

The Man who Stopped the Sand

Des Ogle

6 June 1921 – 14 July 2002

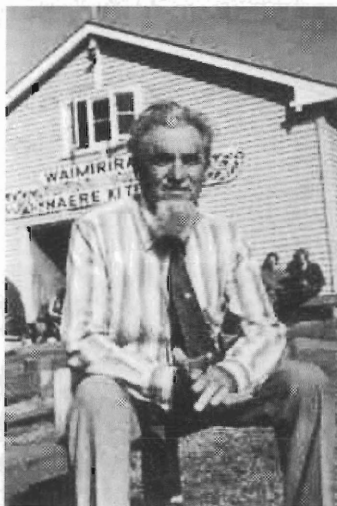
It is sad to record the passing of Desmond James Stancliffe Ogle on the 14th of July 2002. Des will be remembered by many foresters as the man who for 20 years led the programme to stabilise the drifting sand-dunes fringing Northland's 90 Mile Beach, and in the process created a massive wood resource in the form of Aupouri Forest.

For the people of the Far North of New Zealand the life of this man is particularly significant, not only was the project a major employer – Des also sided strongly with the community and came to be acknowledged as one of the real pioneers in the development of the Northland region.

Des Ogle was born on 6 June 1921 at Rangiahua, north of Okaihau. His parents farmed a returned serviceman's ballot farm at Omaunu and Des attended Kaeo School. At the age of 11 years Des was struck down with a severe bout of poliomyelitis, which left him with a permanent "hump" in his back.

After the Second World War Des was able to find work in Puketū Forest where his grandfather was also working, and this was the start of a forestry career with the Forest Service that continued for another 37 years – and a forestry interest that remained with him for the rest of his life. Des shifted relatively rapidly around the fledgling forests of the north, working in the plantations at Waipoua and later Puhipuhi before moving to Glenbervie Forest as Second in Charge. He married Beryl, in 1946, and together they shared some of the pleasures of life in the early New Zealand Forest Service – such as living in a house constructed of 3 linked single-men's/army huts at Puhipuhi. Des and Beryl also started their family at this time, with the interest in forestry rubbing off on their eldest son, Dan who later graduated with a degree in forestry science from the School of Forestry at Canterbury University.

In 1963 Des was appointed as Officer in Charge of Aupouri Forest, and set about planning, organising and undertaking a sand stabilisation and tree planting programme that was without precedent either in New Zealand or most other parts of the world at that time. For some time the drifting sand had been a major headache for those living and working on the Northland peninsula, sand was regularly covering the main road at several points and extensive areas of valuable farmland was disappearing each year. Building on the trial work undertaken by the Public Works Department a few years previously near Waipapakauri, and the more extensive experience of the Forest Service in forests such as Woodhill, marram grass nurseries were established, roads were built and accommodation for a large workforce was developed. Machines capable of supporting



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operations on a huge scale were acquired or constructed, for example the six-man marram planters that criss-crossed the almost endless sand planted thousands of acres each year. Trees provided from a new nursery established at Sweetwater near Awanui were planted 3-4 years after the marram and yellow lupins had fixed the drifting sand.

A few years later operations were also commenced from a new base set up at TeKao, nearer the more northern end of 90 Mile Beach and there was great rejoicing when in 1981 the marram planting programmes running from both the north and south finally met. Des retired in 1982 having seen his goal of fixing the drifting sands of the northland peninsula finally achieved.

Some of the tributes paid to Des;

- "...I came across this man walking across the vast dunes, followed a few yards behind by a very large bulldozer. Des was marking the lines for the roads that were to be constructed through the forest".
- "...He could make you believe a spade was a bulldozer, then you would set out to move a hill".
- "...It was his eyes you noticed first, they sparkled - whether from enthusiasm, a little mischief or sometimes annoyance, you always noticed the sparkle".

Des was one of the first to introduce full-time paid work for women in forest operations, a particularly appreciated contribution in the work impoverished far north. His intervention was also responsible for getting the funding and land allocated for the far north community forest that became both a resource and an experience for those living in the area. He was a member of the NZ Institute of Forestry and contributed well, particularly to the conference held in Kaitia in the 1970s.

After his retirement Des maintained his interest in the project and forestry more broadly, being appointed as a member of the Board of Tai Tokerau Forests Limited, and also speaking and writing on his experience and views. He was a strong advocate for planting trees on Maori land that was not otherwise being fully utilised. His memories were recorded in a book "Beyond the 20 Foot Stump" published by the Northland Historical Publications Society, and he was also awarded the QSM for his services to the community and forestry. He maintained a well-stocked garden and was an enthusiastic bowler.

After a full and active life Des unfortunately required heart surgery in 2001. Aupouri Forest is a fitting memorial to Des Ogle, the man who truly did stop the sand.

Peter Berg