

Obituary

Memories of a true forestry professional

Peter John McKelvey

19 October 1926 - 11 August 2009

(Eulogy delivered at the funeral of Peter McKelvey in Christchurch on Saturday 15th August 2009)

To Joy and the family I extend sympathy at your loss from all members of the NZ Institute of Forestry. Many members are here today in person and others have been contacting me to send some of their memories and thoughts of a great forester and a gentleman.

Peter John McKelvey:

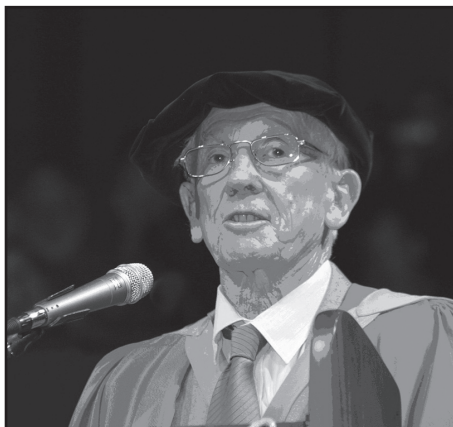
OBE, Doctor of Science, Bachelor of Forestry Science, Bachelor of Science, forester, forest ecologist, administrator, Professor of Forestry, Director of the QE II Trust, forest historian, President of the Institute of Forestry, recipient of the Kirk Horn Flask award.

We can rattle off the achievements in a few words, but behind them are the attributes of a true forestry professional.

Peter started in forestry in 1945 as a Forest Service trainee. He was 18 years old and World War II ended later in that year. The Forest Service training scheme was probably one of the greatest forestry training schemes anywhere and it enabled Peter to form close friendships and bonds with so many others entering the profession at the same time. Such friendships and connections were to be life-long - John Groome, Jim Hughes, Bruce Childs and Lew Skudder all started in the same year as Peter. I understand that John and Jim are with us today as is Margaret Coghill who was in the Forest Service Canterbury office at that time. Other well known names in New Zealand forestry who started as trainees within a year or so of Peter include Bunn, Mitchell, Molloy, Weston, Bainbridge, Fleming, Levy, Cameron, White, Barber, Church, Cunningham and Wendelken.

There was no university forestry course available in New Zealand in the 1940s and the forestry trainees were sent to overseas universities. Peter completed a science degree in Christchurch and a Bachelor of Forestry Science at the University of Edinburgh.

While at Canterbury he spent some vacation periods on the National Forest Survey, that incredible ten year project started in 1945, to assess the then remaining indigenous forests of New Zealand. Designed and initially lead by Priestly Thomson, it covered nearly 2.9 million hectares or 10% of New Zealand, installed over 16,000 sample plots and required field parties, carrying all their gear to spend weeks at a time in some of New Zealand's toughest country. A



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total of around 400 people participated. Field parties were made up of full-time survey leaders, Forest Service trainees and other university students on vacation. Four future Directors-General of Forests (Thomson, Conway, O'Neill and Kirkland) took part while the non-forestry students included medical students Bill (later Sir William) Liley and Fred (later Sir Fred) Hollows. The survey was another great opportunity to develop life long friendships.

Peter was in the West Taupo forests in 1946 and in the West Waiau survey of Southern Fiordland in the summer of

1947-48. During the Fiordland survey, news came through that Peter's mother was not well. With no radio contact, the District Ranger set off into the bush, with no clear idea of where the field party was. Luckily he managed to find the plot lines and then the party. Peter was able to get home two days before his mother died.

When Peter set off for Edinburgh University, he probably thought that he had done his time in the National Forest Survey - no such luck! On his return in 1951, he was posted to Rotorua and the National Forest Survey and was back in the field again, this time in the Urewera. To quote from Julia Millen's story of the Survey "Through Trackless Bush":

"Peter [McKelvey] later wrote: 'You rarely just walked in the bush in that part of the Urewera. Progress was usually made by climbing, slipping, sliding, swinging, stumbling or falling.'"

In the same book we find mention of the role of a forestry wife:

"When her husband was bringing a field team back home Joy McKelvey had instructions to cook up huge quantities of sausages and bacon and eggs. The men would arrive usually late at night and proceed to devour everything in sight. And they would get stuck into Peter's home brew. That beer went down and down."

There is a saying that when someone marries a forester, you marry not just the forester, but also forestry (and many had to marry the Forest Service as well). How truly that saying is expressed in the quote.

On the death of Stan Masters in 1954 Peter took on much of the task of overseeing the final stages of the project. He co-authored, with Stan Masters and Jack Holloway, Volume 1 of the "National Forest Survey of New Zealand", which was published in 1957.

At the end of the survey he stayed on at the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua and with John Nicholls he set up the ecological survey - initially to fill gaps in the National Forest Survey, but it quickly became the first systematic attempt to describe and understand the complex forests of this country. Peter and John established hypotheses, drew up maps and put in further transects.

During his time in the surveys Peter started publishing scientific papers. His earliest one in the *NZ Journal of Forestry*, a year after he graduated from Edinburgh, was the 1952 paper "Forest Colonisation after recent Volcanicity at West Taupo". It was a precursor to a major work, the 1963 "Synecology of West Taupo Indigenous Forests" which examined and explained the patterns of re-establishment of forests following the Taupo eruption of around 200 AD.

Peter and John Nicholls published a provisional classification of the North Island Forests in 1957 and in 1984 Peter published a provisional classification of South Island virgin indigenous forests. There were other publications also dating from this period of Peter's career including "Some ideas on Tawa Management in Central North Island Forests" in 1954, "The Indigenous Forest Types of North Auckland" in 1959 and "The Pattern of the Urewera Forests" in 1973.

It is testament to Peter's professional approach and desire to communicate science results that he is a co-author of a paper "Large-tree growth and mortality rates in forests of the Central North Island", to be published in the *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* later this year, 2009. This research uses plots established between 1957 and 1962 during the time that Peter worked on the ecological survey and remeasured between 1998 and 2007.

While in Rotorua, Peter planted a young kauri tree at the McKelvey home in Fairley Road in Lynmore - was this a symbol of his faith in the future of forestry?

In 1962 Peter moved to the Forest Service Head Office as the Protection Forestry Officer, a post he held until 1965. When speaking to Peter's nomination as an Honorary Member of the Institute of Forestry in 1984, John Holloway commented that the whole course of Forest Service and mountain land management would have been significantly different if Peter had remained in the field. His position in the Head Office Protection Forestry Division led him to examine questions of recreation and amenity. John went on to comment that the interest in multiple use or multiple objective management of forest land was an outstanding feature of Peter's professional life.

John Holloway also commented that the staff of the Protection Forestry Division could not speak too highly of Peter's leadership and the team spirit provided by him.

In 1966 Peter was appointed Conservator of Forests for the Forest Service Wellington Conservancy, an area

that included Hawke's Bay, Taranaki and the land to the south. But his tenure was to be short-lived, when, in 1967, the University of Canterbury, in collusion with the Forest Service persuaded him to apply for and subsequently take up the appointment of the Foundation Chair of Forestry at Canterbury University. This move re-established a New Zealand university school of forestry, something that had not existed since the "temporary" closure of the Canterbury College School of Forestry at the end of 1934 "due to financial stringency".

Peter set about the task with typical thoroughness. He had to oversee the construction of a suitable building, appoint the staff and design a curriculum. In 1967 and 1968 he visited many prominent forestry schools around the world to study their curricula and management. The first undergraduate students arrived in 1970 and the first post-graduate students (of which I was one) in 1972.

The four layer curriculum established by Peter and which he described in a 1984 article in the *Journal of Forestry* "Eighteen Years on, a progress report, and assessment of the future, for the School of Forestry", was based on an initial year of pure science subjects. In the second year the sciences were related to forestry - forest biometry, forest economics, forest ecology and wood science. The third layer was forestry techniques - silviculture, forest engineering, etc. The final year was the "management climax" with principles of management, forestry and society and a realistic regional management case-study where students had to integrate all the subjects they had studied and make justifiable management decisions.

Field work and practical experience were an important part of the curriculum, both for the knowledge gained and for the way in which they contributed to camaraderie amongst students and staff. I suspect that the emphasis on field work was a direct result of Peter's own days as a trainee and in the National Forest Survey.

Peter was an excellent teacher and in 1983 was voted the best teacher by the students at the School of Forestry.

In 1985 Peter retired from the University and was appointed an emeritus professor. He was also awarded an OBE for his services to forestry.

Retirement from his career did not mean retirement from his profession. Two major publications followed - "Steepland Forests, a historical perspective of protection forestry in New Zealand", in 1995 and the 1999 "Sand Forests, a historical perspective of the stabilisation and afforestation of coastal sands in New Zealand". He also published many forest history notes and articles and was especially diligent in ensuring that forest records were properly archived for future researchers.

His final academic accolade was the award of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) from the University of Canterbury

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on 8th April 2004 - a fitting recognition for an eminent forester, ecologist, educationalist, forest historian and manager, all in the field of professional forestry in New Zealand.

What I have described so far is largely about Peter McKelvey's career. But he was also active in service to his profession. He was admitted as a member of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters in 1947. He served on the Council of the Institute for six years - as Vice President from 1972 to 1974, President from 1974 to 1976 and Immediate Past President from 1976 to 1978. He was instrumental in the development of the Institute's Code of Ethics and he was a member of the group that produced the Institute's report on the New Zealand Forest Service beech utilisation proposals in 1972. He actively promoted Institute membership amongst students at the university.

Throughout the New Zealand Journal of Forestry are obituaries, some for people from those early days as a trainee and in the field with the National Forest Survey, book reviews and other articles prepared by Peter.

In recognition of his services to the Institute, Peter was made an honorary member in 1984, elected as one of the inaugural Fellows in 1988 and he received the Institute's highest award, the Kirk Horn Flask award in 1998.

Peter served as a Director of the Queen Elizabeth the Second National Trust for ten years from 1977 to 1987.

Yesterday I asked someone in Rotorua to check on the

kauri tree in Fairley Road, Lynmore. Now over 50 years old, it has a diameter of about 40 cm, it is over 20 metres high and grows tall, strong and healthy like the forestry school that Peter founded and the legacy that he leaves to forestry in New Zealand.

In his acceptance speech on receiving his Doctor of Science from Canterbury University in 2004 Peter said that he had been a forester all of his working life and that he regarded forestry as a prince among the professions. In his experience the greatest professional satisfaction came from service: service to the community, service to your employer, service to your clients, service to your students, service to your colleagues, service to you profession itself.

Peter was truly a prince among the forestry profession. I find it very humbling to follow in his steps as President of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry.

Peter John McKelvey - I salute you for the gift of your life and the service that you gave to the forestry profession in New Zealand.

And I thank you Joy, Pam, Sally, Quentin, John, Stuart, Simon, Bronwyn, Hannah, Richard, Callan, Jordan, Kim, Ella, Tim, Kayla, Jayden and Bessie so much for sharing your husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather with us.

Andrew McEwen
President
New Zealand Institute of Forestry

Letters

Electric pruner increases productivity

Dear Sir

In the review of pruning it was mentioned that mechanized pruning equipment was not being used in New Zealand. I was recently in the Misiones Province of Argentina where I saw electric powered pruners being used. Both large companies and farm foresters are using them, despite the relatively low wages and much higher equipment costs. The pruners being used are made by Electrocoup, a French company, and have been modified from vine pruners by having larger jaws. The battery pack (2.3 kg) allows them to be used for a whole day without recharging. In Argentina they are used mainly in loblolly pine stands but are also used with other species as well. Studies made in both Argentina and Australia show that new workers have a similar productivity to the best workers using standard forestry loppers (McWilliam, 2004). Results also suggest that using Electrocoup pruners workers become more productive over the day and there may be safety advantages with high pruning. I would be

interested to know if similar pruners have been tried in New Zealand.

Reference:

McWilliam, R. (2004). An Investigation of a power assisted tool (Electrocoup/Maxicoup) for low pruning of Australian Plantations. Part B Summary Report. Forest & Wood Products Research & Development Corporation, Project PN03.3905. Available on line at: <http://www.fwpa.com.au/Resources/RD/Reports/PN03.3905%20mechanical%20pruning%20B%20WEB.pdf?c=1>

Don Mead