His zest for practical application of scientific knowledge led him to leave the scientists' ranks in 1980 for the

position of District Forester for the Northern District of Westland Conservancy before becoming Principal Forester in Conservancy Office, a position he held for three further years up until his death.

It was at the Annual General Meeting of the NZ Institute of Foresters held at Logan Park in Auckland in 1973 that Curt, as an articulate young man with a slightly foreign accent, made his debut into Institute affairs. Many of the older members of the Institute will remember turning pointedly to identify the source of affrontery as shibboleths were challenged with remarkably logical arguments by this unseasoned member wearing shorts. Further surprises followed, for later in the meeting Curt was called by the President to receive the Schlich Memorial Prize for best student graduating from the Canterbury University School of Forestry in 1972. The receipt of this honour was possibly vindication for his precocity earlier in the meeting, but however the patriarchs rationalised it, Curt had firmly established himself in the membership body as one who had a lot to offer the Institute in the future.

And offer he did. Unable to tear himself away from the complex challenges of the West Coast, he participated fully in local section affairs, holding office at various times. Even the dampest night at Totara Flat wouldn't deter Curt and wife Frith from attending local section meetings. Curt's presence was sure to keep the guest speakers on their toes lest they leave themselves open to his clear logic or quick wit.

In 1980 Curt sought to enter the national controversies facing forestry by being elected onto the Institute's Council as possibly the youngest member ever to hold such office.

However, his youthfulness did not deter him from very active participation, his resoluteness of purpose was put to good use in various subcommittees, and he played a major role in preparing submissions especially on issues relating to indigenous forest management. Throughout his time on Council he never let up on champion-



ing the cause for an egalitarian institute.

Curt also led the working party that resulted in the new-look Journal of Forestry, the first issue of which was published during the AGM last May. That copy featured a review article by Curt on Tasmanian blackwood and, fittingly, carried a photograph of Curt on its cover. Fittingly because the publication of the new Journal coincided with his election to the office of President, a position he held for only one month before his tragic accident.

Curt was the first citizen naturalised as a New Zealander by the Grey County Council in the 1970s. His special forestry interests have been intensive management of beech forests and plantations of eucalypts and Tasmanian blackwood. He made two study tours of Australian forests and published a number of papers on management of beeches, eucalypts and Tasmanian blackwood. He contributed to numerous other published and unpublished reports. He wrote the Draft Buller Regional Forest Management Plan and contributed to the North Westland Regional Forest Management Plan and was a driving force behind proposals to achieve optimum use of all West Coast native timbers. Young kahikatea stands visible from the State Highway near Ahaura and Harihari thinned to induce faster growth of high quality wood are a reminder of Curt's field work.

Curt David Gleason will be remembered by his colleagues for his cheerful approach to life, his fine intellect and his great commitment to forestry in general and the Institute of Foresters in particular.

It is proposed to establish a forestry memorial for Curt. Members and others wishing to contribute to this should send donations to the Chairman, West Coast Section NZIF, Mr B. Watson, P.O. Box 138, Hokitika.