

# Thomas Ellis Rogers

Born Kaeo 1937, died Rotorua 2013

Prepared by David Elliott

Tom Rogers' home town is Kaeo in Northland where he worked in the bush for a year before joining the Forest Service as a ranger trainee. After graduation he was posted to Ahaura in Westland, where he played rugby to a provincial and eventually to an international level as a Maori All Black. He also met and married Colleen, just in time to take her on his first posting to Kaingaroa in 1966. After a spell there as a logging manager, he achieved his first in-charge promotion to Whangapoua Forest on the Coromandel Peninsula.



I first worked with Tom Rogers when I was a forester at Kaingaroa Forest in the early 1970s, and he returned to Kaingaroa as the Officer in Charge of Waiotapu Subdivision. I found him to be easy to like, extremely competitive and full of ideas. At the time, silvicultural programmes were expanding dramatically and he was able to recruit local dairy farmers as small but competent crews of cooperative contractors for winter pruning and thinning operations.

While Tom was in charge of Waiotapu, the headquarters was transferred to a new site beside the main road into Kaingaroa and a new building was constructed. This was a Lockwood structure designed to feature the use of wood, with a spectacular hyperbolic paraboloid roof. He proceeded to construct around this prestigious structure a model headquarters complex and a small village.

At the end of the 1970s the Rogers moved to the South Island when Tom was appointed Officer in Charge at Ashley Forest. After five years there he transferred to Tapawera in Nelson Conservancy where he moved into the new Golden Downs Forest headquarters as the Officer in Charge.

His final Forest Service posting was back to Kaingaroa as Officer in Charge. This was just in time to get involved in the legal dispute with Fletcher Forests over the Tasman log sales, and the subsequent restructuring which closed down the Forest Service and the Land and Survey Department and created the Forestry Corporation, the Department of Conservation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Almost all of Tom's career had been involved in the commercial operations of the Forest Service and, unlike most of his colleagues, he embraced the restructuring with an enthusiasm which upset many of those around him. He welcomed his appointment as Bay of Plenty District Manager as a heaven-sent opportunity to create a commercial organisation as profitable as any in the private sector.

The last year of the Forest Service was nevertheless an emotional drain on everyone. In its first year, Bay

of Plenty District of NZ Timberlands Ltd had to organise the closure of Kaingaroa and a number of other forest villages. This closure attracted the national news media and finally failed when the villagers turned down the Forestry Corporation's incentive offer in favour of the Maori Affairs Department's proposal for a community incorporation. In the process, Timberlands' local management was exposed to the hostility of those affected and the general public, while at the same time a confrontational relationship with Fletcher Forests' management led to recurring operational disputes. It would be

an exaggeration to suggest that Tom enjoyed this working environment, but his apparent cheerful indifference to the aggravation certainly had a therapeutic influence on those around him.

When the privatisation of the Crown's Forest Assets had to exclude the Central North Island forests, Tom Rogers was appointed to the position of General Manager Forests by the new Forestry Corporation's CEO, Tim Cullinane. In a subsequent restructuring, his responsibilities were expanded with the merging of the forestry and harvesting roles.

Tom was intimately involved in the planning and development of the Kaingaroa log processing plant and the re-development of roading infrastructure and harvesting systems to facilitate whole tree harvesting. As a monument to his vital association with TPP, one of the new main roads into the plant is named Tom Rogers Drive. The setting up of TPP was to be Tom's swan song as far as his forest management career was concerned.

After he retired at the age of 65 he was approached by Industrial Research Limited, the Crown Research Institute for chemistry, physics, mathematics and engineering, which had just developed a research strategy focused on wood. He was recruited for three days a week to arrange consultation with forestry industry businesses over the implementation of the strategy, and his involvement is credited with a number of innovative developments. Subsequently his status and rapport with Maori leaders was applied to the development of the Institute's strategy for interaction with Maori. During his five years with the Crown Research Institute he had a major beneficial influence on the development of strategies for the commercial extension of research.

Tom was a large, amiable, gentle man. Wherever he went he became a leader in the community he lived in and a mentor to talented young subordinates. He was in many respects an enthusiastic perfectionist with an ever active imagination which drove him to make things happen.