

John de Berri Graham Groome

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Prepared by Angus McPherson

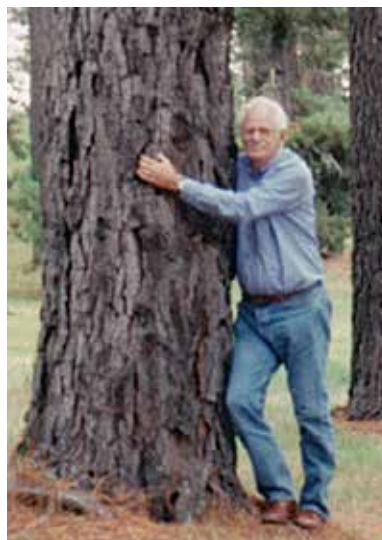
John Groome's career in forestry should probably be referred to as his life in forestry, as that's how much it meant to him. It was a career of significance. It wasn't sufficient for him to just participate – he needed to contribute and make a difference. John was a thinker and read widely, and was happy to make his views known and to debate them. While this might challenge you, working with him was rewarding and it made you reflect on your own views.

John was a compelling character – tall, raw-boned, with a gravelly voice, a forceful personality and a formidable reputation. Jouko Virta from Jaakko Pöyry once likened him to an old kauri tree – scarred from the ravages of time but roots firmly in the ground – strong and unbent, and he was this to the end. While John could be strong-minded, forceful and uncompromising, he was fiercely loyal to his friends and staff and supportive at a professional and personal level, and opened up a world of opportunities to many. It was these attributes, along with an impressively broad base of experience, a good memory and near-unshakeable self-confidence, that made him uniquely suited to becoming a pioneer in forest consulting in New Zealand and internationally.

It shouldn't really come as any surprise that John chose a life in forestry. While he was born in Hawke's Bay, his early schooling was in Kaingaroa and Rotorua while his father Ben was Clerk at Kaingaroa Forest. This was at a time when Kaingaroa was being established, and the depression and depression-era forestry had a lasting influence on him. He attended high school in Christchurch, where his father was Officer in Charge at Balmoral – biking home for the holidays.

After a science degree at Canterbury, it was time for John to begin his formal forestry education as part of the first group of New Zealand students to attend the Australian Forestry School in Canberra in 1949-50, along with his great friend Tony Grayburn. One of his fondest memories of this time was that he was a Brumby – locking the scrum with Tony. For many years after there was an expectation that New Zealand forestry students would all be like these two, but none made the grade in the tight five. It's a testament to John as a friend that many of the friendships formed at this time and as a Forest Service trainee stood the test of time.

Ever seeking to challenge himself, a formative job in John's early career was when he managed Hawke's



Bay Forests Limited from 1954–62. This position required him to develop a plantation forest business without incurring debt or raising capital, and to operate the business within tight financial parameters. This helped ingrain sound economic thinking and an aversion to unnecessary expenditure.

John's next step was to establish New Zealand's first forestry consulting firm in 1962, JG Groome and Associates, with Len Wilson and Pat Crequer. This company was at the forefront of guiding the expansion of plantation forestry on private and Māori land, and the professional services required to support this, and led the way in developing the successful forestry incorporation models for Māori that still exist today. Internationally, JG Groome and Associates established successful projects in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. Many young foresters gained valuable experience in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Pacific, and in new plantation forestry projects in the same regions.

John was very effective at utilising the research coming out of the Forest Research Institute (FRI), whether this be applying research results in the field, or FRI scientists as consultants both domestically and internationally. John, Pat and Len had taken JG Groome and Associates, forestry consulting and New Zealand out into the world – a first from Australasia. In time this company became Groome Pöyry, which was pre-eminent in forestry consulting in the wider Asia-Pacific region, with John as its Executive Chairman.

John was also very active in the NZ Institute of Forestry from an early stage in his career, and was a passionate advocate for professional standards within the Institute. He joined in 1948, and was a member for almost 70 years, becoming an Honorary Member and Fellow along the way. As will be noted later he was awarded the Institute's highest award – the Kirk Horn – in 2016. John started the Hawke's Bay local section in 1956, and served as a Councillor, Vice-President and President of the national body over 12 years.

He made significant contributions to the Institute's Code of Ethics and the recognition of professional forestry consultants, initiatives which are still relevant today some 50 years later. John lobbied for many years to allow proxy voting at the Institute AGM, one battle he was unable to win. He was also vigorously opposed to the name change to the Institute of Forestry – to him

it was the people, their personalities, perspectives and aspirations that were relevant – the foresters.

Outside the Institute, John served for many years on the executive of the Forest Owners' Association (FOA), and the NZ Advisory Committee on Aid and Development. Finally, he was a director of FRI and Chairman of FRI International.

While a full and rich and satisfying career might be enough for some, not so John who was motivated to keep working long after he (never) officially retired, participating in consulting projects in New Zealand and overseas into his late seventies, acting as a mentor to young foresters, and contributing to NZIF local section activities, the Journal and newsletter.

John's flair and drive were epitomised when FRI held its Jubilee in 1997. He was determined that this should be a splendid event, and he worked hard to make sure that there was a strong representation of overseas visitors from the Asia-Pacific region where FRI was held in high regard. The Symphony in the Redwoods was a particular success, and owed much to his vision and determination.

Another project that showcased John's flair and determination, and which gave him immense personal pleasure, was the Gallipoli Peace Park competition run by the Government of Turkey and the International Union of Architects. John's father was wounded at Gallipoli, and he was determined that a New Zealand entry should do justice to the sacrifices made by many Kiwis there. This was achieved, with the entry he participated in receiving an honourable mention and some of the elements used in the park's construction.

Working with John was a lot of fun. His breadth of experience in New Zealand and overseas was immense. His colleagues describe a man who was committed to the forestry sector and its development, and who would focus his energies on where he felt he could make a difference. He had an exceptional network of contacts within the forestry sector, both nationally and internationally. It didn't matter the project you were working on or where you needed information or contacts, he would know who to get in touch with and would generously point you in the right direction. This typified his working relationship with colleagues – once he had decided you were up to the task he would back you.

Anecdotes of working and travelling with John are legend: landing a sawmill on the beaches of Papua New Guinea among McArthur's rusting military hardware, battling through floods and storms to visit Bengkoka in Sabah, collaring a visiting Minister on the golf course in Rotorua, climbing the (rusting) fire tower at PT Musi Hutan Persada in South Sumatra at the age of 74 (a record at the time), revisiting Open Bay in East New Britain to check on progress age 77, the last minute rush to catch a plane because John didn't like to break his stride when presenting his pass and boarding the plane, and numerous photos of him hugging trees in various parts of the world.

On one of my first trips with him, and at the end of a couple of long days, we were enjoying a night cap on the balcony at the hotel. John was leaning back with his eyes closed, so I assumed that he was resting, or even nodding off, and that it would be safe to start shutting down for the evening. Then a voice rumbles, 'I've been thinking ...'. John never really stopped thinking about his beloved forestry.

His other great love, of course, was his family and his dear wife Judy. His son Tony talked about the amount of travel undertaken by John and his colleagues, often well in excess of the minimum specified in their contracts. The upside of this is that Judy and the children would get to see parts of New Zealand and the wider world that aren't available to most, to have experiences not open to many, and access to the most recent advances in gadgetry when they weren't able to travel with him. As Judy noted, forestry took John around the world with his consulting work, but also through association with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the French Institute of Tropical Forestry, and representing the NZ Aid Committee at OECD. This was not always to forests and the visits to cities without forests – Rome, Paris, London and New York – were much to her delight.

John was awarded the Kirk Horn, the Institute's highest award, at the NZIF Annual Conference dinner in Dunedin in 2016. While John was unable to attend, his son Tony was present and able to accept the award for him. Talking to John on the phone that evening you could tell it meant a huge amount to him and it was an award richly deserved.

Now the old kauri has fallen, and while John's passing gives us sadness, many are blessed with having known him as a mentor, colleague and friend. John made that difference he strove for, through his direct actions and through his influence on others and the sector. This was a huge contribution and a life of family, friends and forestry is to be celebrated. Rest well my friend, knowing that your memory will be cherished.

Acknowledgements

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Chavasse, G. 1993. John de Berri Graham Groome. *NZ Journal of Forestry*, (May): 39–40.

