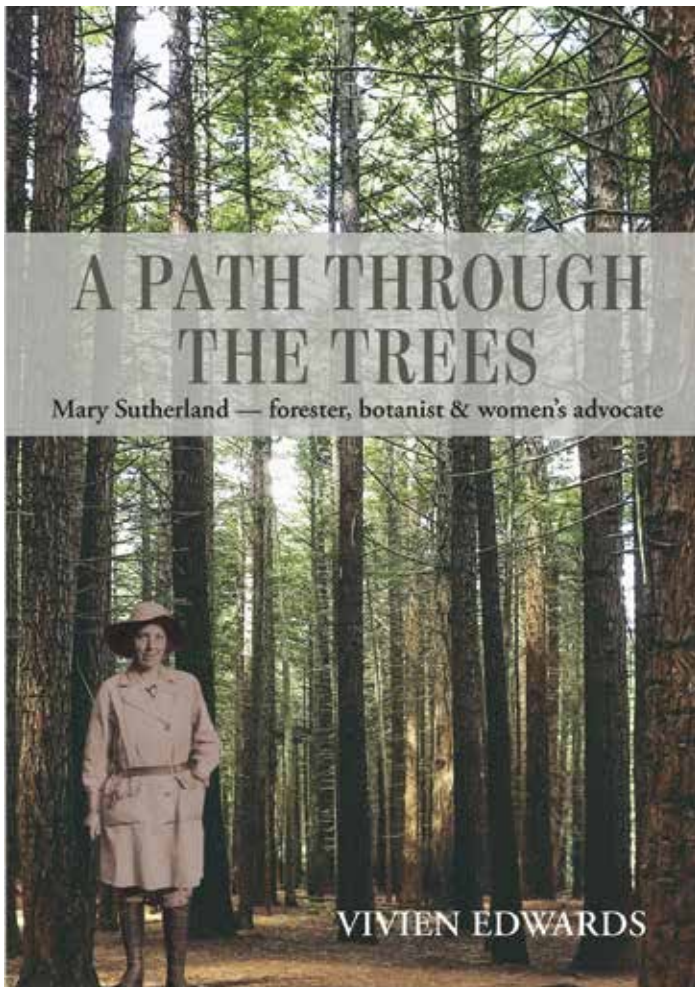


# A Path Through the Trees

Reviewed by Julie Collins

**Author:** Vivien Edwards  
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New Zealand history is going through a renaissance of sorts. As a country we have matured enough that we can now celebrate our own history and tell the stories of our own remarkable people. Vivien Edwards has written about one of these remarkable people – Mary Sutherland (1893–1955) – the first woman forestry graduate in the world and a pioneer of tertiary education in New Zealand for women.



## Forestry graduate and career

Edwards was inspired to write the story of Mary Sutherland after discovering a plaque dedicated to the forester in the Redwood Grove at Whakarewarewa Forest in Rotorua.

Her research discovered a woman who was dedicated to promoting tertiary education to women, as well as afforestation, and who had a passion for living life the way she wanted to.

Born in the late 1800s in Wales, forestry wasn't a natural career path for women. However, having a mother who valued educating girls, the First World War and the opportunity to move to New Zealand all played defining roles in Mary's life.

For author Vivien Edwards, it is clear through her research she has come to admire and be inspired by Mary. Her writing allows the reader to almost feel as though they are with her as she led teams of women through the forests of Britain trying to secure the timber supply chain while the men who traditionally held these roles went off to war. Unfortunately for Mary, once the men began returning they were given roles in forestry despite her being vastly more experienced and qualified.

So in 1923, unemployed and 30 years old, she decided to join her sister in New Zealand. Here she was intrigued by the State Forest Service and landed a clerical role. This experience gave her the time to learn about New Zealand's native trees and the landscape they thrived in.

Finally, in 1924, she was able to secure a role as a forest assistant and was back among forests. Here she worked closely with forestry rangers, impressing them with her knowledge and work ethic. Mary carried out major pieces of research and in 1934 published a paper on the *Pinus* genus. Eventually, while working in the forests, she became known simply as the 'Lady Ranger' to her colleagues.

Sadly, when the forest service downsized Mary was once again out of work, but this led to a new interest – botany. While her first role in this field was at the Wellington Dominion Museum with an initial job title of clerk, she was eventually formally acknowledged as a botanist. In 1946, she became a farm forestry

specialist for the Department of Agriculture and wrote about farms and forestry, an area that continues to be increasingly relevant today.

Vivien Edwards has not only delivered the story of New Zealand and the world's first woman forestry graduate, she has also told the story of how the forest service in this country has grown from strength to strength.

### Tertiary education advocate

The legacy of Mary Sutherland is not only the work she did in forestry, but in her advocacy for tertiary education for women, having come from a family who advocated for this. Mary clearly understood how lucky she was to be educated because she went on to work against barriers to the tertiary education of women. In 1932, she joined the New Zealand Federation of University Women and was also elected to the New Zealand Foresters Council.

However, it was not until 1974 that the first woman in New Zealand graduated from the recently re-opened School of Forestry in Canterbury. This was nearly 60 years after Mary began her forestry journey that took her

from Wales to what must have seemed like a whole new world in New Zealand. But she never seemed to lose her sense of loss of her home country and for the outdoors, and on her death she left a bequest to the Pearson Fresh Air Fund. This Fund provided opportunities for British children living in urban centres to experience the countryside.

She is also remembered by Bangor University in Wales because 100 years after she first graduated they established the Mary Sutherland award for the best female graduate. Here the scholarship is available to students at a New Zealand polytechnic and is offered by the NZIF Foundation.

As this country continues to work hard to attract women to the primary sector, her story and life serve as an inspiration. Vivien Edwards' book is not only about Mary Sutherland, but is an acknowledgement that the history of strong women in this country is one we should celebrate.

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The NZIF Foundation was established in 2011 to support forestry education, research and training through the provision of grants, scholarships and prizes, promoting the acquisition, development and dissemination of forestry-related knowledge and information, and other activities.

The Foundation's capital has come from donations by the NZ Institute of Forestry and NZIF members. With this, the Board has been able to offer three student scholarships and a travel award each year. It has also offered prizes for student poster competitions at NZIF conferences.

To make a real difference to New Zealand forestry, including being able to offer more and bigger

scholarships and grants, the Board needs to grow the Foundation's funds. Consequently it is appealing for donations, large and small, from individuals, companies and organisations.

The Board will consider donations tagged for a specific purpose that meets the charitable requirements of the trust deed. A recent example has seen funds raised to create an award in memory of Jon Dey who was known to many in New Zealand forestry.

The Foundation is a registered charity (CC47691) and donations to it are eligible for tax credits.

To make a donation, to discuss proposals for a targeted award or for further information, please email [foundation@nzif.org.nz](mailto:foundation@nzif.org.nz) or phone +64 4 974 8421.

*Please help us to support NZ forestry education, research and training*