

Timber cruising and other forestry stories

Edited by Denis Harris.

Printed by First Edition Ltd in Wellington, ISBN 978-1 -877513 - 66 - 4, 195 pages including more than 60 photographs, a number of cartoons, and several maps - price NZ\$45.00 and available from the editor at Parewanui Road, Bulls or by email: parewanui@airstream.net.nz.

For almost 70 years the NZ Forest Service went about its business supporting a rapidly growing forest industry in New Zealand.

Over the same period the transformation of the industry was immense; strongly founded at the outset in the country's natural forests, in less than one lifetime the entire industry shifted its reliance from a menagerie of fine temperate hardwood and softwood (mostly podocarps) species to almost complete reliance on only 1-2 introduced species grown in often vast plantations.

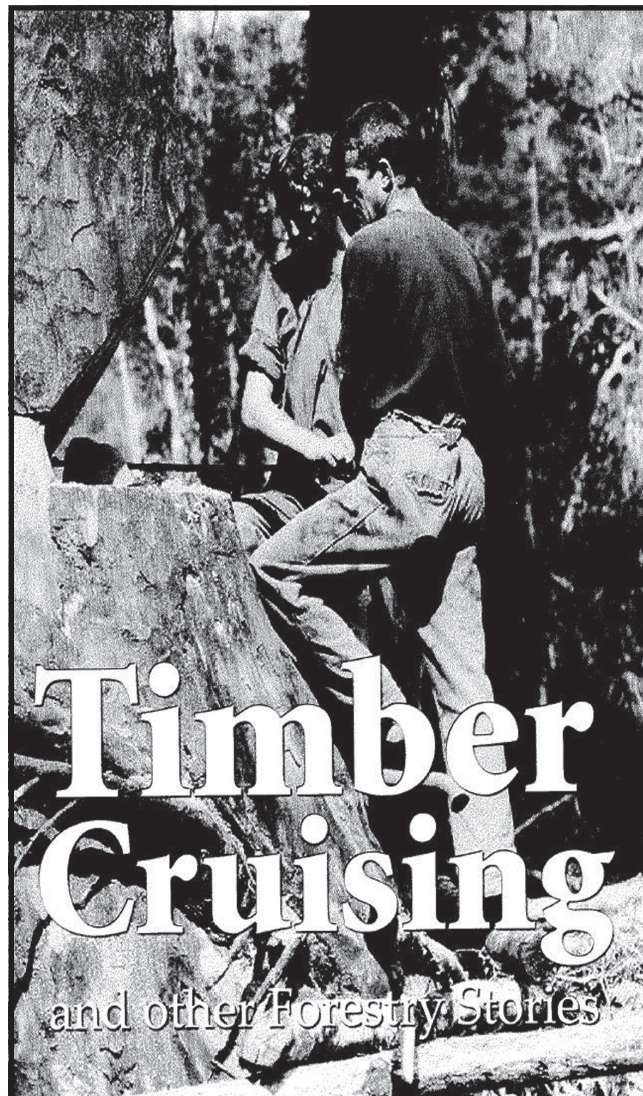
For many people born in the last half of the 20th century the plantations of radiata pine now relatively prominent across much of our rural landscape represents the only form of industrial forestry they are familiar with. Probably most of this same group of people are similarly quite unaware that New Zealand's broad expanses of rich green pasture were once largely clothed in tall natural forest whose harvest/removal contributed to a vibrant and economically significant forest industry which played a major part in sustaining the national economy for some decades during and after the latter part of the 19th century.

Even less well known are the stories of the people who lived and worked in and around the forests and whose energy and insight contributed to New Zealand's transformation from a small nation of enthusiastic pioneers to first world status in less than two centuries.

This book, *Timber Cruising*, deals quite specifically with some of those people who contributed to the transition - those involved in the aspect of native forest survey, measurement and assessment that preceded sale and harvest and which was known as "cruising". In the process they helped instil a measure of discipline around an industry which up until that point had largely been extractive.

They operated in small teams of hardy individuals; as the Introduction to the book suggests... "Wanted:- Good keen men, fit, reasonably intelligent, must have good sense of direction, good sense of humour, physical endurance, skill with a slasher, not accident prone, able to cook (or learn quickly), willing to work in remote localities and work in all weather".

For many a young forestry employee it appears the introduction to cruising involved being dropped off "in the bush" (often at the end of a bush tram or roadway, sometimes with a horse to carry the food and gear), which for a young fellow from the city required some resilience. Most important was self reliance, especially when it came



to cooking and cleaning although hard physical work in all weather conditions could also be challenging until one hardened to it. If you lasted (and most did, with a little help and good-humour from their colleagues when necessary) then the comradeship and relationships that grew from this experience often lasted for lifetimes. In fact at least some of the camaraderie and esprit de corps that was associated with the NZ Forest Service throughout its existence was due to this necessarily close living and working relationship.

Timber Cruising is centred on 25 or so stories of experiences in the bush with a good mix of history, hardship and humour that ensures the reader is both well informed and entertained. It is well supported by photography from the day - maps, cartoon, poems and other memorabilia - while a series of other articles explain cruising and put it into historical context. The stories and some other articles were

initially collected together by Bob Grubner after a reunion of timber cruisers held about 2000, and these were later transferred into electronic form by Darby Perston. Denis Harris with some additional editorial and assistance from his friends has assembled the rather eclectic collection into a very readable format.

Those with some association with forestry in New Zealand will find this account full of familiar localities and forests, and the names of people who are now part of the folk-lore of NZ forestry (e.g. Ivan Frost who later ran the very successful forest extension programme of the 1960s and 70s, Bob Lawn from the West Coast and Dick Marston who later carved out a long career with Odlins). Some are still active in the forestry community but a number of those mentioned have sadly passed away.

Overall it is not a long or heavily informative book, nevertheless it will certainly add to the important compendium of information that makes up the forest history of New Zealand, and help explain some of the psyche of the New Zealand bushman (which along with itinerant shearers, swaggers, scrub-cutters, etc created the rural character of

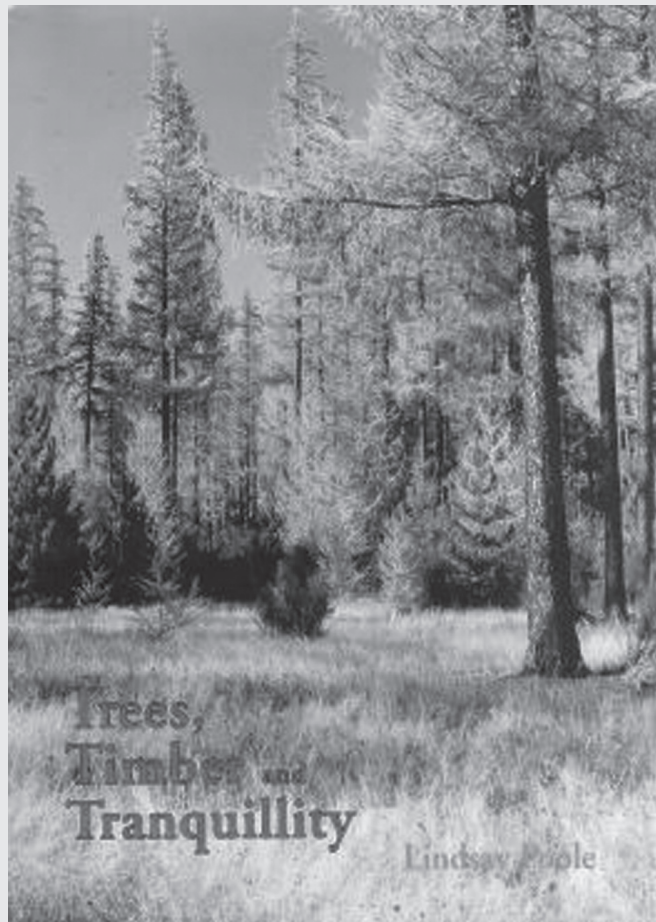
which we are so justly proud). But if you are like me, don't think you will read this in a single sitting...every couple of pages I found my mind turning to similar events and places, and at least part of its value is the stimulus it provides in this respect.

The book itself is produced in soft-cover format and printed on relatively light-weight paper; so print and photo reproduction quality is no more than you would expect of a book published in this fashion.

The editor Denis Harris was part of the forest cruising fraternity in the latter half of the 1940s and at 83 is still involved with the family farm near Bulls. Denis has largely seen the project through on his own behalf and should be congratulated for his dedication and efforts in that respect.

Forestry people generally, but especially those with longer memories will find this well worth reading.

Peter J Berg



Trees, Timber and Tranquillity

by Lindsay Poole

This account of the life and times and one of New Zealand's most influential forestry administrators provides an insight into the late Lindsay Poole's early years growing up on the East Coast and in Rotorua and the career that led him through the NZ Forest Service to become Director-General and into retirement as an elder statesman and commentator on changes to forestry.

Contact,
Business Media Services Ltd,
Tel: (07) 349 4017;
ms@bms.co.nz