



# John Murray Balneaves

It is appropriate that John Balneaves pursued a forestry career, descended as he is from one of Scotland's great foresters, John Murray, Duke of Atholl, Laird of Dunkeld.

His school years at Hokitika and Kurow where, he claims, his "academic achievements were unspectacular to say the least", gave no indication of his future accomplishments, but he was blessed with immense energy and zest for life and revelled in such outdoor activities as possum trapping (at 2/6 per skin), fishing, rabbit shooting, swimming, tennis and golf. When he was 16 years old, his parents, despairing of any intellectual achievements, sent John to the Golden Downs Woodsmen's School in 1959. Two years there were followed by further training at Totara Flat, Pebbly Hills, Berwick and Conical Hill Sawmill. Then he was posted to Berwick Forest under the energetic and skilful management of Jack Barber for two years. He moved to the Dunedin district office, working under George Wilkinson, the District Forester. No avoider of hard toil, and replete with an enquiring mind and unlimited initiative, John took a major part in the early development of Silverpeaks Forest north of Dunedin.

It was during this period that John met Helen, then a kindergarten teacher trainee, whom he married in December 1966 – a union that has been one of the mainstays of his life.

John and Helen have been actively involved in church work, and with young people, throughout their married life. Helen worked with handicapped pre-school children at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Rotorua, and John served as Director of International Youth Affairs for Rotary in Rangiora.

In 1966, also, John applied to become a Forest Technician at the Forest Research Institute, Rotorua. Having obtained this position, he was confronted with his ignorance as he became involved in silviculture, plant physiology, soil physics and chemistry. With typical Balneaves drive, he attended night school four nights a week, as well as taking on other studies by correspondence, to learn sufficient mathematics, physics, biology and chemistry for his research work, and also to improve his English and brush up his writing, which he "still has to struggle with".

In 1968, John joined the newly formed

Forest Establishment Research Group under Geoff Chavasse. John then more or less took off, entering or initiating numerous research projects with uninhibited zeal, covering the whole gamut of forest establishment from nursery production up to first pruning, including the site preparation tools of chemicals, machinery and fire. His contribution was outstanding, not least in taking a significant part in several symposia over the next ten years. He had the ability to carry through all his research work from meticulous statistically based planning to concise and meaningful papers. Looking back on his career, his output is extraordinary in practical value, solidity and scope.

### Welcomed Challenges

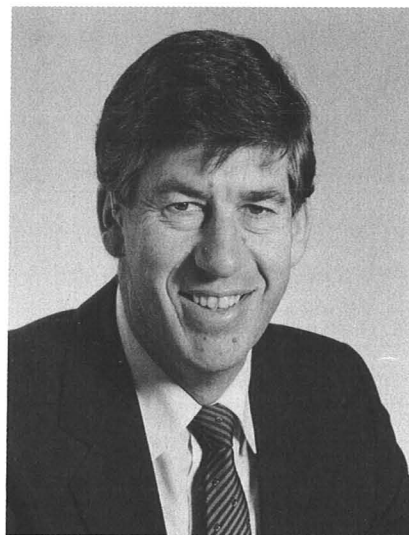
John always welcomed new challenges and when he was invited in 1971 to go to Rangiora to extend the work of the Establishment Group to the South Island, and also to initiate work on problems peculiar to southern sites, he jumped at it. An important part of his contribution was his ability to bridge the gap between researchers and forest managers, who then felt they had a stake in the outcome of his research. Many wondered how John could keep track of his numerous trials, many of them of considerable complexity.

A different kind of challenge, which he relished, was the arrival of a daughter, Sarah Jane, in 1971.

### Widened Horizons

John was awarded a David Henry scholarship in 1983, giving him the opportunity to study forestry in Britain, Canada, western USA and Australia. This widened his horizons and he came back with new insights which extended the scope of his research work, including involvement in the problem of site deterioration. He made a further visit to Australia and the USA, where he attended an international workshop on site amelioration.

John is a man who came up from behind to advance to the forefront of that stalwart group of researchers who contributed liberally to the "great days" of forestry research in New Zealand, and gave them that well-deserved high profile among the world-wide forestry profession.



John Balneaves

### Scholarship Fund

In 1993, the Forest Technology Board approved the setting up of a John M. Balneaves scholarship fund to "enable suitable persons to travel and enhance plantation research". Also, the NZ Institute of Forestry awarded John the NZ Forest Service Carving for "his contribution to practical forestry". The award was set up in 1989 "to recognise outstanding work in practical forest management in the integrated management of the land, the forests and the people who work and recreate in them". A presentation was made at a combined meeting of the Canterbury local sections of the NZ Institute of Forestry and the Royal Society of NZ in April this year. This is only the second time the award has been presented. All who know him will confirm these awards are well deserved.

### Enforced Retirement

It is sad that John, who always sang as he worked in the field, and whose cheerful disposition helped his co-workers to keep going in atrocious weather ("Every day's a picnic in the bush!"), has latterly had to suffer the encroachment of cancer, which eventually led to his enforced retirement in June 1992.

Geoff Chavasse