

The North loses one of nature's gentlemen

Colin Sutherland

22 April 1925 - 28 August 2002

Not long before Colin's death, I had an excellent report on a eulogy that he had delivered at Des Ogle's funeral, so it came as a surprise to hear of Colin's subsequent passing away.

Although I worked with Colin for only a short period of about 3 years while I was at Kaikohe, he was a person who made a large impact on me. Generous of spirit, "one of nature's gentlemen" as one colleague has described him, able to see the wider picture, bursting with frenetic energy, and remarkably tolerant of other people's shortcomings – these are just some of the attributes of the man. Therefore I consider it an honour and a privilege to be able to pay this small tribute to Colin. I am grateful to Ivan Frost and Harry Bunn, who have kindly filled in some early background about Colin that I was lacking.

Colin joined the Forest Service as a Category A trainee under a training scheme for ex-servicemen introduced by the Forest Service following World War 2. He joined about a dozen or so ex-servicemen at Waipoua Forest in 1946 to commence training. They were employed as labourers initially, and after successfully attending the first course at the Training Centre at Rotorua, were made Leading Hands. This was Colin's path to a career. In addition to working mainly on exotic forest tasks, he spent a period timber cruising at the Te Kuiti District. After promotion to Forest Foreman, which was his first "staff" position, Colin worked at various forests in Northland, mainly at Waitangi and Omahuta. Eventually he was sent back to Te Kuiti for more timber cruising. It was during this time that he was diagnosed as having diabetes, and for the sake of his health, was transferred to Pureora Forest to work on the exotic establishment programme there.

In 1956 he was appointed Officer in Charge at Te Wera, then very much in the establishment phase, with very difficult regrowth problems. In 1961 he was promoted to O/C Mangatu Forest, where he had to face the challenges of establishing a forest on eroding papa country. A major problem was establishing roads on this unstable country. In the absence of survey



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staff, Colin ran many of the road grades himself.

After 6 years in this job he was promoted to District Ranger, Thames District. It was here that he developed an interest in the work of the Catchment Board, and worked closely with that board until he was promoted to District Ranger, Kaikohe. This was a demanding job, covering the whole range of Forest Service activities including the sand dune reclamation project at Aupouri. He maintained an active, personal interest in Local Body affairs, which led him

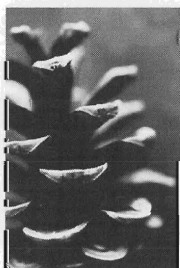
to stand and become an elected member of the Far North District Council for a number of years following his retirement in 1986.

Colin came to Kaikohe with a reputation of being the fastest man in the north, and quite capable of doing a trip around the Coromandel Peninsula and back to the District Office in Thames before anyone else got to work. He was never quite that bad in Kaikohe, but he certainly got out of the office more than most other District Rangers, even if it was to attend more meetings than anyone else. One of the occasions of very great significance to me was when the staff from Kaikohe District Office attended the funeral of Googi Pene's wife in Punaruku. Googi, who was the O/C of Russell Forest, in his inimical and generous style, insisted that the Forest Service team, led by Colin, should lead the entourage into the Tangi. Colin handled this extremely well, and we were all proud of him.

Colin's father, Charlie, was a Soil Bureau Scientist of the old school who remapped much of Northland's extremely complex soils by shear foot slog. Colin told me that when he was a child he would spend weeks with his father traipsing around the back roads in Northland in a Morris Eight (that's 8 horsepower, if you are not familiar with these things). No wonder Colin had an awesome knowledge of the Far North.

Colin is survived by Moya, his three children, and four grandchildren, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy, but grateful thanks for sharing him with us.

Dennys Guild



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