
Obituaries

Stephen H. Spurr 1918-1990

Stephen Spurr died in June 1990; the Institute of Forestry regrets that it has taken so long to produce this obituary.

Stephen Spurr was an Honorary Member of the Institute, perhaps its most distinguished Honorary Member. He was given this appointment in 1961 very soon after his sojourn as a Fulbright Research Scholar at the Forest Research Institute, Rotorua.

I first knew Stephen in the late 1940s. He was a most likeable and impressive young man, destined for a distinguished career in American and world forestry. He was then Associate Professor of Forestry at Harvard University and there and later at the University of Michigan he made a name for himself as the author of three standard textbooks, on aerial photographs, forest inventory, and aerial photogrammetry. These were most impressive publications, the more so since they were specialist documents and Stephen was far from being a specialist – rather he was a very good and very wise all-round forester with a full appreciation of the social, environmental as well as the commercial implications of forestry.

Stephen went to Michigan as Professor of Silviculture in 1952 and spent nearly 20 years there, rising to Dean of the School of Natural Resources, a school he had himself founded. He was a brilliant lecturer, recalled with fondness by all his students, particularly the postgraduate ones. In 1962 he produced his major work "Forest Ecology", which has been reprinted

twice. Such was Stephen's reputation as a thinking and practical ecologist that he became one of the American President's specialist ecological advisers and in 1966 in this capacity he produced a major study on the Rampart Dam in Alaska.

In later years he became more involved with University administration and particularly with postgraduate studies. He became an authority on educational matters generally and had many high honours in the field of professional education as well as of forestry. In 1967 he moved to the University of Texas as its President and was there until he died. His last few years were troubled sadly by heart problems and Parkinson's disease.

Stephen is best known to New Zealanders through his silvicultural and mensurational work at FRI. He found it a great experience. His wife wrote: "The time spent in New Zealand was a joy to us. The beauty of your country and the hospitality of your people made our sojourn in your country one of the highlights in our life." He returned to Rotorua for a few months in 1962.

In New Zealand he was immediately taken not so much by radiata pine, which

did of course impress him, but with Douglas fir – "the best planted Oregon pine in the world". He wrote two important FRI bulletins on New Zealand Douglas. He prophesied that in his lifetime Douglas fir sawn timber would be exported from New Zealand to the United States. He was very nearly right; it is Douglas fir saw logs rather than sawn timber which is now going to the USA.

Stephen was an extremely active and busy man. I have two vivid memories of this. When he first returned home from Rotorua he sold me his portable typewriter; he delivered it at my home just one hour before his plane left, having used it right up to the last moment to type an article. Then two years later he came down to Wellington from Tokoroa for a weekend and stayed at our Khandallah house. He said he needed some exercise; within one hour of his arrival we were at the top of the nearest big high hill, Mount Kaukau. He was indefatigable.

His impact on New Zealand forestry from all points of view was immense. He will be remembered for a long time.

A.P. Thomson

Brian Johnstone Allison 1927-1992

Brian Allison was born and brought up in the English Lake District. He graduated with a forestry degree from Aberdeen University in 1951. His analytical and reporting style reflected that university's method of training. For five years he worked for the British Forestry Commission as a District Forest Officer. In 1956 Brian joined the Commonwealth Development Corporation serving successively in Malawi, Swaziland, the West Indies and London. While in Africa he gained a real insight into the productivity and management of large teams of unskilled labour and what that could cost in forest management. He was often to remind us of this later. While in London he completed qualifications in management and accounting. By now Brian realised that there were fewer opportunities for him in Commonwealth forestry so he turned his attention to New Zealand.

He joined NZ Forest Products Limited in 1962 – one of a number of Aberdeen

forestry graduates recruited by Jack Henry about that time. With a family of three small boys he paid his own passage to New Zealand. Throughout the rest of his life he often praised the opportunities New Zealand gave his whole family in life style, education and careers. In addition the Kinleith Forest was large enough to allow him to develop his ideas on the holistic approach to forest planning.

Brian was appointed Working Plans Forester but his title was to change a number of times during his career to Assistant Forest Manager, Manager Forest Planning and Services, etc. While organisational charts and titles gave him some amusement, he realised they were essential in a big organisation but he did not let them stand in his way when he wanted to get his ideas across at all levels.

Forest planning became his life, to which he applied his intellect, imagination and innovative skills. Thus began a most remarkable 25-year period where Brian

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owners can be expected when the social or political environment encourages this. The Institute should adopt an unbiased role in informing firstly the membership and secondly the concerned public, of significant aspects of forest industry activity from which a judgement can be made.

The above report on the AGM motion is intended to provide such information on the Forestry Corporation of NZ and it is Council's view that no further investigation is merited, particularly in the light of recent statements on FCNZ's future.

Peter Olsen
President