

# Commitment, loyalty and service

G Peter S Allan 1937 - 2005  
(NZIF Hon Secretary 1999-2005)

Throughout most of his adult life Peter Allan invested his time more or less equally in his three great loves; his family, forestry and the communities of which he was a part. His enthusiasm, good humour and the very great pleasure he took from each of these was always evident and reflected his pride in being part of them.

He was not a person who sought particular recognition or who stood out from the crowd in any remarkable way yet I can think of few people who have given more of themselves in support of the things that they believed in than Peter.

Peter's early life and upbringing was not unusual; he was born in September 1937 at the Wharenana Nursing Home in Timaru, the son of a Scottish farming family who had settled in the South Canterbury region. He attended primary school at first Albury and later Winchester Schools. Attendance at Winchester Church and evening bible readings at home imbued him with an understanding and devotion that continued to develop throughout his lifetime, and also led to his learning to play both the organ and piano.

The family business revolved around apple growing on a farmlet ("Stonycroft") about 2 km north of Winchester where his father was identified as the local cider maker, (whether this contributed in any way to Peter's subsequently mostly teetotal habits is hard to say).

His secondary school education was at Timaru Boys High School where he passed his examinations satisfactorily and as a consequence of his capability as a pianist he played for the School Honours Assembly in his final year.

With his good marks, physical ability and community activity through the church it is no surprise that he was readily accepted by the NZ Forest Service for a position as Technical Trainee in 1956, starting with a group that included later to become well known members of the NZ forestry fraternity such as Dr Rowly Burdon, Chris Christie, Eddie Kearns, Ian Barton, Dave Brett, John Gilbert, Max Johnston, Alan Rockell, Denis Kelly and Brian Swale.

In 1956, as was the custom of the day he also spent some time in the NZ Army Corps and in the process developed an interest in the St Johns Ambulance Service, subsequently serving in the Blackball, Central Wellington and Hokitika Units and earning a long service medal in the process.

At this time all technical trainees spent a year working in the field before being selected for university or ranger training and Peter was posted to Dusky forest in west Otago, where a range of species had been planted in the early years of the Forest Service.

Waipoua Forest in Northland was well known for the early work on the establishment of radiata pine and a range of US southern pine species on the difficult kauri gumland clay soils and of course included the then recently established Kauri Sanctuary where some of the largest and most inspirational trees to be found anywhere are still growing. The local Maori people, many of whom worked in the forest were both welcoming and friendly and generated a strong



interest in NZ's bi-cultural identity which strongly influenced Peter's life from that point on.

Other postings included work with Forest and Range Experimental Station (FRES – later to become part of FRI) on the Tararua survey (1958), Harper-Avoca (1959), and team leader on the Ngaruroro survey in 1960 where he developed a wider interest in the potential of a number of our native tree species. This sort of field work was where a great deal of the *esprit de corps* and self reliance of the NZFS team was developed and which served it so well throughout its

70 year history.

His colleague at that time, Rowly Burdon remembers...

*"Peter did have a good sense of fun and mischief; as senior trainees, we were looking after two junior but highly bumptious professional trainees (messrs Herrick and Bamford) on some work in Canterbury Conservancy. It was, de rigueur, the seniors in the cab, and the juniors in the back of a very badly sprung canopy truck - with Peter at the wheel. The juniors had been particularly... stropky, so... when we got to a very long but heavily corrugated straight Peter looked at me, suggested that he put his foot down... down went his foot, and the truck bounced along at a remarkably good clip. When we figured the juniors had had enough we pulled up, and drew much amusement from the screaming wobbly thrown by them. From that point, they were a lot less bumptious".*

Somewhat reluctantly, he then spent two years completing his diploma in forestry at Canberra's School of Forestry – his reluctance due to a preference for a not to be realised European or North American university posting.

Upon returning to NZ he was posted to the position of District Forester at Ahaura, part of Westland Conservancy where a range of tree species were being planted and where beech forest management was being practiced and the Forest Service capability honed via a series of felling and regeneration trials.

Clearly this experience marked another turning point in Peter's life; the exposure to the forests and people of the West Coast being a source of inspiration and commitment that lasted for the remainder of his life. As one version of his CV rather wryly notes...

*"1963-67 University of Ahaura, Doctorate (in Fire Lighting)".*

In 1968 he was appointed to the Forest Service Head Office before shifting from there to the role of Private Secretary to the then Minister of Forestry, Lands and Maori and Island Affairs the Hon Duncan McIntyre. This was another important period for Peter, involving significant exposure to the Wellington political system of lobbying, submissions and hearings, and an appreciation of the importance of good contacts and maintenance of accurate records – all of which he was able to use to good advantage later.

It was also an important time for another reason; at this time Peter also met his wife to be, Patricia Robinson and they were married in May 1969. Over the next decade four

children were born to the happy couple (three in Hokitika) and later the family blossomed - to see Peter also survived by four grand-children in whom he took great delight.

Later in 1970 Peter was re-appointed to the West Coast, this time as Principal Forester/Assistant Conservator Planning – a position he was to hold until the demise of the Forest Service in 1987. It was an important but challenging time, the Forest service were reviewing the potential for a significant beech utilisation project and the establishment of extensive planted forests to provide a long term sustainable harvest.

The project soon attracted the attention of an emerging environmental movement and for most of the following two decades their enthusiasm for locking up (“protecting”) much of the West Coast native forest was a match for those who advocated sustainable management from relatively limited areas.

Like many other foresters of his time Peter was firmly convinced that a prudent level of beech forest management was possible on a sustainable basis and without detriment to natural values more widely. And he was particularly a strong advocate for forestry on the ‘Coast because of the greater prosperity and better lifestyles it promised people living in the region.

In both respects he worked hard to achieve these goals; leading a team of committed foresters who continually refined and improved the establishment, silvicultural, management and wood property knowledge of the beech species and at the same time he sought election to the Hokitika Borough Council where he served for 12 years including 6 years as deputy mayor. For 9 of those years he also represented the forestry sector on the West Coast Regional Development Council.

Peter recognised that forests could contribute in other ways, and he provided significant flexibility and even cover for members of his team to research and demonstrate the significance of these other values; thus for example at this time West Coast foresters were setting the standard for the rest of the Forest Service in terms of recreational planning and protection and restoration of important historic and natural sites. The templates they developed became the standard for the Forest Service and later the organisations that succeeded it. Bruce Watson recalls.....

*“Peter’s good humour, mild and tolerant manner provided a great foil for his argumentative band of younger foresters – Curt Gleason, Sandy Rae, Alan Reid and myself, each of us focused on new and different ways of achieving multiple use goals.*

*One resulting development was the addition of family friendly recreational facilities to balance the ‘good keen man’ tracks of the rugged West Coast back country. Peter’s support of the team that planned these developments and researched and designed interpretation of their stories of nature, history and culture, provided a legacy for New Zealanders and overseas visitors to enjoy. Many of the old miners’ and settlers’ tracks that were renovated then are now national must-visits: Okarito Trig & Three Mile Beach, Monroe Beach, Hari Hari Coastal Walkway, Goldsborough, Woods Creek, Nelson Creek, Croesus & Moonlight, Kirwans, Waiuta, and Big River”.*

In many respects the dissolution of the Forest Service

in 1987 freed Peter to focus more closely on his particular interests; he became a Registered Forestry Consultant working more particularly in the field of indigenous forest management while continuing with his local body and church leadership roles and expanding an interest in the bi-cultural development of his community (Secretary of the Christchurch Diocesan bicultural education committee for the 10 years from 1995 and attended various courses on Te Reo Maori and Maori perspectives).

Peter’s NZIF activity was equally as committed – student member 1957, full member 1966, secretary or chairman of the Westland Section of NZIF continuously from 1970-94, heavy involvement in organising the 1972 conference and AGM in Hokitika, Registered Forestry Consultant from 1988 and elected to Council in 1996.

In 1998 I was elected President of the Institute and after a gap of some years away from Council I needed some assistance to get up to speed. Peter was leading Council’s indigenous forest management committee (and later had considerable influence in shaping the Institute’s Indigenous Forest Policy), however at that time it was his personal records that were particularly helpful and enabled us to bridge the gap between Councils. It wasn’t so surprising then that we were able to come to a mutually satisfactory arrangement for Peter to take on the role of Hon Secretary of the NZIF, which he held from 1999 to his death almost seven years later.

Like so many other things he had done he committed himself to the role totally. Records were researched meticulously and gaps filled, the constitution was reviewed, the organisation was renamed the New Zealand Institute of Forestry or *Te Putahi Ngaherehere o Aotearoa* to better reflect the important cultural streams in NZ forestry, and NZIF honours boards were established in the lobby area of the Canterbury School of Forestry identifying those who have served well. Just this year, and well aware of his failing health, he provided the President’s Burl – a highly polished, shaped and mounted yellow silver pine burl to become a tangible means of “passing the baton” from President to President. Unable to make the journey to Waitangi for its initial presentation earlier this year he sent a detailed message on both its purpose and care – along with instructions on the regular use of wood polish for the incumbent President!

Peter Allan will be remembered for his commitment, loyalty and the high level of public service he performed during an extremely busy lifetime. He sought no recognition but took huge pleasure from participating; he gave willingly, was thoughtful and sensitive of others and made a difference as a consequence.

But mostly of course he simply loved the West Coast, its forests and people and committed himself over quite a long period to doing all that he could to support and argue their future. It’s no surprise and indeed it is very fitting that he should be buried there in the heart of the land, forests and people he loved so much.

*Haere ra, Haere ra, Haere ra.*

Peter Berg