

Forestry stalwart with a special feeling for Kaingaroa

Owen Alexander Boyd 1920-2005

We lost another forestry stalwart when Owen Boyd passed away in July. He started in the Forest Service as a labourer in Southland at the end of 1945 but was soon promoted to staff and spent most of his 36 year career at Kaingaroa. The culmination of his career was his appointment as Officer-in-Charge of this, our largest plantation forest, in 1975. He retired in 1980.

Owen was raised in Dunedin. Like others born at that time, his early life was affected by the two key events of the 1930s - the depression and World War II. In a large family, schooling continued only until a job became available which was why Owen ended up behind the counter at Hallensteins clothing store. As a "counter" to this occupation, he and his older brother spent as much time as possible in the outdoors - rock and mountain climbing in the Rock and Pillar Range and skiing when conditions allowed. Both played rugby for the Pirates Club. Owen also joined the Territorial Army and became a Commissioned Officer.

He was in the 20th Battalion and served overseas throughout the Italian campaign. Owen only mentioned the fringe fun parts of his service but, in recent years, his brother mentioned that he had been in charge of a mule train in Southern Italy. Friends had a lot of fun teasing "Boydie" about his mule train experience. He would just suck away on his pipe - "Nothing to it old man".

What to do after the War? He certainly wasn't going back to being a drapery assistant. His brother came to the rescue and told him that the Forest Service had a rehabilitation scheme for returned servicemen, known as category A and B. Owen applied and was accepted in A category, offering immediate employment as a wage worker with a guarantee of in-house training if he made the grade. In late 1945 he was posted to Dusky Forest in West Otago. Owen's work ethic and leadership qualities soon came to the fore and he was quickly promoted to leading hand and then to staff as a Forest Foreman. Within two years of joining, he was added to the staff of the Tapanui Forestry Training Centre helping with Forest Foremen courses. Most of the students were ex-servicemen and Owen, because of his rapport with the men, helped greatly in the smooth running of the centre. After that, he returned to Dusky helping run small log production in Corsican pine and larch - a horse extraction process not unusual at that time.

Owen was transferred to Kaingaroa on promotion to Assistant Forest Ranger in 1948. He was never certain why he was moved but it was probably because his old boss at Dusky, Joe Whitely, had been appointed 2-I-C and knew his capabilities. Thus Owen spent the rest of his working life - 32 years - in the one forest ending up as



Officer-in-Charge. This was very unusual because the Forest Service liked its officers to move around (and indeed they usually had to for promotion). However, because of the size of the forest and the variety of activities within it, Kaingaroa was rather exceptional. As well, people developed a special affection for this great sprawling man-made forest. Owen had this very special feeling for Kaingaroa and it earned him respect when he assumed overall control.

His first posting was to the Wairapukao Sub-division. This was a bit of a culture shock to a "Southern man" used to people being cleanshaven with short back and sides. The local work force was mostly from Ruatahuna and according to their Ringatu Faith did not believe in hair cutting of any sort. He weathered that experience all right and it stood him in good stead. He spent much of the next few years relieving in all the other sub-divisions of the forest before coming back to headquarters in 1952 to lead the production teams providing large volumes of thinnings for the new Tasman Pulp and Paper operations in Kawerau, and sawlogs for Waipa Mill. This was a very large operation and Owen's skill and experience made it an acknowledged success.

In 1966, Joe Whitely retired and Owen was appointed to replace him as 2-I-C. He provided continuity over the next nine years to compensate for the Head Office policy of appointing the Officer-in-Charge on a two-year basis, before moving him on to other senior position. In an apparent policy change, Owen was appointed Officer-in-Charge in 1975 and held the position until he retired.

Owen was down-to-earth and straightforward - what you saw was what you got! When he spoke it was direct and uncomplicated. He was unflappable, good natured and a good listener. These were the attributes people appreciated in their association with him both professionally and socially. Over the years, he played a full part in the affairs of Kaingaroa village, playing rugby, badminton and golf, later becoming a J.P. so he could be available to help the residents more effectively.

He married somewhat late in life and he and Joan shifted to Rotorua some time before he retired. Joan died from a sudden illness seven years ago and is well remembered from her writing, particularly the story of Kaingaroa Forest - "Pumice and Pines". Owen retained his contact with old forestry colleagues, was the first President (later granted Life Membership) of the FRESTA Club, and was a Full Life Member of the Institute.

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