

# The push to plant pines – a photographic history

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Ranger W. Montgomery

## Early 20th century afforestation boom

New Zealand saw an afforestation boom in the 1920s and 1930s with the establishment of around 288,000 ha of plantation forests. An old photo collection that I have acquired through Scion and others sources shows what life was like then in new forests around Canterbury.

*Pinus radiata* is one of the most successful forest plantation species in the world. It tolerates a wide variety of conditions, grows quickly, the timber is versatile, and the economics of growing it are attractive. The Royal Forestry Commission of 1913, charged with allaying 'early 20th century "timber famine" fears in New Zealand', identified radiata pine as one of the choices for commercial forestry (Roche, 2013).

The Commission estimated the likely future demand for timber in New Zealand at 1.68 million m<sup>3</sup> by 1948. At the time, the wood supply from state plantations was calculated to be enough for just four months. A near tripling of the planting rate was recommended with large-scale state tree planting in Otago, Canterbury, the volcanic plateau, the Rangitikei sand dunes and the Northland gum lands. Eucalypts were favoured for durability, and pines for building timber, including *P. radiata* (Roche, 2013).

The declaration of World War One threw a spanner in the works, but by the mid-1920s the great afforestation boom of the 1920s and 1930s was underway. Annual plantings were an order of magnitude greater than the scale recommended by the Commission (Roche, 2013).

Between 1925 and 1936, about 288,000 ha were planted. Initially this was a government undertaking, but once the financial rewards and technologies were firmly established, the private sector quickly responded and contributed significantly to the planting boom. Between 1927 and 1932, exotic pine production increased from 17,500 to 32,000 m<sup>3</sup>, although still only representing 6% of total production. Twenty percent of this exotic production came from government forests and was typically used domestically for poles, sleepers, mine props, posts, battens and fuel (Rhodes et al., 2004).



The backbreaking work of planting tussock and scrubland, Balmoral Plantation, September, 1927



The first plantations were grown with seed collected from farm shelter belts. Ideally, only the cones from tall, well-formed trees were collected; practice may have been a little different



Preparing beds: horse-drawn discs, Hanmer, October 1927

## Life as a 1920s forester

An old photo find shows what life as a nurseryman and forester was like during the intense planting period. These photos were taken by Ranger W. Montgomery, who was good with a camera and even better at labelling his photos (his labels are shown underneath each one).

## Conclusion

The original trees planted at Balmoral and Eyrewell are long gone, with the land being converted into pasture, but their legacy lives on. Intensively managed radiata pine forests form the backbone of New Zealand's forestry industry, stretching across 1.5 million ha, meeting the country's needs for timber, fibre and fuel, and supporting a thriving export industry. Sustainably

grown radiata pine will also likely underpin the development of a wider bioeconomy in New Zealand. As well as delivering tangible products and profits, the other services provided by growing forests, such as carbon capture and storage, improved water, soil and air quality, habitats for native species, and physical and cultural benefits, help us look after our environment and people.

## References

- Rhodes, D., Novis, J., Enters, T. and Durst, B. 2004. Impact of Incentives on the Development of Plantation Forest Resources in New Zealand. *What Does It Take?* 151.
- Roche, M. 2013. The Royal Commission on Forestry 1913 Viewed from 2013. *New Zealand Journal of Forestry*, 58(1): 7.



Seed sowing: Fordson tractor and multiple sower, Balmoral, September 1927



Sown seedlings: one year old machine line sown radiata at Balmoral, sown October 1927



From nursery to forest: 205,000 from Hamner Nursery are loaded for Eyrewell Plantation, August 1928



Separated seed



Planting scrub country, Balmoral



Forcing cones to open with kiln drying