



No apology for being a radiata enthusiast

My advocacy of plantation forestry has received considerable publicity over the last few months. Most comment has been favourable. That which was not almost always centred around my strong advocacy of radiata at, what is interpreted as, the expense of other species. I make no apology for my bias. As a professional forester it would be irresponsible of me to advocate investment in high-risk alternatives. I wish we could confidently recommend another species, but is there even one alternative which comes anywhere near radiata in its potential usefulness, predictability or profitability?

It is timely to remind ourselves of some of the experiences with other species over the last 100 years:

- The forerunner of the NZ Forest Service – the Afforestation Branch of Lands Department was founded in 1896. Its species policy was to plant a specific tree for each specific end use, e.g.
 - hickory for axe handles
 - catalpa for fence posts and railway sleepers
 - English walnut for furniture etc.

Radiata pine was not recognised as having an important end use. By 1909 the Afforestation Branch had planted 25 million trees but less than half of 1% of these were radiata pine. Almost all of those early plantings failed to achieve their objective.

- Although the 1913 Royal Commission recommended large-scale plantings of radiata pine it still considered the species to be only “a second class timber”.
- The New Zealand Forest Service was created in 1919. One of its first professional foresters, F.W. Foster, wrote of radiata in 1924 – “it will be very difficult to name a tree that is useful”. However he went on to say “several proprietors with longer views and sounder forestry sense are planting slower-growing trees which will yield higher-price timber”.
- The first planting boom (1926-1933) began with a major emphasis on radiata pine but ended with a higher proportion of other species being planted. In 1931 it became the policy of the NZ Forest Service to use other well-proven species and to ultimately reduce the proportion of radiata to only 30% of State plantations. That

policy remained until the end of the 1950s. Nearly all of those other species either failed or grew slowly. Most of those minor species have found only limited market outlets and most have now been converted to radiata pine. Of all the other species Douglas fir would be the major exception.

Comment from the President

- At the end of the 1970s the NZ Forest Service developed a policy of planting special purpose species (i.e. species that could satisfy markets for which radiata was not particularly suitable). The proposal was that 5% of State plantings were to be in non-radiata species. Very rarely was that policy implemented because of the problems of finding suitable alternative species. Other species have certainly had their opportunities. Few, if any, have lived up to their expectations. What evidence, except possibly for a few eucalypts and *Cupressus macrocarpa*, do we have that anything has changed? Even eucalypts remain under a cloud as the company

which invested heavily in them, NZFP, is now proposing to quit the species.

Can we as professionals advise investment in such unproven ventures? To invest in anything other than radiata is to speculate. It may prove a winner but chances are that it will not.

Even if the alternative species does produce a high-quality first log, and even if the top logs and chip material does find a ready and profitable outlet, there could still be problems. Our experience in exporting radiata has shown that it is not enough to demonstrate that it is suitable for a whole range of end uses. We must also guarantee large volumes of a consistent quality for a very long period (at least a decade). My fear is that successful forest owners of other species will be disappointed at sale time. Some may be lucky to find valuable outlets for their products. I suspect however many will be disappointed. They could search in vain for a buyer willing to pay a high price for a few logs of relatively unknown, untried and different species. It will matter little that it has desirable properties, an attractive grain etc.

I would love to be able to advocate confidently an alternative to radiata. So far not one species has emerged during the last 150 years which in any way matches the proven usefulness and predictable performance of radiata.

W.R.J. Sutton

FORESTRY IDENTITY

Mavis Davidson

C.G.R. Chavasse

One of the most remarkable members of our Institute is Mavis Davidson, a woman of extraordinary energy, initiative, industry and critical intelligence, who has indefatigably tramped over a great many of the rugged places in New Zealand and still, after 40 years' mountaineering, ski-ing and trout fishing, remains a keen trapper and canoeist. But Mavis is also a retiring and modest person who never sought the limelight and so remained scarcely known to most of our members. Yet those who have come to know her esteem her warmth and friendship.

Mavis is a keen geneologist. Her pio-

neer paternal antecedents were Cornish, and her maternal ones were Norwegian. She was born at Te Karaka, Poverty Bay, in February 1910, the seventh child of Thomas James Gedye and Dagmar Martha Melville Gedye (née Hansen), who had three daughters and six sons.

Her schooling, from about 1918, was largely in Poverty Bay – Tokomaru Bay and Gisborne – and Wairoa, Hawkes Bay, with a year in Dunedin; and finally at Brain's Commercial College, Auckland, in 1925. She then worked in both Auckland and Wellington as a short-hand-typist, ledgerkeeper and clerk.

In 1940 Mavis entered Victoria Uni-