

INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY

New Zealand foresters – durable diplomats in international aid

John Groome

This issue of NZ Forestry contains on-site reports from such diverse parts of the world as Outer Mongolia and Western Samoa. These all arise from the experiences of Institute members and readers may be surprised to learn the extent of our influence in off-shore (particularly Asian and Pacific) countries. The acceptance and, in most cases, success of individuals in forestry projects in unfamiliar climates and with new species has grown due only partially to the funds provided by our official E.A.D. (External Aid and Development) programme. Rather it has been due to the "suitability", tolerance and genuine concern for the local problems exhibited by virtually all the men and women who have chosen to accept assignments in generally remote, always difficult forestry projects overseas.

Perhaps we have been well suited to these roles due to relatively recent exposure to not dissimilar conditions of work in New Zealand itself. The National Forest Survey 56-66 saw most trainees or foresters slogging along strip lines carrying their equipment, food and powers of observation over arduous terrain for weeks on end. While perhaps this was not the best use of university graduates, it was great training for getting to grips with the challenge of tropical jungles in the sixties and seventies. The same grounding is hardly likely to have been part of the Japanese or North American foresters' training. By now there is scarcely one Pacific Island or Asian mountain on which imprints of New Zealand foresters' boots cannot be found.

More recently, another New Zealand influence has been effective in Asian and Pacific forestry. That is the ability of most people who have been involved in forest management in this country to get on well with those who plant the trees and drive the tractors, whatever their race or rank. This characteristic has also proven useful in dealing with other users of the land. The King Country farmers' concern about pine planters is little different from that of the Kadazans of Sabah. The high country farmer in the South Island burns off the tussock for

exactly the same reason as the buffalo owner of Kalimantan – to get a "green pick" for his animals when the rains come.

Many conservation and reforestation efforts by foreigners in Asia have failed because the well-based official plans and aspirations were either never cleared with the local people or were quite unacceptable with their reasons for living in the area – usually to grow food or to be as far away from Government activity as possible. In spite of this common situation and with the help of the experience from their own country, New Zealand foresters in several cases have succeeded by following the precept: "If you see people as part of the problem you will never enlist them in the solution".

Well Placed

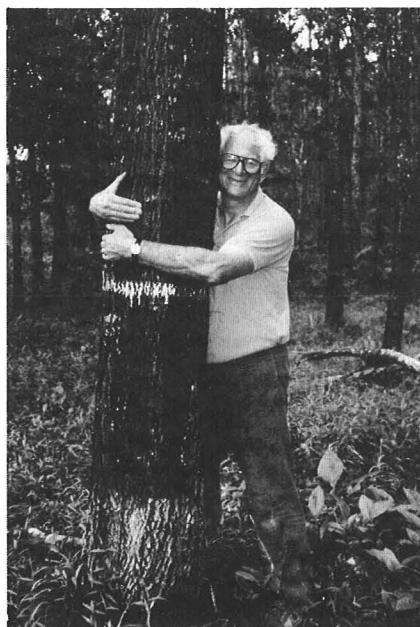
The late Chas Brown was probably the first to make his mark in a foreign country – Chile in the 1960s, but it was not until New Zealand's aid programme in the Kirk years decided that forestry in developing countries was a preferred choice for aid funds and that New Zealand was well placed to satisfy this need. Levy and Usmar planned and initiated the Fiji Pine Scheme. Trotman (Tonga),

Marten (Solomon Islands), Gregor (Fiji), Crequer (Irian Jaya), Ellis (Africa and Malaysia), Poole (Vietnam, Malaysia), Williamson (Vietnam), Lockyer, Brummer (Indonesia), Everts (Papua New Guinea), Harris (Western Samoa), Wilson (Kenya), Te Aho, Smithies, Ingles and their helpers (Tarloc, the Philippines), Ogle (Fiji, Western Samoa, Papua New Guinea) – all have spent lengthy periods on projects with their families. Numerous other rangers and foresters can rightly claim that their efforts have resulted in effective aid in the form of helping people to help themselves to create both jobs and permanent resources. This tradition of Institute members spreading their wings beyond their native shores continues at the present time through Miller and Leith (Malaysia), Springford (Western Samoa) and Telfer (Bougainville). While not complete, this list indicates the range of countries in which New Zealanders can operate successfully.

Particular Gems

While most of their efforts and experiences are inadequately reported in either the popular or technical media, we are indeed fortunate to have in our midst some peripatetic professionals whose able pens and comprehensive educational backgrounds enliven their reports of travels into highly enjoyable and enlightening articles. Those by Dennis Richardson and John Purey-Cust in this issue of NZ Forestry are particular gems in a long series of similar accounts to be stored and re-read.

Not that all aid projects achieved their original aims. However, this was seldom because of the dedicated men on the ground, but more usually because of diplomatic misunderstandings or faulty timing. It is therefore gratifying to read in this issue that MERT have placed the responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating forestry projects in the hands of a professional forester who has had 15 years' experience trying to provide what the clients require rather than what New Zealand might have to offer. It is to be hoped that the funds available are targeted carefully at a few projects which will be of lasting value. A number of past forays such as a dry kiln



John Groome with 10-year-old *Acacia mangium* in Sabah. Photo: R. Miller.

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in a Jakarta suburb, or planting a protection forest in Northern Peru have mercifully been forgotten by both donor and recipient.

'Radiata of the Tropics'

The severe trough that is currently being experienced in New Zealand forestry is set to last for some time yet. What better time than to take what we have learnt in managing fast-growing plantations to whichever countries can benefit and at the same time receive recognition for our efforts which are so sadly denigrated at home. Careful readers will note numerous references to *Acacia mangium* in this issue. This tough Australian newcomer (first introduced into Sabah in 1966) looks as if it will fast become the "Radiata of the Tropics" and an exciting challenge awaits anyone who gets the opportunity to improve the provenances, manipulate the silviculture and market the product from a tree which is at about the same stage of development as Monterey Pine was in the 1920s. The plantation needs of Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea alone are so huge that all the graduate talents of our School of Forestry could be absorbed in this urgent cause for the next 20 years.



17-year-old *Acacia mangium* in Sabah – some of the early plantings. Photo: D. Mead.

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