

15. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE FARM FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

The National Farm Forestry Library

When Mike Smith was Executive Secretary of the Association between 1991 and 1994, he became aware of the problem of getting information out to the ordinary member.

It was clearly not practical to send all the information he received out to all members, while the alternative of sending it to Branch secretaries to distribute to those interested was not satisfactory either. While some secretaries did a good job in dealing with inquiries, others did not even read what was available.

The constant telephone and mail inquiries to Mike led him to the idea of setting up a library. The Executive of the day were happy if it was not an additional cost.

Mike Smith saved all material he received by mail or collected at meetings and conferences, together with items requested from the Ministry of Forestry, or the Forest Research Institute. He catalogued all items and gave them a number on his own initiative, and says the system would have caused Dewey to turn in his grave!

The rules were simple. Any member could borrow at no cost for a fortnight. The member must pay return postage.

Mike found the system to work well; inevitably some members were tardy in returning documents so that popular titles had a waiting list, but he felt that the information was getting out to those who wanted it, with minimum waste.

Mike mentioned one regular borrower, B.L. McLauchlan of Whangarei, who must have read nearly everything in the library. Butch McLauchlan says he very much appreciated the material being available and found the service excellent.

The National Farm Forestry Library list was published in the *Tree Grower* in February 1994, and about once a year since, appearing in the coloured centrefold of the magazine.

Items were at first available from Mike Smith at his home address, but now from the Head Office of the Association in Wellington.

Some 210 titles are listed, covering reports from FRI Collaboratives, other research papers on special-purpose species, and now a few videos covering some aspects of tree growth, and some safety issues.

Field Organisers—Jack Hawthorn and Bill Gimblett

Jack Hawthorn

The Executive, in November 1977, authorised Jack Hawthorn to approach Branches to promote Association objectives. Jack was a sales and technical representative for the chemical firm Ivon Watkins Dow of New Plymouth, with particular responsibility for forestry operations. Although mostly involved in large-scale forestry operations, he was also very helpful to farm foresters clearing land for tree planting.

Jack was to be known as the Branch Liaison Officer, and was to take any opportunity to attend Branch meetings during his New Zealand-wide travels, discussing national and local farm forestry issues. There was no remuneration for this work, but of course Jack took the opportunity of mentioning his company's excellent products.

Jack Hawthorn attended National Executive Meetings and Conferences from time to time, and became known as the Field Organiser, but by the beginning of 1980, his company was making changes which meant that he could not continue in this farm forestry role.

Bill Gimblett

Discussion was frequently held on the need for the Association to have someone available for general forestry advice, but marketing advice in particular.

Owen Smith, as National President in 1981, announced the appointment of Bill Gimblett as Farm Forestry Co-ordinator. Owen mentioned the increase in workload for Executive, and the need for individual farm foresters to be better served on a day-to-day basis. He was particularly concerned about the need for assistance in marketing woodlots, and the need to have a person to liaise with

members of other organisations such as sawmillers, forest owners, local bodies and planners, manufacturers, exporters, and Government departments.

Owen said it was important that our private wood resource was identified and evaluated, so that the farm forester could receive a fair price for his timber.

TG 2/3 August 1981 included a Marketing Service notice, saying that one of Bill Gimblett's duties was to help members of the Association with the marketing of their trees, and stating that Executive was confident that members would gain a lot from the new service. Bill's address was included.

Richard Davies-Colley, the next President, wrote in *TG 3/3* August 1982 of the changes the Association needed to make to become a professional organisation, with the employment of a co-ordinator. He said that with a few sales achieved, the Association would enter the commercial world with the co-ordinator paying his way, with a surplus to extend new services to members.

Bill Gimblett was a big man with a big deep voice, with an extensive Forest Service background. He had spent a great deal of his time in indigenous bush on the West Coast and in the Ureweras. He had a great love of the outdoors and things botanical or geological, as well as a wide knowledge of the current exotic forest situation.

He wrote many articles for the *Tree Grower* during the 1980s on a wide range of topics. In one, *TG 3/4* November 1982, Bill suggested agroforestry with deer could be more profitable than with cattle. He said that with antlers being removed for velvet sales, little damage would occur on *P. radiata* over 6 years of age.

In *TG 4/2* August 1983, Bill urged the preservation of remnants of native bush and wetlands to save native bird populations.

A number of market reports were compiled by Bill Gimblett for the *Tree Grower*, giving sale prices per cubic



Bill Gimblett

metre received for various log types in different parts of the country.

In his report to the 1984 Conference at Timaru, Bill gave an optimistic view of the future of forestry in New Zealand, including recommending more plantings of eucalypts and Douglas-fir as well as *P. radiata*, and stressed the need for special pole-producing regimes for pine.

At that time he reported that 50 sales were in progress, with marketing occupying most of his time, although low sawlog prices in some regions such as Southland were a concern.

To begin with, Bill's remuneration was set at a monthly fee plus expenses, with any sales on a commission basis, 80% of the commission to go to Bill and 20% to the Association.

In 1983, Executive drew up Conditions of Employment for the Co-ordinator's position, specifying the amount of retainer plus an allowance for expenses, with any tax implications being his responsibility. Commission up to \$4000 was to be for the Co-ordinator; above that sum, 25% was to go to the Association.

The Association was willing to assist in holding deposits in a Trust Fund, but made it clear that it was not one of the contracting parties, and would not be exposed to any liability. The Association viewed the setting up of contractual conditions between the Co-ordinator and the client as absolutely vital to establish a satisfactory relationship, and something that must occur before any expense was incurred; such conditions were to be documented.

The Conditions of Employment were subject to an annual review, with either party able to terminate the agreement on 3 months' notice.

Bill Gimblett's title was changed in 1984 to National Field Advisor, though he continued to be referred to as Co-ordinator or Organiser.

Revenue from this arrangement was never as high as hoped for. In some ways Bill's own honesty in his dealings with clients became a problem. He would often advise a

client to hold back a sale because prices were low, resulting in a delay or loss of commission receipts.

By 1986, Executive was expressing concern at the loose arrangement with Bill, and set up a sub-committee to consider changes. Problems increased with Bill moving that year from Hawke's Bay to Southland to work with Richardsons, a co-operative for management, marketing, and processing. Even though this was seen to be in possible conflict with his Association work, Bill was authorised to join Richardsons and continue working for the Association, but this position was to be reviewed at the next Executive meeting.

In March 1987, Executive decided to pay Bill \$3000 for specific work for the Association, but to stop all commission, so that log sales were to be entirely on his own account.

By the following year, March 1988, Bill had finished all work for the Association, and was to have his name removed from the *Tree Grower*. Though the attempt to employ a Field Organiser did not produce the results hoped for, the relationship between Bill Gimblett and the Association was always friendly, and Bill still has many friends within the membership.

The attempt by the Association to employ a part-time officer to help members, mainly in the sales area, showed how difficult it was for a non-commercial group of tree-growing enthusiasts that made up the membership of the Association, to try to provide a commercial service to their members.

At the time, there was a real need to help members in negotiating sales, with few experts in the field, and a lack of any co-operative companies organised by Branches in different regions. For one person to offer a service covering the whole country on a limited budget was nigh on impossible.

This situation has changed markedly in the 1990s, with several such co-operatives now in existence, and a proliferation of general forest consultants following the demise of the Forest Service. It is now much easier for a farm forester with trees to sell, to get professional advice and feel confident that he is getting the best prices for his timber.

Association's Presence at Mystery Creek

For a number of years the Waikato Branch of the Association had produced and manned a display promoting farm forestry at the National Fielddays, held in June each year at Mystery Creek. In 1977, John Mortimer raised the possibility of erecting a permanent building for the display. He told the National Executive that the Waikato Branch would do the work, but would need National Association financial assistance.

The same situation continued for several more years, with the Waikato Branch using a variety of removable sheds or even tents for their display. This situation was hopeless in mid-winter with a growing number of visitors each year, and enthusiasm tended to wane.

The NZ National Fielddays Society was most co-operative and, when approached about a permanent building, offered a free site in return for the use of the building at times other than the Agricultural Fielddays.

The site was to be in the commercial display area, but eventually became part of the Farm World complex which cost \$600 000, operated 7 days a week, and included the Clydesdale Museum. Twice-daily live animal shows with a sophisticated audio-visual display depicted the role that farming plays in New Zealand, with particular emphasis on dairying. Everyone going into the auditorium would have to pass through the farm forestry building, and so the change of site was quite a bonus to the Waikato farm foresters.

John Mortimer was able to persuade the New Zealand Executive to underwrite the cost of the building to the tune of \$5000 in August 1983 and, as he became New Zealand President in 1984, he was in a good position to see the project through. A further loan of \$2000 followed the initial grant.

A great deal of work by John and other Waikato members drummed up support from a generous community, with many firms being visited and asked to help in cash or kind. Mike Smith helped with this as he lived in Auckland, and could approach the Head Offices of some of these companies.

The NZ Forest Service was at the forefront in offering assistance by providing architectural services, and their

Chief Architect Arthur Drake drew up an unusual and exciting plan. This was followed as much as finances would allow, with Arthur Drake continuing his help including several visits to the site during construction.

The Waikato Valley Authority and the National Water and Soil Conservation Organisation were of considerable assistance, and were given space on a long-term basis to mount displays which would remain all year.

A labour-only contract was let for the erection of the main structure, and from then on John Mortimer admitted to bullying or cajoling members of the Branch into doing all the finishing work, including the laying of the floor.

The building was used for the 1985 Fielddays, but at that stage had no linings and no doors—it kept the rain out but not the wind!

When the Farm World complex opened in December 1985, most of the finishing work had been completed, and many compliments were paid to John and his team. Specialty timbers included in the lining were put in place as they were obtained, with the last main item being electricity reticulation.

The building is about 130 m² (1300 sq.ft), and divided into eight triangular segments. Farm foresters completed five of these segments, and at one stage hoped the Mohair Association would complete the other three. Negotiations fell down when the costs of the additions were to be well over \$60 000, which gave some idea of the value of the five



The New Zealand Farm Forestry Association permanent display building at Mystery Creek.

completed segments, and how well farm foresters had stretched the original National Association finance.

Flooring is made up of 75-mm-thick blocks of *P. radiata* treated to C3. The ceiling is all timber; the octagonal segments are separated by heavy laminated pine beams, with a framed sarking of plywood between.

The doors are made of angled tongue and groove *Cupressus macrocarpa*, and panels supporting displays around the walls are framed in a variety of timbers such as Douglas-fir and redwood. The displays are in recesses separated by half walls panelled in blackwood veneer.

John Mortimer reported that wiring would be complete in 1988, and remaining debt should be cleared in about 2 years by renting space out each year. After that, surplus income would enable further improvements to exhibits to make the building and its contents a truly exciting display of farm forestry activities.

The opportunity this building and its displays have given to farm forestry can be seen from the number of people visiting Mystery Creek. Well over 100 000 people visit the various fielddays run by the Fielddays Society each year, including 60 000–70 000 visiting the 3-day winter Agricultural Fielddays, plus a steady flow from the everyday attendance at Farm World (about 30 000 during the first 16 months).

These are 1988 figures, and growth has continued since, except for the Farm World venture, where numbers fell away, with the Clydesdale Museum not proving a success.

Mike Smith as New Zealand President in 1988 stated in *TG 9/1* February 1988, “Your Executive has backed and supported the project, and John Mortimer and the Waikato Branch have turned the vision into reality. The result is difficult to describe—it is so well done. The only answer is to visit it yourself, to live and soak up the warmth of the many timbers so ably used. I know that you will be glad you did”.

The building became affectionately known as “Mortimer’s Castle”.

The relationship between the Waikato Farm Forestry Association and the Fieldays Society was based largely on friends and contacts to begin with, with no formal agreement. There does, however, appear to have been a broad understanding based on general conditions applying to all buildings on the Mystery Creek property, with the Waikato Association receiving a copy of these in August 1983, well before building commenced. Clauses in these conditions show that Fieldays make no additional charge other than normal site rentals, for permanent structures; that the exhibitor may not sublet the building without the consent of the Society; that the right to have the permanent building on the property will be reviewed every 5 years; and that a permanent building may be donated to the Society with the right of use maintained.

In 1995, the building was valued for insurance at \$130 000, and was debt free, a truly remarkable effort by the local farm foresters.

The agreement has been tightened by the Fieldays Society in recent years, and unfortunately the main expansion of the Fieldays has been away from the farm forestry site, leaving, as John Mortimer reports, too many non-agricultural displays.

For the last 3 years, the farm foresters have moved up to the main agricultural display area of the Fieldays, joining with other forestry interests such as FRI, in order to be in a position seen by most farmers.

At present, the Society gives the Waikato Association free space as a swap for their building which is now used for stalls of crafts and clothing. The Society looks after maintenance and insurance.

In a way then, times have changed, and the building does not serve the purpose for which it was designed—a problem of building on a site owned by another organisation, but for a number of years it gave considerable impetus to the farm forestry movement.

The project was designed initially to attract new members to the Association, and in this it was very successful. New

members from all over the country joined, with the locals arranging for the appropriate Branch to be notified of the prospective members' names and addresses.

Perhaps more importantly, the venue has been a great meeting place for lovers of trees of all types and for all uses to meet and discuss their interests.

Other branches have also included major promotional efforts at local shows, examples being Martin Pharazyn's prize-winning exhibit at the Hawke's Bay Agricultural and Pastoral Society show in 1984—Champion of Champions, and Best in Class—Eucalypts in 1986.

The annual display mounted by John Pedersen and his Mid Northland team has been a great success at the Northland Agricultural Field Days held in Dargaville at the beginning of March each year.

The Colour Slide Collection

During the 1960s, many Association members keen on photography preferred slides to prints as the best method of recording high-quality colour shots of trees and views.

It was decided to make a New Zealand Association collection from slides donated by members, to show at branch or national meetings, to illustrate talks on different topics.

Jack Harper, the current North Island Member on the National Executive, was given the job of collecting these slides and of holding a meeting at the 1975 Palmerston North Conference where interested people could discuss the collection.

There was some enthusiasm for the idea shown at the conference, with the official collector of slides being Mrs R. Bell from the Bay of Plenty. Donations of slides were sought without the resources for copying and returning to the owner, at least in the beginning.

Major subject groupings were to be handled by different members. Landscaping—Bob Berry, Dick Thevenard, and Gerald Groendijk; Erosion Control—Ewen Bellis; Large Scale Farm Forestry—Mark Farnsworth.

It was particularly hoped to build up a collection showing groups and identities from the early days of the Association.

Probably because of improvements in colour print photography, slides became less commonly used. Jack Harper reports that it was difficult to sort through collections with enthusiastic owners. Slides that Jack wanted to explain certain aspects of landscaping for example, were often not the choice of the owners.

For these reasons, the whole project did not proceed.

The Farm Forestry Film “In the Company of Trees”

At Russell Smith’s home in 1967 a discussion took place on the possibility of making a short promotional film for the Association. It was thought that a 15-minute film would cost about \$1700, and a sub-committee was set up to look further into the matter.

The Executive Meeting in November 1967 decided that the Association could only proceed with the film if a sponsor could be found. The idea was boosted by a recent “Country Calendar” programme featuring President Russell Smith.

It was not until 1970 that firm commitments were made to produce a film, with production by Regional Films, sponsorship by the Forest Service and Ivon Watkins Dow, and with \$800 from the Association. The total cost was estimated to be \$8400.

The film, entitled “In the Company of Trees”, was completed in 1972 by Pacific Films and shown for the first time to the National Executive at their November meeting.

The Forest Service contributed \$4000, Ivon Watkins Dow \$2000, Soil Conservation \$2000, and Farm Forestry \$400.

Three copies were made, one kept by the Canterbury Central Branch and the other two by Treasurer Norm Gill in Palmerston North. They were available free of charge to any branches wanting to exhibit them.

The film was shown to delegates at the 1973 Conference at Rotorua. \$558 was left in the film account, and consideration

was given to making further short films from unused footage, but the money was returned to the general account.

In 1997, Peter Smail had one of the copies transposed on to video tape, with copies being available from Peter or Joll Hosking. Jim Pottinger did the same with another of the original films.

Much of the film was shot on Pottinger's and Joe Taylor's farms, together with comments from Ivan Frost at his desk in Wellington.

It is interesting to look at the tape in 1999, and to appreciate what good advice was given 25 years earlier. Not that much has changed.

Training Courses in Farm Forestry

The Department of Adult Education conducted weekend schools on forestry in Oamaru and Auckland in 1957, 1958, and 1959. J.C.Dakin from the Adult Education Centre in Auckland said in *FF* 1/3 May 1958 "Few readers of *Farm Forestry* will dispute the contention that the study of forestry is an interest that should be cultivated by as many of our citizens as possible for their own good". He went on to say "Forestry is an activity that develops the faculty of foresight, encourages the scientific approach and calls for the exercise of close observation and practical skill".

The first weekend school on tree planting was arranged by the University of Otago but held in Oamaru, partly because it was central but also because it was the headquarters of the North Otago Tree Planting Association which under Dr E.S.Stubbs had been very active for 21 years. 118 people were involved in this first school during a very stormy weekend, and one observer wrote "The impression one gained was that of a concourse of very diverse individuals suddenly realising they were united in one common interest".

Shelter was the main topic of the 1957 school, while the 1958 Oamaru school led by Prof. L.W.McCaskill of Lincoln College concentrated on high-country tree planting.

In 1959, emphasis was on the economic value of trees on farms from Bill Jolliffe of the Forest Service, and the

marketing of farm forest products from Arthur Cooney of the Selwyn Plantation Board.

In Auckland the first school was arranged by the University and the Tree Society. Lecturers included Neil Barr, Dr Frank Newhook on diseases of *P. radiata*, Malcolm Conway from the Forest Service, and Prof. Kennedy from the Town and Country Planning Department of the University.

The 1959 Auckland school involved lectures by Fred McWhannell on eucalypts, and Dr J.S. Yeates on hedges for home and farm, among others.

Russell Smith, when President of the Association, wrote an editorial in *FF* 7/3 August 1965 commending the Forest Service for holding a Farm Forestry Training Course at Gwavas State Forest in Hawke's Bay. This was the second year of such a practical course, and it was attended by Association members from Hawke's Bay, Middle Districts, and Wairarapa. Subjects covered were pruning, thinning, mensuration, and preservation. Members actually did the work and then discussed the rights and wrongs of each other's approach.

Undoubtedly the most successful and long-lasting course on farm forestry has been that provided by the Technical Correspondence Institute beginning in 1973.

This course had a fairly long gestation. Bruce Treeby, Senior Lecturer in Horticulture at TCI, attended a National Executive meeting in November 1966, offering to make such a course available. Executive was enthusiastic about the idea. Frank Morrison, then Senior Extension Officer of the Forest Service, offered to help Bruce in the preparation of assignments. Frank died in 1967, but the work was carried on by Ivan Frost.

Gerald Hocking, who retired from the Forest Service in 1968, also helped in the preparation of assignments with Bruce Treeby and Ivan Frost. It was hoped the course would be ready by 1969 but due to Gerald Hocking's illness this was delayed. Ivan Frost reported to the 1971 Executive meeting that all assignments by various authors should be complete by mid-1972, and in fact *FF* 14/4 December 1972 announced the course, giving details of the assignments.

All aspects of woodlot, shelter, soil conservation, and amenity planting were covered, as well as legal and financial matters. These assignments have been continually updated as new knowledge and techniques have developed.

The course was expected to take a student 6 months to complete if regular work was undertaken. There was an enrolment fee of \$2-00 plus a tuition fee of \$1-50 for those who had exhausted their 5-year secondary school free place entitlement.

By June 1973, Bruce reported that 120 students were enrolled, and by November 1973 this had risen to 201.

President Jim Pottinger in his 1974 Annual Report praised the work of Bruce Treeby, Ivan Frost, and others who had worked on the course since 1967 with such a successful outcome.

Because of Bruce Treeby's involvement with the Association in the preparation of this course, he was appointed Associate Editor of *Farm Forestry* and later *Tree Grower*, and was a co-opted member of National Executive from 1975 to 1999. The advantages of this arrangement were that Bruce was able to see good examples of farm forestry throughout New Zealand, and was able to pass this practical information on to his students.

The Farm Forester's Course is still popular 26 years after commencing. The course fee is now \$190, with students able to receive a Certificate in Farm Forestry. About a 100 students a year, or over 2500 since 1973, have received this tuition, showing a remarkably consistent demand.

In view of the phasing out of the Forest Service and its extension officers, the sound instruction given by the TCI course is even more important. It would be interesting to know how many trees have been planted, tended, or harvested by one-time students.

Bruce Treeby, now Senior Tutor in Natural Resources for the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (the former Technical Correspondence Institute), produced a New Zealand Native Plants Course in 1992, which attracts about 150 students each year and, with the Farm Forester's Course,

gives those interested an easy way of obtaining a broad training in wise land use based on care for the environment.

Ivan Frost and his extension officers from the Forest Service could see that some practical instruction to go with the TCI course would be valuable. J.J.Stewart, Principal of Flock House Training Farm at Bulls, had noticed an interest in forestry among his farming students, and so he approached the Forest Service for information. As a result, short courses lasting a week were arranged for Flock House in March 1975, and later at the Telford Farm Training Institute near Balclutha where Vic Stephens helped with the organisation. Forest Service, Agriculture and Fisheries, together with farm staff provided the instruction to the live-in students.

Gavin McKenzie, writing in *FF 17/3* September 1975, said that 24 students had attended the first Flock House course; they came from Whangarei to Lawrence, and included occupations as diverse as farmer, policeman, dentist, doctor, and sports goods businessman. A second course was to be held in November 1975 with more visual-aid material, but the emphasis was always to be on field exercises.

Ivan Frost remembers the Flock House courses running for perhaps 6 years, with two per year on occasion. At Telford, courses ran for 3 years.

The Association grew rapidly in the early 1990s, with Executive being concerned that some branches did not have the expertise to handle the bigger membership which included more urban investors.

A leadership course of 2 days was organised in Wellington for 1993. The National Association paid for one delegate from each branch, with the branch having the option of sending a second delegate at its own expense. 25 of the 29 branches were represented, some with two delegates, making 36 members attending. Following a questionnaire at the end of this seminar, it was judged very successful and was repeated 2 years later in July 1995.

Two high-pressure days of talks and discussions with forestry leaders, environmentalists, and investment experts, were followed by discussions on branch management,

newsletter production, and how branches could get the most from research.

Those attending again considered that the course was of high value. To reduce expenses, similar regional courses have been held since in Wellsford, Napier, and Nelson, with one or two Executive members and the Executive Officer leading discussion.

The types of courses that may be held in future will very much depend on Association finances. With no Government input and current (1999) poor markets for farming and forestry, it may be a case of holding back for a while but, as a result of these seminars, a core of more knowledgeable officers keep branches operating smoothly.