

Character of the NZ Forest Service

Gavin James Molloy 1924 – 2004

Ask almost anyone who ever worked with Gavin Molloy how they found him and the response will invariably include a reference to hard work, a love of the outdoors, an enthusiasm for the job and the organisation he worked for, a great sense of humour, quiet support and encouragement for his staff, "roll your own's", and a real appreciation of and contribution to the esprit de corps that was a feature of the NZ Forest Service throughout its existence.



In many respects he epitomised the character of the NZ Forest Service, an organisation well regarded for its commitment to growing trees in New Zealand, its ability to get the job done and its spirit of camaraderie. Within the Service Gavin was recognised early on as a person who would do the job, and as a person who would inspire others to do the same.

Gavin was born in Wellington where he attended primary school and later college at St Patrick's in Silverstream. There under the tutelage of the good brothers he became an above-average scholar and sportsman.

His early adulthood and potential career planning was interrupted by World War 2 – when both conscription and placement into essential industry was usual, meaning in Gavin's case a period with the NZ Army J Force. J Force was part of the British Commonwealth army of occupation in Japan, where Gavin made many lasting friends, played rugby with distinction and won the Freyberg Cup for rifle shooting out of the entire British contingent.

On his return to New Zealand, the appeal of the outdoors encouraged him to apply for a traineeship with the NZ Forest Service, a path also followed by many other returning servicemen who went on to enjoy distinguished careers in forestry. Following his induction course in Rotorua, Gavin was posted to the Department's relatively new Waipa Sawmill where he worked in wood preservation under Ken Goudie (who was a keen member of the NZ Institute of Foresters and recruited many new members).

Gavin was posted to Head Office in Wellington (1950) while completing a B Sc degree at Victoria University part-time. In the vacations his work in wood preservation continued, working alongside Sandy McQuire (later to become Dr McQuire, the doyen of plantation grown timber treatment in New Zealand) on such matters as preservation of beech mine props and, possibly

quite appropriately, the preservation treatment of hop poles. This pair formed a close friendship that was to last for the remainder of Gavin's life.

Following his graduation from Victoria University, Gavin was sent to the Canberra School of Forestry to complete a post-graduate diploma in forestry; however he was now accompanied by his long-time girlfriend and now new wife, Carma. Gavin's groomsmen included Lew Skudder and Peter Olsen, two others who were to remain firm lifetime friends and achieve prominence in New Zealand forestry circles.

His time in Canberra is notable for the leadership he was able to provide to other, younger students, the receipt of the Schlich medal for academic excellence, representation of NSW Country at rugby and the birth of his first son.

Upon his return to New Zealand Gavin was appointed as forester to Maramarua Forest, working directly in plantation forestry for the first time. Clearly his performance was well regarded because when the position of Officer in Charge became vacant some time later Gavin was appointed – a situation quite unusual for foresters at that time.

Further promotion followed; this time as Principal Forester, Westland Conservancy based in Hokitika in 1962. Peter Allan who was District Forester at Ahaura at the time remembers Gavin well: "A clear early recollection of Gavin was of him sitting at a desk in one of the second storey rooms of the old Post Office rolling a smoke. Gavin initially shared a room with District Ranger Stewart Ogilvie (who recognised only one tree species – radiata pine) and Merv O'Reilly; boss of protection forestry ... what was so distinctive about Gavin rolling a cigarette was the way his little finger stuck in the air.

"Gavin was in Westland at a crucial time for both indigenous and exotic production forestry. He picked up and progressed the introduction of selection logging of rimu terrace forests initiated by Geoff Chavasse and Colin Bassett (earlier work had been done by Charlie Foweraker and Frank Hutchinson in rimu forest just south of the Hokitika River). He also encouraged Andy Kirkland in work on sustainable management of beech forests (built on work by John Y Morris and Jim Hardcastle).

"Gavin was an exceptionally strong advocate for radiata pine. He caught Stew Ogilvie's mantra, 'I'll plant anything you like if its radiata pine, I'm

telling you.' That enthusiasm carried on for the decade and a half after Gavin left to form the resource on which Timberlands West Coast is now sustained.

"Gavin's love for the West Coast lifestyle meant that he fitted in very well; he loved fishing and carried his rod in the Forest Service vehicle he used.

"It was during his time that Westland Section of the Institute of Foresters was established. He was a keen supporter and local section meetings were one of the major social forestry events in which Gavin played an important role in nurturing enthusiasm in forestry."

In 1970 Gavin was again promoted, this time to the position of Conservator of Forests for the rapidly growing Southland region. His strong competitive spirit and regard for the region's forestry achievements meant that planting momentum was maintained and even lifted further as the Forest Service sought other opportunities to meet the Government's joint afforestation, regional development and employment goals.

John Purey-Cust, who was Principal Forester in Southland at the time comments:

"Gavin was very much one of the boys. He was here through the trickiest times of the beech management arguments and he was always ready to fight for the forestry corner when the need arose.

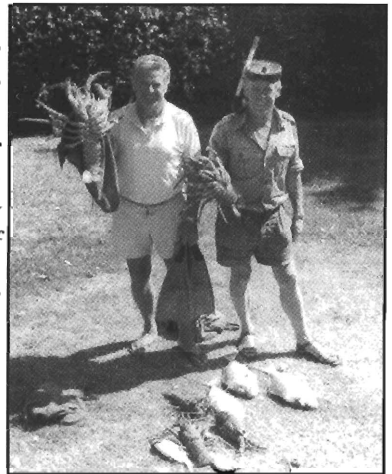
"My strongest memory of Gavin is as a family man and hunter gatherer. Whitebaiting was a new sport to me and always, in my experience, a dismal one. I remember being severely told off for using up our catch of five or six to bait a line for trout. Gavin was always convinced we would catch more..."

In 1974 Gavin shifted to Auckland as Conservator of Forests. These were troublesome times for the Forest Service as pressure continued to be applied to halt any form of management or harvesting in indigenous forests. In Gavin's case this meant the demise of the Kauri Forest Management Unit and some excellent trial work they were doing. The fact that this was able to be achieved without a great deal of acrimony owes much to Gavin's careful handling and wise counsel to his staff.

Meanwhile the afforestation of the coastal sands and reverting scrublands of the Auckland peninsula was maintained at a high tempo.

Russell Dale who was a relatively young forester at the time noted: "Gavin spent a lot of his time on timber sales matters. Long term stumpage sales to Carters from several of the Auckland forests and to Fletchers from Tairua Forest were a constant challenge that Gavin tackled, supported by the late Mason Potter and

Bob Harper. Many a long timber sales strategy took place in the Hobson Towers 7th floor Conservator's office accompanied by thick clouds of smoke from Gavin's roll-your-own and Mason Potters more refined but no less smoky tailor-mades. Well before the time of Smoke Free workplaces.



The move from stumpage sales to prepared log sales occurred during Gavin's time as Conservator and while welcomed by the smaller independent sawmillers it was not well received by the larger players who viewed the moves to realise greater value for the taxpayer with suspicion.

"I recall some advice from Gavin to a young forester keen to get some firewood in the weekend that what was required was some 'West Coast Experience' which was ensuring the calls of duty during the week included a visit to suitable firewood areas."

Gavin retired from the Forest Service in 1984 looking forward to even greater opportunities to pursue his fishing and hunting activities.

As his lifelong friend Lew Skudder has noted "other duties aside, whenever possible Gavin indulged his passion with his usual competitive spirit and enthusiasm. Not only for himself, but he imbued his four sons with the same attitude and encouraged them to gain the same skills. It came to pass then, when the Molloy family was on the trail it was woe and betide for any edible animal, fish and fowl".

Clearly this delight in the outdoors and whatever nature had to offer was well transferred as two of Gavin's sons later opted for careers in forestry.

For most of his forestry career Gavin Molloy was a manager and leader of part of a massive programme of afforestation and reforestation in New Zealand, involving large numbers of forestry people. Quite coincidentally and within months of his retirement, plans were afoot to dis-establish the Forest Service and sell the forests. The tangible assets included in the sale - trees, roads, buildings were obvious enough. Less obvious were the endeavours of dedicated forestry people like Gavin Molloy who created the entity and gave it sufficient meaning to realise the largest single privatisation of State resources in New Zealand history.

Peter Berg & Lew Skudder