

# The New Zealand Journal of Forestry - past, present and beyond

Hamish Levack

Although this article has been written to celebrate the closing off of the 50<sup>th</sup> volume of the Journal it is evident from Table 1 that the term “volume” is rather meaningless. The sum of “numbers” published as part of a “volume” has varied from one to five, and has covered anywhere between one and six years of members’ articles. Lately a “volume” has been made up of four “numbers” that straddle May of one year to February of the next. Does anybody bother to bind their numbers into volumes these days, and if so why not do it by calendar years?

It is much more important to be aware that 161 different Journals have been published, and that they are a treasure

*Table 1: Details of the first 50 volumes of the New Zealand Journal of Forestry.*

Volume	Numbers	Total issues	Years	Name	Editor
1	1	1	1925	Te Kura Ngahere	F E Hutchinson
2	1-5	5	1926-30	Te Kura Ngahere	ditto
3	1-4	4	1931-34	Te Kura Ngahere - the New Zealand Journal of Forestry	ditto
3	5	1	1935		T T C Birch
4	1-5	5	1936-41	The New Zealand Journal of Forestry (from 1937)	ditto
5	1-5	5	1942-48		G D Hocking
6	1-5	5	1949-53		ditto
7	1	1	1954		A D McKinnon
7	2-5	4	1955-58		A P Thomson
8	1-2	2	1959-60		A L Poole
8	3-5	3	1961-63		D S Jackson
9-14	1-2	12	1964-69		ditto
15-19	1-2	10	1970-74		C G R Chavasse
20-24	1-2	10	1975-79		G B Sweet.
25-27	1-2	6	1980-82		J S Holloway
28	1-3	3	1983		ditto
29	1	1	1984		ditto
29	2	1	1984		J R Purey-Cust
30	1-2	2	1985		ditto
31-34	1-4	16	1986-89	New Zealand Forestry. Journal of the NZ Institute of Forestry Inc.	Don J Mead
35	1	1	1990		ditto
35	2-4	3	1990		Hamish Levack
36	1-4	4	1991		ditto
37	1-2	2	1992		ditto
37	3-4	2	1992		Chris Perley
38-40	1-4	12	1993-95		ditto
41	1	1	1996		ditto
41	2-4	3	1996		Hugh Bigsby
42-43	1-4	8	1997-98		Hugh Bigsby. Don J Mead acted as editor for 42(4) to 43(2)
44-46	1-4	12	1999-2001	NZ Journal of Forestry. Te Putahi Ngaherehere o Aotearoa - from 43(4)	Hugh Bigsby
47-50	1-4	16	2002-05		Bruce Manley
Total issues		161			


trove of information about New Zealand forestry.

## Te Kura Ngahere


The first issue of the Journal was published in 1925 under the name *Te Kura Ngahere* which in Maori means the sacred lore of the forest. In fact twelve issues of the Journal were published under that name. Initially *Te Kura Ngahere* was an annual publication produced by the Forestry Club of the first School of Forestry at the University of Canterbury and was edited by F. E. Hutchinson, the aim being to “discuss forestry in all its aspects, extend the range of technical articles and publish research conducted by the School”.

*Te Kura Ngahere* even preceded the establishment of the NZIF by three issues and reported on the inaugural meeting to set up the Institute in Wellington in 1927. The fourth issue of *Te Kura Ngahere*, which was published in October 1928, noted the adoption of a NZIF constitution during the previous March and the first election of NZIF officers.


An amendment to the NZIF constitution providing for the publication of professional papers and transactions by the Institute was covered in the fifth issue of *Te Kura Ngahere*. Incidentally at the 1930 AGM the Institute logo that currently decorates the cover of our journal, was adopted. This logo, which embodies a fruiting spray of



## New Zealand's Principal Forest Seed Supplier



- Tailored *GF Plus*<sup>TM</sup> radiata seedlots
- Douglas fir from recognized sources
- Improved macrocarpa and lusitanica
- New Zealand natives
- Wide range of other species



Visit our website:

[www.proseed.co.nz](http://www.proseed.co.nz)

Contact us for a copy of our catalogue

Ph: (03) 314 8978 • Fax: (03) 314 8985  
Email: [seed@proseed.co.nz](mailto:seed@proseed.co.nz)

rimu with a mountain background, was designed by Mary Sutherland.

In 1931, by arrangement with the Canterbury School of Forestry, *Tē Kura Ngāhere* became the organ of publication of the Institute, but in 1934 the School was closed due to financial stringency, and from 1937 onwards the journal changed its name, being published by the institute as *The New Zealand Journal of Forestry*.

## The importance of the Journal

Lindsay Poole reviewed the Journal in his 1957 Presidential address to the Institute.

Much of this address remains valid today. He said "Whatever the achievements of this Institute may be, the story of them and the Institute's doings are enshrined in the journal it publishes.....A good journal will record all possible aspects of an Institute's ramifications and so leave an adequate record for posterity. There is no need for me to point out the importance of this in forestry because of the long term nature of most ventures in connection with it" and.... "the journal is regarded highly both here and overseas, as a repository of good writing on general forest practice.....To achieve such a standard, the journal is largely dependent upon its editors so the Institute has reason to be grateful to those members who have performed this onerous honorary service. It is the most burdensome of all offices and demands the most meticulous work, particularly as many manuscripts are sent forward in an indifferent form". Editors received no honorarium from the NZIF until 1996.

However Lindsay also pointed out that the journal had been silent on quite a few forestry matters of historical importance up to that time, such as the evolution of private corporate forestry and, for example, that prior to about 1957 very little had been written about radiata pine. (John Ure's classic account of the natural regeneration of radiata pine in Kaingaroa was published in 1953 breaking a 15 year virtual silence about the species).

Lindsay's comment remains apposite today. At say annual intervals the Journal Editor should look back over the past year's events to ensure that everything important to forestry has been adequately recorded.

In a 1976 editorial Geoff Sweet observed that the Journal should be:

- a. Informative and interpretive: trying to focus on the major issues and policy matters of the time, either editorially or through articles or Member's comment.
- b. Provide a forum for Institute opinion and Institute happenings.
- c. Provide a voice for members who have something professional to say, or wish to draw to wider attention their work or their thinking. One aspect of the latter role is the provision of a platform from which to launch new and innovative ideas which may, if they prove worthwhile, influence future forestry development.

Following the analysis of a questionnaire sent out in 1978, Wink Sutton reported that members thought that the most important thing the Institute could do was be an

advocate for forestry, and in particular that the NZIF should do more to present the case for forestry to the general public. Members saw that the Journal was essential not only for this but also for contact, discussion, exchange and dissemination of information and ideas.

By 1979 this had translated into a move for a change in Journal style. It was reflected by Geoff Sweet's editorial that year when he wrote "To date NZIF Council has not imposed directions on its Editors....The current editor has aimed at a reader with a degree in forestry and interests broadly based around forest management as it relates to New Zealand. He has made full use of the Newsletter's role in publishing 'domestic' Institute material to keep the journal content as free of this as possible. He has also frequently suggested that high-research-content material be published in the 'New Zealand Journal of Forestry Science' instead. However, recent feedback suggests that the Journal may have become too technical for the majority of readers. It may be time for a change."

It took half a dozen years for that change to materialize.

## Restructured Journal

John Purey-Cust wrote in the last 'old style' Journal: "This (1985) volume will be the last in the old format. (The page size was then 14 x 21 cm). A new format is wanted with more frequent issues, more reader appeal, and more discussion and opinion. A4 size pages will be used so that photos and diagrams can be more easily included. Some members will regret the change...but there is also no doubt that the Journal has tended to reflect the importance of some sectors of the profession above others, and some have seen it as a scientific journal where fact and exactitude were more important than opinion. This is an old established principle for similar publications, but the changes in forestry over the past few years have often not been changes of fact but opinion and attitude, and maybe that has not come through."

In 1986 Don Mead with his committee of John Halkett, Priestley Thomson and this writer launched the first of the "new look" Journals. It was certainly a break from tradition. NZIF Newsletters, over seventy of which had been published since 1962 by consecutive editors John Groome, A.R. Thorpe, Phil Painter, Peter Herrick and Geoff Cameron, were discontinued. Instead, for the next seventeen years, the material that previously would have gone into the Newsletters was incorporated into the Journal.

There were minor complaints about some aspects of the new Journal; e.g. objection to the cartoon cover on the February 1987 edition entitled "musical chairs for forestry folk" being "too much like a Public Service Association Journal", and objection to the first and only picture of a naked person daringly published in the Journal by editor Chris Perley (February 1993), but generally members warmly welcomed all the innovations. One gruff ex-Director General of Forests even praised the Journal (August 1992), saying that "the continuing production of a professionally good forestry journal is about the most important thing that the Institute can do". He continued

"Some of the technical articles in recent issues have been superb. Don't let the need to make the Journal interesting and informative and readable override the importance of producing articles of a high professional standard; but don't let the reverse happen either."

### How accurate have forecasts of the future of forestry been in the Journal?

The Journal has recorded the continual change that has taken place in the sector. Hands up those of you who are familiar with *Pinus insignis* and *Pseudotsuga taxifolia* these days.) Even more interesting are members' past predictions of the future.

When Harrison-Smith asserted that "One man chain saws are probably here to stay" in a 1952 article, he was absolutely right but he was wrong about slide rules. Few would follow his advice and use them these days for grid system topographical surveys.

The 1958 Journal ran Priestley Thomson's report on the first trial shipments of *Pinus radiata* logs that had been sent to Japan. He pointed out that this was a welcome way to get rid of some of the country's temporary and still considerable excess of growing stock, and was good for forest management, but said "it is obviously inefficient to transport bark, slabs, sawdust and water over thousands of miles", and concluded entirely wrongly (so far anyway) "that on economic grounds, it is doubtful if a permanent trade can develop".

In a letter to the Journal, Brian Allison noted how ironical it was that the 1913 Royal Commission thought that New Zealand would run out of timber whereas now New Zealanders were faced with "a flood of wood several times their willing usage."

It has to be said that the future national supply of wood was rather well predicted by this writer in one of the 1979 Journals and updated again in 1986 with John Novis and G. Burrows. Mike Colley congratulated us in his 1991 Journal critique "Sometimes forecasting and reality do coincide".

In the May 1987 Journal Peter Grant, a research officer of the Maruia Society, claimed that the long run rate of return for radiata pine forests averaged only about 1%. Fortunately he has turned out to be quite wrong. So far plantation forest investment has never done quite that badly.

The Journal ran an opposite perspective in the February 1989 under the heading "Burly stumpages for the New Crop says BERL". Kel Sanderson of BERL claimed that fundamental supply and demand forces meant that log prices would be 95% higher in real terms in 2010 than they were in 1987. Ted Bilek objected to Sanderson's analysis in the May 1989 Journal and Kel provided a vigorous rebuttal. In retrospect it looks like Kel shot way above the target, and Ted was right.

Then, in the November 1989 Journal, Murray Hosking pronounced that beech management could not operate profitably so it was best for the South Island State-owned beech forests in question to be added to the DOC estate. In the following Journal Geoff Chavassee strongly disagreed.

He asserted that, with price control for indigenous timber being lifted, beech management would be very profitable. Geoff also said that DOC did not have nearly enough money to manage the indigenous forests that it had already been allocated, and it was never likely to have enough money unless it could offset the necessary protection costs against revenue from timber harvest.

By 1999 Timberlands West Coast had proved Chavassee right, not that the Government showed any interest in converting this important information into sensible forest policy.

Many other articles commented on the likely outcome of the revolutionary changes that took place in the forestry sector between 1984 and 1999.

### The future of the Journal

On 5 September 2003 the NZIF began publishing its weekly electronic NZIF Newsletter. A brainchild of its editor Andrew McEwen, (occasionally assisted by this writer as acting editor), these publications have been a huge success. Reasons include the high volume of information that can be quickly transferred and the almost immediate interaction that is often generated. This and the fact that sufficient money has been raised to get all back copies of the Journal on-line are harbingers of fascinating possible future developments.

It has already been indicated that the Journal was reformed in 1986 partly to take over the then quarterly 'Newsletter' function. It is now time to think about effectively doing the converse, i.e. letting the weekly Newsletter absorb the Journal. Now that just about every member of the Institute checks his or her email every day, it makes no sense for say refereed scientific articles to wait for up to three months to appear in hard copy in the Journal when they could be published immediately on the NZIF web site and referred to within a week in the Newsletter.

Like the electronic Newsletter the NZIF Forestry Handbook, (edited/updated by Geoff Chavassee, Hamish Levack, Don Hammond and Mike Colley in 1977, 1986, 1995 and 2005 respectively), could be considered an extension of the Journal. There is no reason why the handbook should not also be put on line and components updated as new information comes to hand, instead of waiting for up to a decade to do it. Incremental changes here could also be reported in the Newsletter as they occur. The same goes for a number of other NZIF publications such as the NZIF Professional Handbook and various conference proceedings. Articles in all these documents will be able to be searched for and interrogated electronically using key words.

Back in the 1960s the Institute had an office bearer who held the title of "Librarian". We may need to reinstate this sort of position but call the office bearer Information Manager/Web Master instead. We could also treble the bangs we get for our bucks by developing these technical and historical information systems in conjunction with the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association and the New Zealand Forest Owners Association.