

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### *Foresters and sociological mumbo-jumbo*

Sir,—In your editorial for Volume 23 (2) you were concerned that forest recreation was in danger of becoming a specialist field of management and that foresters would retreat in the face of sociological mumbo-jumbo. You drew your conclusions from the Forest Service "Recreation Workshop" of May 1978 and from papers in Volume 23 of the *Journal*.

I attended both workshop and subsequent committee to prepare recommendations to the Director-General of Forests and I have to admit that there was a fair amount of sociological jargon used in the proceedings. The bulk of this arose from participants with little or no experience in actually managing forests for recreation, or any other use for that matter. Sixty-six percent of participants had forest management experience and would not, I imagine, be particularly unnerved by trendy terms and vague sociological notions. There is no doubt that foresters must think more about people, their behaviour in forests and their expectations. We are committed to increased public access to and use of State forests and we must not shirk our responsibilities. But there is absolutely no need to get into a dither about recreation. I personally encourage forest managers to regard recreation as just another forest product, to be thought about, planned for and facilitated, like any other management operation. I tell them to consider past use of their forests, look at present use and any trends, relate these to the recreation potential of their particular forests, and then cater for recreation as demands indicate. They might occasionally want to anticipate demand, or develop some feature of special public interest. In addition, they should think a little about the wider perspective and relate recreation in their forest to recreation elsewhere in the region, to avoid duplication of effort or meet demands which are not catered for elsewhere. It is all common sense, experience, a bit of data gathering and a smattering of initiative, just like any other forest operation.

I hope you may be reassured that New Zealand foresters are competent to manage forests for recreation. Sure, they will need some help from time to time, but they need not be overawed by trendy terms from textbooks and the halls of ivy.

Incidentally, the Member's Comment on "Alpine Lands" was a good example of stripping away recreation mystique to see the reality.

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### *In defence of sociologists, scientists, scruffy idealists ... and foresters*

Sir,—Some characteristics of the typical Kiwi are more appropriate to the 1870s than life one hundred years later. One is an overemphasis on the independent, self-reliant, jack-of-all-trades image, which in itself is admirable but, when it surfaces as a suspicion of the expert, is unhealthy. Too many find the easiest way to handle the academic, the trendy lefty, the ecofreak and others of his ilk is by ridicule, a reaction which is an expression of the insecurity and intolerance of the perpetrator.

This whole exaggerated profile is apparent in the forester (I use the term generically), who seeks varying degrees of exclusivity of stewardship of "his" estate. Just how sincere and effective are our public participation efforts? There is no doubt we are world leaders in many aspects of forest management, so why are we so wary of the sociologist whose discipline we want to rank as a third world science; the young graduate whose ideals we want to "knock into shape"; the scientist whose qualifications were not always traded in for a certificate of impracticality; and the ecofreak whose effectiveness we can't dismiss and more often envy?

As foresters we have the security of statutory or commercial stewardship of almost 20% of New Zealand's land. We make the decisions, we have the breadth of training and depth of experience. As a profession we are adequately equipped to accept, digest or reject expert opinion, so surely we have the maturity and humility to acknowledge that others do have much to offer. Inevitably we will judge their findings on the basis of our experience. There is, however, nothing omniscient about that experience.

Let us stop being suspicious of experts, youth, and ecofreaks. Talk to them, work with them, join them and use them. We have no need to feel professionally inadequate.

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