

Service above self-interest

John W. Edmonds 1944- 2003

John W. Edmonds died in July 2003. John was diagnosed with terminal cancer two years ago on September 11, 2001 (a day of ill omens). He was given six months at that stage, but beat the odds for almost two years. He and his wife Peggy – with whom he did so much – were planning a trip to Britain in June when John's condition suddenly got worse.

John would have been surprised at his own funeral. I don't think he ever realised in how much regard he was held. Old classmates came down from the North Island, and forestry and farm forestry personalities from throughout the South Island made a point of honouring him. It was a testament to the man who was affectionately known to many of us as Jed.

Jed was held in such high regard because of his commitment to the ideals of public service, for his strength of character, for his genuine love of trees, the South Island landscape, and the people associated with them. He was a giver, always prepared to help whatever the inconvenience, very reluctant to admit either defeat or triumph, and modest to a fault. His inner strength was obvious over the last six months of his life when he refused to slow down, and never complained of the pain he was in as the cancer took hold.

Given his determination, it comes as no surprise to find that he was an exceptional sportsman. In his early years he was a national age-group swimming champion, whose prospects were cut short when the family moved from his Dunedin birthplace to Murapara. Pig hunting took precedence. The family eventually moved back to Dunedin, where his father had a job with the Forest Service (NZFS). In his youth he was a senior rugby representative and an active member of NZFS conservancy teams. He was also a keen runner – being president of the local Harrier club for four years – a skier, and a triathlete.

John joined the Forest Service Ranger School with the 1962 intake. After working on various stations in Southland Conservancy, he became OC of Silverpeaks forest before opting for doing the thing he loved most – spreading the message of forestry to the farming community through the advisory services of NZFS. He made a significant difference in Otago, and is often credited with being the driving force behind making South Otago the premier farm forestry region that it is. He was the first extension officer in New Zealand to set up

discussion groups to develop a core of expertise in the farm forestry community. *2nd from right in the 2nd row).*



Jed was always the first to admit that they taught as much as he taught them, and that his role was as much about filtering wisdom through to research and policy as it was about bringing new ideas and practices to farm foresters. Jed's little-acknowledged effectiveness in this broader role was due in no small part to his excellent links with Forest Research Institute personnel, many of whom were personal friends (Leith Knowles was an old classmate). His effectiveness was also due to his continual interest in the latest ideas and

technologies, and with measuring everything. There are a lot of stands on Otago farms with quietly fading paint.

With the eventual moves of NZFS into the Ministry of Forestry and the Forest Corporation, he never lost faith in the ideal of public service, nor did he ever accept that 'service' was an anachronism better replaced by personal self-interest. He kept on being asked to contribute to sports clubs, farm forestry local branches and the NZ Institute of Forestry – and he always did. He would not let people down. In May 2003, having just helped organise the ANZIF Conference in Queenstown, he resigned as the long-standing Chairman of the Otago Southland local section of NZIF, and from the Executive of the Farm Forestry Association. He was in line for national President of the latter.

Jed had a love of life and a generosity of spirit that is an inspiration, coupled with the quiet determination of an Angus bull. He was an exceptionally good man, and it was the privilege of many of us to have known him.

Chris Perley

