



accomplishments, and high expectations he had of himself and his colleagues are well remembered. Bob never sought the limelight for himself, but was always willing to share his ideas and research sites with his contemporaries and later researchers, who benefited greatly from his insight.

Following his retirement Bob and his wife Betty moved to Tairua in 1982, where he built an ocean-going yacht, *Elkirit* (preceded by a *Sunburst* and trailer sailor, *Patiently* at Waiteti). Bob and Betty

sailed *Elkirit* to Nelson, where they enjoyed their retirement. In the fullness of time, Bob's love of trees was reflected in a diverse range of specimen trees being established successively at Puketapu, Waiteti, Pumpkin Hill, and Nelson. Bob and Betty were both loving generous people who contributed immensely to their local community. Both will be sadly missed by their children Jon and Jenny, and their wider family and friends.

**Peter Beets**

## A Quietly Spoken but Fastidious Boss

**R.G.(Bob) Lawn 1921-2011**

On Saturday 27 August Bob Lawn died peacefully at Ziman House Reefton Hospital at the grand old age of 91 years. He was one of that now dwindling band of N.Z. Forest Service field officers who formed the backbone of the Service during the forty years between the end of World War II and its demise in the mid 80's.

Bob's forestry career began in 1939 when he joined the Forest Service as a Junior Labourer on eight shillings (80c) per day and spent the next three years on timber cruising and general forestry work. In late 1939 when many of the older employees were drafted into

the Army Forestry Companies, those younger members left had to assume responsibilities that would not normally have been the case.

On reaching 21 in 1942 Bob entered the Army and spent the next two years with 36th. Infantry Battalion, 3rd. Division on active Service in the Pacific. On his return in 1944 he was released from the Army and resumed his forestry career. He was posted to Invercargill but was there



only a few months when he was sent to Rotorua on the first Timber Cruising Course. After successfully completing this course he was sent back to Reefton and had charge of all timber cruising in the Reefton/Westport District. This posting did not last long when he was sent back to Rotorua to join the National Forest Survey Unit as Party Leader of the West Taupo Area.

In 1947 he was transferred to Harihari as Party Leader. It was in this year that Bob joined the Institute of Foresters as an Associate Member. He became a full Member in 1979 and resigned on retirement from the Forest Service in 1981. John Rawson (now retired in Whangarei) has these memories of his time as a young graduate working with Bob:

“One of my first experiences was to observe various Forest Rangers. One of these was Bob Lawn, my first immediate boss. He was demanding – in a fatherly manner. In camp, tents were put up without wrinkles. The young Trainee who looked after the truck checked water and oil in the machine religiously each morning. Plot lines were cut straight with survey pickets shaped to surveyors’ standards. Tree trunks were properly cleaned of growth before diameters were taken and heights measured carefully with Abney Level at exactly 45 Degrees.

“If you were left behind in camp to cook dinner it was understood that it would be a first class meal, even if you had never cooked a meal in your life before. I don’t think Bob ever raised his voice to anyone. He didn’t have to.

“Shortly after that he headed south to commence N.F.S. work in his home province Westland. From time to time many wild stories came back of the endless swamps and man-sized mosquitoes, so it was with some trepidation that I was sent down to work with him again. Well organised as usual, he had three parties spread out in separate accommodations, each working its own portion of forests north and south of Harihari. The Lawns were a team with Bob’s wife Betty caring for cuts and bruises, and I suspect some emotional problems of the troops as well.

“In early 1949 Bob was transferred back to the Forest Service and I was left with the South Westland Unit, including hundreds of aerial photos on which he had marked with ‘Chinagraph’ pencil the distinctions between the various association types. While field checking required some modification in places, and progression south brought in different types of bush, the delineation that finally appeared on the maps was firmly based on his work.”

In 1952 Bob was appointed District Ranger of the

Southern District Westland. This involved among other duties supervision of the Silver Pine splitters who provided huge quantities of railway sleepers, fence posts and power poles. All this produce had to be tallied, branded and royalties collected on the site, requiring a high level of honesty and trust as well on occasion some physical risk. Bob recalled an occasion when a splitter took a couple of shots at his truck after he had rejected some of his posts. It was not uncommon for him to have a thousand pounds (\$2000) in cash and cheques in his pocket at the end of a day.

In 1957 he was appointed District Ranger of the Northland District with headquarters at Kaikohe. This was a major change not only geographically but also from the Podocarp forests of Westland to the Kauri forests of Northland. It was here that Bob and Betty, together with their six children settled down for the next sixteen years.

His duties included dealing with the many farmers and other land owners involved with the Forestry Encouragement Scheme. He had the ideal temperament to uphold the excellent public relations tradition of the Forest Service. His final move was as Senior Ranger back to Hokitika Conservancy Office where he finally retired in 1981 as Asst. Conservator after 42 years of service.

Bob’s off duty time was largely devoted to his family. He was a keen gardener and achieved prizes for his potatoes and tomatoes at various A&P Shows. He was involved with Search and Rescue and Scouting as well as work with the Historic Places Trust – being involved in archaeological ‘digs’ in both Northland and Westland.

An article he wrote in 2009 for the book ‘Timber Cruising and Other Forestry Stories’ sums up his life in the N.Z. Forest Service. He concluded with this sentence. “My 42 years with the Forest Service can only be described as a very rich experience, a busy and very worthwhile job.” His many friends and colleagues would say ‘Amen’ to that.

He is survived by his wife Betty, his four sons, one daughter and many grandchildren.

**Ivan A. Frost**