

# Champion of alternative species and trees on farms

## Ian David Nicholas 1953 to 2013

Glen Murphy

*In our forestry community one of our forest giants has fallen. He wasn't the tallest tree in the forest, but his branches stretched far and wide, and in common with all forests, when one of the forest giants falls there is a large space left behind... This one is larger than most.*

Angus Gordon (Farm Forester, Taihape)

I first met Ian when we both began worked at the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua in the mid-1970s. Besides being work colleagues, over the next three-and-a-half decades we raised families together, were both actively involved in leadership roles in Toastmasters International, and shared a strong interest in fishing. His enthusiasm for fishing was almost as strong as his passion for farm forestry. My last memories of Ian are dragging him away from one of the many farm forestry projects he was working on for one more fishing trip.

Ian Nicholas was born and raised in the King Country on a farm to the west of Piopio. This is where his love of farming, forestry, sports and the outdoors began. He attended Piopio Primary School, followed by Saint Kentigern's College in Auckland. Then he headed off to Christchurch to earn a Bachelor of Forest Science degree at the University of Canterbury. Later in life he also earned a masters degree from Waikato University. It was while working on his bachelors degree that he met his wife Ann.

When Ian graduated in 1976 he hoped – for hunting and fishing reasons – to be sent by the Forest Service to Turangi, Pureora or Tuatapere. The Forest Service, however, sent Ian and Ann to the Forest Research Institute where he was appointed to a group working on special purpose species. Here began his career-long interest in eucalypts, blackwood, black walnut, cypress, paulownia and other alternative species to radiata pine.

In time he became the leader of both the Special Purpose Species Programme and the Management of Eucalypts FRI/Industry Research Cooperative. In August 2010, Ian took early retirement from the Forest Research Institute, then called Scion, to set up his own private consulting business.

Ian was a prolific communicator. He was passionate about getting involved and getting the science out to the people. In his career he was an author on 51 refereed journal papers, 26 conference papers, 28 magazine articles, seven books, 51 technical reports/papers, 39 contract reports, 86 presentations and two television programmes.

I can vouch, however, that this was only the tip of his communication iceberg. I heard Ian give many presentations on forestry to the lay public at Toastmasters' meetings over a 10-year period. Farm foresters also commented that he never missed an opportunity to provide a running commentary of the trials that he had been involved with as they passed by.

Ian was recognised as an expert internationally. During his career he was awarded a number of travel scholarships and was invited as an international conference speaker, which allowed him to visit forests in North and South America, Europe and Australia. After he visited Tasmania a few years ago, a forest industry representative said Ian's work was 'awesome, inspiring and motivational' and their industry was fortunate to have someone like him visit them.

It was after having led a group of farm foresters and colleagues on a trip to Chile in late 2012 that Ian suddenly became deaf. He was then diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour. Despite surgery, and the best treatment available, he died in late March 2013, a little more than five months later.

Not all of Ian's energy was devoted to work. He and Ann also raised three children – Amanda, Jamie and Scott. He was also an avid, if not completely competent, business house cricketer, rugby player, marathon runner, hunter, fisherman and white water kayaker.

Ian leaves behind a large legacy of information that was collected over his career. It includes the electronic handbook series for blackwood, eucalypt, cypress and redwood, his guidance in the eucalypt species trials, the Trees on Farms workshops, and his own professional archive of information. Information is information. What will be greatly missed by those who knew Ian is the energy, zeal and passion with which the information was willingly shared with others.

As Andrew McEwen, President of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, recently said, Ian was New Zealand's 'champion of alternative species and trees on farms... and his knowledge and enthusiasm will be hard to replace.'