

DAVID KENNEDY: AN APPRECIATION

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With the passing of Dave Kennedy, New Zealand lost one of the outstanding foresters of this generation and certainly the most colourful.

Kennedy was born in Rangiora in 1907. His background was a rural one; after leaving high school he had, in his own words, "four years' subsequent experience in the staple Canterbury industries of that day; blade shearing, potato digging, working in threshing mills, post-splitting, plus a six-month trick culling deer. . . ." At the time these were the only jobs he could get — his application in 1925 to join the State Forest Service was refused. In retrospect he probably would have agreed that the years were well spent. They gave him a great respect for the dignity of physical labour and an empathy with those who practised it — two deep-seated feelings that never left him. They produced in him a fierce resentment against the economic injustices of the day, leading him to a political philosophy which, though never doctrinaire, was always humanitarian and was deeply rooted in a passionate and profound social conscience. And they gave him also the opportunity to develop his unique intuitive understanding of land, land use and land mis-use. They were truly formative years.

His determination to be a forester must have persisted. In 1927 he became a ranger student at the Canterbury School of Forestry and studied for three years under Foweraker and Hutchinson. He was one of the few products of the Ranger School and thus subsequently occupied a somewhat ambiguous position between the sub-professional forest ranger and the academically-qualified forester. There was little else ambiguous about him.

In 1929 he joined the Forest Service as a temporary labourer and for the next five years worked in this capacity in Canterbury and Southland, and in the Forest Service Head Office in Wellington. In those days one was lucky to have any work at all and if a budding forester happened to have some formal training in forestry he was doubly lucky to be employed by the then Forest Service. One of its senior officers who disagreed at the time with the philosophy of his colleagues — C. M. Smith — brought the young Dave Kennedy to work in

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Wellington beside him. Dave came very much under C.M.'s influence; he learnt from him not only the fundamentals of forest and land use administration but also the habits of thinking and expressing oneself clearly and logically in terms of basic principles; and of never, in any circumstances, compromising those principles once they were established. Neither Dave nor C.M. ever realized how much the latter learnt from the former.

In 1935 he was appointed to the permanent staff of the Forest Service and spent the next four years as a Forest Guard at Ohakune. Splitting silver pine posts was then still a major and lucrative rural industry, and it was Dave's job to administer it. I first came to know him then, when he was the acknowledged "silver pine king" of the King Country; it was a far cry from what was to come. But even there he is to be remembered for those facets of his character which were later to make him legendary — the humour, the wit, the apt turn of phrase, the professionalism of his forestry judgements and the generous and uncondescending help and encouragement he invariably gave to those junior to him. At this time he was reading widely and absorbing almost everything he read. He must have had almost total recall; there is no other explanation to account for his extraordinarily wide vocabulary or for the literary, historical and geographical allusions which subsequently enriched his conversations and his writings. Whatever the reasons, he became a brilliant and original conversationalist and, unfortunately only too infrequently, an equally brilliant and original writer. Many of his best literary efforts were in the form of personal letters, departmental memoranda and file note "asides", meant for evanescence and inevitably committed to that fate if for no other reasons than the laws of libel and Government secrecy. Nevertheless, a certain body of written "Kennedyiana" has been built up by some of his friends and one hopes that one day a means can be found to publish them.

In 1940 he was appointed Officer-in-Charge of the Te Whaiti project, now known as Whirinaki Forest. One of A. R. Entrican's first major innovations, it was historically important since it represented a deliberate and determined attempt to see, for the first time, whether radically modified logging practices could conceivably lead to the sustained yield management of species such as rimu, matai and totara, despite their silvicultural intractability in the North Island, and despite the inevitable rotations of 200 to 400 years or more. It was also the first time that the State became involved in large-scale logging and in the sale of logs rather than stumpage. Entrican paid a great tribute to Dave in selecting him to pioneer these new developments.

It was natural for him to graduate from Whirinaki to Whaka Forest where, also for the first time, the Forest Service itself

started clearfelling exotic forests. Dave thus became an experienced indigenous and exotic logger; he was also coming to be recognized as a departmental trouble-shooter, a role which perhaps never left him. At Whaka Dave is remembered, amongst other things, for his introduction of a successful and durable incentive bonus scheme — yet another first for him. With its variety of species, sites and past treatments, Whaka was a great training ground for silviculturists: Dave did not waste this opportunity. He had remarkable powers of observation and a most retentive memory, combined with a partly acquired, partly instinctive, understanding of soil-plant relationships, and a feeling for the art of growing things — he had in other words all the makings of a natural silviculturist. This he became, and a distinguished one at that. It was no accident that in 1957, even though he had then for years been immersed in West Coast indigenous forest management problems, he was selected to deliver to the Seventh British Commonwealth Forestry Conference a paper entitled "The Establishment, Development and Regeneration of Forests of Exotic Species".

The further graduation, via a short period in Conservancy office, to Office-in-Charge at Kaingaroa Forest was inevitable. Dave managed Kaingaroa before the big logging and industrial developments came. But he anticipated them and influenced the silvicultural and management thinking that was necessary if sound foundations were to be laid. He pioneered some silvicultural experiments without the knowledge of Wellington, or for that matter of Rotorua; and if silviculturally they were neither particularly original nor radical, they were departures from accepted policy and practice; and they were carried out, not just talked about. Dave was always a doer as well as a thinker.

In 1951 he was appointed Conservator of Forests, Westland. Here he had completely different challenges, although ones for which his Te Whaiti days had conditioned him. First he had to introduce, in a province whose economy depended so largely on forests and forest industries, a Wellington-directed "conservation policy" aimed at preventing new logging and sawmilling units from starting; holding, and if possible reducing, the output of those already established; modifying the intolerably wasteful practices in both bush and mill; and generally improving the efficiency of the industry. It was not a task conducive to personal or departmental popularity; and it is one of the greatest tributes to Dave that after ten years' unremitting battle he emerged respected, liked and even revered from one end of the Coast to the other, and by all sections of the community. The other major and equally difficult challenge was to lay the foundations for true indigenous forest management. This meant putting a stop to traditional logging practices which had as their end result com-

plete or near-complete forest devastation, and offered no hope whatsoever of adequate regeneration or second crops. The tragedy was that the soils, by general agreement between soil scientists, agriculturists and foresters alike, were predominantly absolute forest soils — *i.e.*, there was no possibility of changing the principle land-use from forestry to agriculture. Dave's reforms included roading the forests and weaning the industry away from trams, providing better fire and animal control, gradually replacing clearfelling on the terrace soils by strip felling and selection logging; and the introduction of exotics into partially cut-over hill country forests not suitable for the culture of rimu. It is widely considered that, of his many contributions to New Zealand forestry, the changes he wrought in the West Coast forest scene must rank amongst his greatest.

By the time Dave came back to the premier Conservancy, Rotorua, he was the acknowledged premier Conservator of Forests, combining as he did wide practical experience with unusual professional competence and great administrative judgement. Rotorua was by then very big business with, of necessity, a large staff; and the Conservator's job more than ever before was to be a team leader. Here again Dave was a giant amongst men. He stimulated; he encouraged; where necessary he reproved, in a manner which was always effective and never unfriendly; he was scrupulously fair; and he was intensely loyal to all his staff. His critical faculties if anything were more acute and his comments more penetrating. His wit remained undiminished. He was particularly interested in training, and in the welfare of young people; and he derived great satisfaction from being able to encourage and inspire them. In particular he developed a unique ability to see clearly the role of forestry in social and historical perspectives — as evidenced by his unpublished 1969 address (to the Rotorua Section, N.Z.I.F.) entitled "The Mutable Forest Scene". This vision influenced his approach to administration, and influenced also, perhaps more than is yet appreciated, the forestry philosophy of his friends and colleagues. Rotorua Conservancy gained in stature under his leadership as indeed did forestry from his whole career.

His formal recognitions included Honorary Membership of this Institute and the award of the Imperial Service Order. He valued both very highly, but he would have valued even more the great affection and respect in which he was held by all who knew him.