

# Forester, story-teller and innovator

Henry Banks Fleming always known as "Harry", 1925- 2005

Often at a funeral a speaker will eulogise and make references such as "a forest giant has fallen". Some may have never seen a forest giant standing or fallen. Not so Harry B. Fleming. He was introduced to forestry at an early age by Pat Pollock, a forester from Scotland who was a family friend and could arrange holiday work at Golden Downs Forest. This was mainly nursery work, but as a snippet of interest, he was also tending a charcoal plant for use as a substitute for petrol in vehicles equipped with gas producers, a war time measure.

Leaving Nelson College, Harry joined the Golden Downs work force as a junior labourer and was involved in all normal station activities. Then, at the end of 1943 Harry was appointed as a technical trainee with the Forest Service and in line with their training programme of regular postings for overall experience of forest management, soon found himself timber cruising at Ohakune.

Now Harry took immense pleasure in all of these postings and in fact, wrote many short stories about those years and the incidents and characters involved therein.

His last posting was as O/C Waiotapu Forest and this lasted for five years. Interestingly, he was the last O/C of Waiotapu before it was integrated with Kaingaroa Forest. This was in keeping with the way things happened around Harry. All marvelled how he changed his job, bought a new car and got married all in the same week.

Harry left to join private enterprise as General Manager, Australasia of the Forest Industrial Division of machinery merchants Dalhoff & King. In this capacity he was appointed to the executive committee of the New Zealand Logging Association and was very active for some six years. With two other members of that committee, he was appointed as a director of the North American Pacific Logging Congress and attended several of its deliberations, even presenting a paper or two. A large contingent subsequently attended a New Zealand Logging Association annual conference and many friendships were forged.

After 20 years with the Dalhoff & King Group, Harry formed the very successful Morbark Pacific Ltd manufacturing and marketing a specific range of forest industry equipment. Five years later in conjunction only with the American company, he formed the equally successful Morbark Australia Pty. and relocated in Melbourne on a five year partnership until semi-retirement.

He then formed Chipex Ltd., specializing mainly in wood chip economics, plant and export and undertaking projects in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Harry then sold his Chipex company to another consultant having been lured into final retirement by the fishing and climate of Hervey Bay, Queensland.

When Harry talked of retirement he was obviously thinking of someone else's because he immediately bought a lifestyle block in the Hervey Bay area and started on all sorts of enterprises, some profitable, some not so profitable - some disastrous.

Now Harry was a raconteur of some note and could regale his old forestry friends in Rotorua when visiting, with anecdotes both fair and foul with unfailing good humour.

The ravage of time meant the farmlet had to be sold and the Flemings moved into the town area. Fortunately, wife Rosemary was able to carry on with her profitable little herb growing business and Harry took up wood turning.

There was great satisfaction for Harry in his hobby of wood turning, as he contemplated the weeding of three beds in the Golden Downs Forest to the ultimate product held in his hands.

In the last letter I received from Harry before he died ended thus "I joined the Institute of Foresters in 1952 - my love of forestry has never waned."

The following letter describes, in Harry's words, an incident from his life:

Recently I was driving with a prominent local businessman/ city councilor/ budding politician when we passed a truck load of Pinus thinnings headed to a peeling and treatment plant.

"When is the Government going to wake up and stop the butchering of our rain forests? Did you see the size of those logs on their way to a damned woodchip mill? They can't even wait for the trees to grow beyond four or five years old instead of letting them grow to fifty metres tall and about a metre diameter. Logging dries up streams, kills native animals and bird life, causes erosion and greatly reduces our rainfall and the damned Government doesn't do a thing about it!"

I quietly but firmly tried to enlighten him, "That wood is from a pine forest which ....."

"Yes. that's what I said - from a pine rain forest!"

I became a little more forceful. "That wood is not from a rain forest. It is produced from thinning a man-made Pinus forest planted as a crop for harvesting, just like wheat or sugar cane. The thinning enables the main crop to grow to maturity faster and with higher quality timber. Those thinnings we just passed will not be chipped even if there has a chip mill within five hundred kilometers - they are going to be peeled, seasoned and pressure treated for fence posts and poles and ..."

"Why butcher our rain forests to make fence posts when you can buy them already treated from Rural Supplies?"

I gulped and continued, "Those thinnings from a manmade pine forest were about twelve years old and the final crop would never grow anything like the diameter and height you mentioned. Also, it is a fallacy that forests attract rain indeed it is rain that attracts forests - endogenous forest, and ..."

"So you have changed your mind about that wood coming from a rain forest. You are wrong too about the size of trees - there were Kauri trees bigger than that on my father's property when he sold it - they all went to the woodchip mill. I think you have been listening to someone who doesn't know a damned thing about trees."

On the bottom of his stationery, he had printed:

"Forestry is the combination of sciences and skills essential to the establishing, tending, improving and perpetuating of multipurpose forests. H.B.F."

Lew Skudder