
PETER FRANCIS OLSEN

10 March 1930 – 30 October 1998

President of the Institute for the period 1992-96, Peter Olsen died quietly in his sleep at his home in Rotorua sometime on the evening of Friday 30 October.

Such was the level of his activity up until the time of his short illness that few really appreciated its seriousness, and the suddenness of his death was a particular shock for his many friends and colleagues. Most were also surprised to find that he was in fact more than 68 years of age and had completed a forestry career spanning more than 50 years.

That career commenced when at the age of about 16 he worked for a period for a neighbour, providing lots of enthusiasm and possibly a little 'advice' as they operated a small sawmilling operation in the native forest near Taihape. By the age of 18 he had joined the Forest Service as a Junior Labourer, a common entry point for many young men who later went on to study forestry at various universities. After a period of forest survey work Peter was accepted as a trainee, attending Victoria University and graduating with a B.Sc. in botany. He then travelled to Canberra where in company with other Forest Service trainees he studied for his Diploma in Forestry.

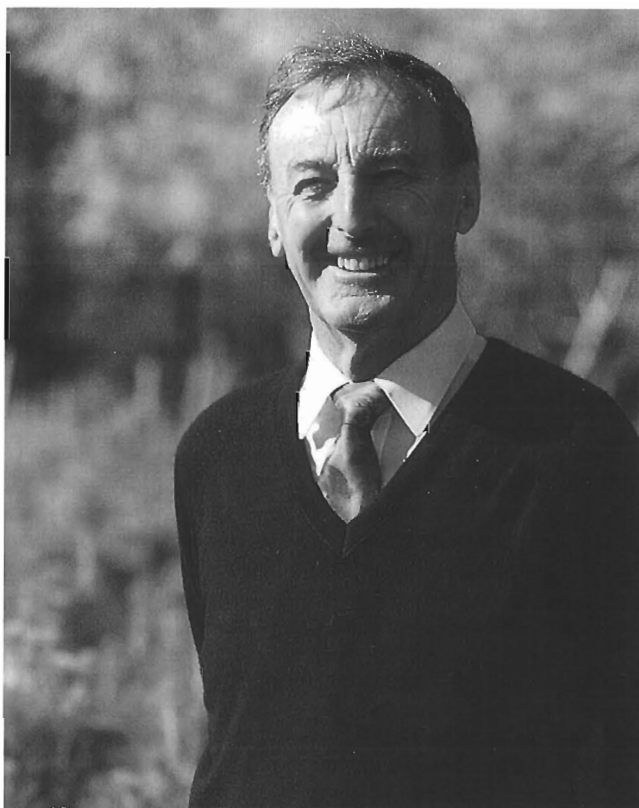
Upon his return to New Zealand he worked in several locations, firstly at the Forest Research Institute and later at Kaingaroa which at that stage was moving through the early stages of the Murupara scheme. For a period, Peter was identified as the Department's pulp and paper expert, a role that took him on visits to many mills both at home and abroad, and later resulted in his taking leave for a period to work with Caxton as they moved through the implementation phase of their own refiner ground-wood pulping operation. The relationship Peter built up with Caxton during that period lasted for many years, with his forest management company (P F Olsen and Company, established in 1971) later providing forest establishment and management services to Caxton for more than 25 years.

Thus when Peter resigned from the Forest Service in 1970, he already had more than 20 years' experience in a wide variety of roles and had achieved senior officer status in Rotorua Conservancy.

His new company has of course become a household name amongst the forestry community with offices spread around New Zealand and a global spread of activity. More than 60 staff, most shareholders in the company speak highly of his leadership and the great esprit de corps developed amongst his team.

However the most outstanding feature of his life long commitment to forestry was his tireless and mostly unrewarded involvement with any organisation that seemed to have the potential to promote or smooth the way for the industry that he so strongly believed in. It is said that he sat on, advised, chaired - and where necessary cussed and cajoled just about every forestry sector body of note in operation at the time. The list is extensive - NZIF President 1992-96, Chairman of LIRA/LIRO 1987-97, Member of the Forest Owners Assn Executive Committee for more than 20 years, NZFIC 1997, Rural Fire Mediator, Director of GEENZ, Director Thailand Exports NZ Ltd, Director of Foreza (genetically improved tree seedlings for the public), Chairman of the Radiata Pine Tree Breeding Co-operative, Member of FAFPRO, Director Port of Gisborne from 1994, and of course Managing Director of P F Olsen and Company. This list is not comprehensive but serves to identify the extent and level of his involvement.

The intensity of the involvement is equally notable, many will



remember his directness, the precise and carefully enunciated questioning, his keen wit and sense of humour, and his willingness to tackle any opponent if he felt the cause justified it. Often he was the champion of the small forester, particularly when other such champions were lacking, and always he was on the side of clear and simple solutions. His accuracy and sincerity were unquestionable, and amongst his peers, colleagues and competitors respect for him was immense.

Within the Institute he had gained the status of Fellow, however many of the senior members felt that this did not adequately recognise the major contribution he had made to either the organisation or profession that he so proudly represented. It is a matter of record that at the time of his death Council of the Institute were therefore, in association with others in the sector, seeking to have Peter's contribution more formally recognised through the Royal Honours process. Unfortunately because the nomination had not been lodged at the time of his death this cannot be proceeded with, however all of us note the passing of one of the real champions of the forestry profession, a great friend and a really good joker.

To Ruth and the rest of Peter's family we extend our very best regards, and appreciation for the very large share of time Peter was able to devote to our cause.

Bless you Peter Olsen.

Peter Berg