

Anthony Erskine Beveridge

MSc (NZ), BA (Oxon), BA (Auck), HonMNZIF, HonMCFA

17 July 1925 – 27 July 2020

With the passing of Anthony Erskine (Tony) Beveridge on 27 July 2020, another leading light of the Forest Research Institute of yesteryear has departed. His long career in native forest research was overshadowed by changing national attitudes to, and policies for, native forests and their role in timber production and nature conservation.

Family history and education

Tony was born in 1925 in Hamilton, in those days a large country town with mostly gravel streets and an early generation of automobiles, a far cry from today's busy metropolis. His father's family came from the ancient Scottish capital and abbey town of Dunfermline, across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh. Earlier generations there were bakers and town councillors. A first cousin once removed, William Beveridge, later Baron Beveridge of Tuggal, wrote in his book about his parents that 'the spreading of these children and their children outwards from the British Empire and upwards from small trades into professions and large business is typical of the nineteenth century efflorescence (flowering) of the British people.'

Tony's Scottish father, Alexander Watt Beveridge, was the first ophthalmologist in the Waikato and his English mother, Florence Marguerite Fletcher, came from a family of grain merchants in the pretty Midlands village of Pentrich in Derbyshire. They lived in some style in 'Cardrona', a rather grand house on 11 acres above the Waikato River – a favourite swimming spot – near the northern edge of town in Jersey Street, Whitiora, later the site of the Fairfield Bridge.

Tony began his education at Whitiora Primary School, later enrolling at Southwell, an Anglican preparatory school across the river in Enderley. He maintained a lifelong interest in it and its remnant stand of kahikatea forest, being on the board of governors for many years, becoming a fellow of the school, and visiting whenever the opportunity arose. His abiding interest in the natural world began on weekend cycling visits to Ngutunui on the southern slopes of Mt Pirongia, where he stayed with the redoubtable Valder sisters on their small holding with stands of native bush.

The Valders were daughters of one of the founders of Ellis & Burnand, the biggest native sawmilling company



in the North Island, and passionate conservationists. Lilian was a long-time patron of the Waikato branch of Forest & Bird. I had the pleasure of taking Tony back to the property some 70 years later, the original house and acre of bush behind it still there, replete with king fern and other treasures. The brilliant night skies over Mt Pirongia, seen from the backdoor of his Hamilton home, inspired childhood wonder.

At the age of 14, Tony was sent to board at Rutherford House, Nelson College, where he was taught largely by veterans of the Great War. The beech forest of nearby Maitai Valley, then alive with the chorus of

yellowheads and now home to the Brook Waimarama Sanctuary, provided further stimulus for his interest in natural history. Five years at Auckland University College followed, culminating in a Master of Science with Honours in Botany, his thesis being on marine algae at Piha.

A Colonial Service Scholarship enabled Tony to spend two years studying forestry at one of the world's great institutions of learning, the University of Oxford. He boarded in nearby Iffley and attended Keble College where he met fellow New Zealander and forestry student G.C. (Graham) Weston, who later became a colleague at the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua and lifelong friend. They shared a memorable post-graduation holiday in Norway. Interestingly, he refused to pay 20 pounds – or whatever the fee was – to convert his BA into an MA, considering that a rort.

Overseas work and Forest Research Institute

The seven years that followed in the Malayan Forest Service, mostly as a District Forest Officer and later at the Malayan Forest Research Institute in Kepong, led to a lifelong interest in tropical forests and forestry. On a visit home he met Mary Rae Macky, daughter of a pioneering Auckland orthopaedic surgeon. They were married in 1955 and spent their first year in Kepong where she enjoyed the comfortable life of an expatriate's wife while Tony was an instructor at the Malayan Forest School of Silviculture.

Returning to New Zealand in 1957, Tony joined the Forest Research Institute, then only a decade old and expanding steadily with the arrival of new personnel from Britain and the Continent as well as locals with

forestry degrees from overseas universities. He was posted initially to Pureora Forest, a remote sawmilling village in the northern King Country, where he spent two-and-a-half years as a research forester. Pureora it was, because when they arrived earlier at equally remote Minginui, his original posting, no staff house was available.

Logging was in its heyday, with two big mills in the village and several others nearby churning out truckloads of sawn rimu, matai and tawa for the post-war building boom. Here began the first of what was to become a groundbreaking series of management trials in selective harvesting, an alternative to the destructive logging practices of an era when most cutover forest was destined for clearance for agriculture. The great pity is that it was implemented too late. By the time selective management became the national policy for indigenous State Forests in 1977, the public appetite for timber harvest from them had largely evaporated, with strident demands for a total end to native logging. All this and more has been skillfully described by Professor Kim King in her book *The Drama of Conservation. The History of Pureora Forest, New Zealand*.

In 1960, the Beveridges shifted with their first son in what was to become a long sojourn in Rotorua, ending weekend trips there from Pureora Forest in the Rover 75 they had bought new in Malaya and regular punctures on coarse gravel roads. Their second gracious home at Kawaha Point became the scene of many hospitable social occasions. Three more sons followed.

Tony began work at the Forest Research Institute in the first of several offices he occupied in Silviculture House, built originally in 1905/1909 for Halbert Goudie, the nurseryman who ran the original Lands Department forest nursery at Whakarewarewa, and who later became the first Conservator of Forests, Rotorua. Mamaku, Rotoehu, Pureora and to a lesser extent, Whirinaki, were the main forests of focus. Alas, in 1962, a new Director, Dr A. Denis Richardson, ordered the dismemberment of the Indigenous Silviculture group and he re-assigned colleagues like Roger Cameron and David Preest to other areas of work. Only Tony and John Nicholls survived in a mere token investment in indigenous forest research in the North Island.

Another blow fell in 1969 when the first Forestry Development Conference recommended the conversion of large areas of cutover native forest to exotic plantation and this became government policy. Already with years of research on rehabilitating logged forest behind him, Tony was given the odious task of finding the best way of replacing diverse tall forest of tawa and hinau and 101 other plant species with an apparent monoculture of radiata pine. Subsequent research has revealed a surprising diversity of native flora in older plantations of exotic conifers, but they are no match for ancient natural forest.

As a Research Field Leader from 1968, Tony's purview included oversight of research work in native forest throughout the country, including Northland

kauri forests and South Island beech and rimu forests. Visits to other parts of the country and a series of silvicultural and botanical visits to tropical forests in Australia, southeast Asia and the Pacific from 1964 provided some relief from the rather depressing domestic outlook for indigenous forestry at the time.

The flowering of the conservation movement in the mid-1970s brought native forest management into the spotlight more sharply than at any time in New Zealand's history. By the late 1970s, Tony found himself and others embroiled in bitter national controversies over the future of iconic forests such as Pureora and Whirinaki. With his love of native forest and his personal and professional integrity, Tony found them particularly traumatic. Relief came with government decisions to end logging at Pureora in 1978 and Whirinaki in 1984, and the renewal of his research field, now renamed Indigenous Forest Management, from 1980. A band of enthusiastic young researchers, myself included, arrived fresh from university and research expanded into exciting new areas, such as predator impacts on native birds and comprehensive vegetation surveys of the large conservation reserves designated somewhat curiously as Ecological Areas.

Retirement

After retirement in 1985, Tony worked part-time for some years with disadvantaged youth at a charitable trust at Te Amorangi while still enjoying forays into his favourite haunts. I have fond memories of visits to his first logging trial at Pureora, crawling around in the scrub in the nearby Taparoa Clearing looking for this transect or that planting, and dinner on summer evenings under a marquee at the former maternity hospital in Mangakino. Relocation to Auckland in 1996 enabled him to spend more time with family and to also pursue his long-standing interest in southeast Asian languages, culminating in a BA degree in Indonesian. Recognition of his professional achievements came with honorary membership of the Commonwealth Forestry Association and of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry.

With his extraordinarily observant eye for and catholic interest in the natural world, Tony was very much in the mould of the natural historian. His leadership was marked by unconditional support and endless encouragement for younger scientists, in stark contrast to the often unprincipled and self-serving managers of today's science world. His concern for the personal and professional welfare of his staff never wavered. Neither did his passion for native forest, particularly his beloved tall podocarps: rimu, miro, matai, kahikatea and totara.

Tony died on 27 July aged 95, just a few short weeks after Mary. He was described as a person to whom the term a 'gentleman' was aptly applied, in all senses of the word. Tony will be greatly missed by those who knew and worked with him.

Obituary written by Mark Smale (Landcare Research) and Greg Steward (Scion).