

Dr Colin Lockhart O'Loughlin

Respected Scientist and International Consultant

Colin O'Loughlin died in Christchurch on 17 February 2011 after a short illness just a few weeks before his 75th birthday. In this tribute let us reflect on a remarkable man, Dr Colin Lockhart O'Loughlin, who has led a full and balanced life while pursuing an impressive career in his chosen field of scientific research.

Colin was always a clear thinker, good analyst and fluent writer that made him such an outstanding researcher. He had an ability to recognize the key questions needing to be addressed for making a difference to forest management in New Zealand's extraordinarily vulnerable steepplands.

Most importantly his scientific vision and achievements were not left to languish in dusty reports or papers in academic journals. He communicated well, influenced research direction, and in time provided answers of immediate value to improving best-practice of sustainable land-use in steepplands here and overseas.

In addition to being a sound scientist with a down-to-earth bent, he showed many other significant qualities, i.e. human qualities that made him so outstanding.

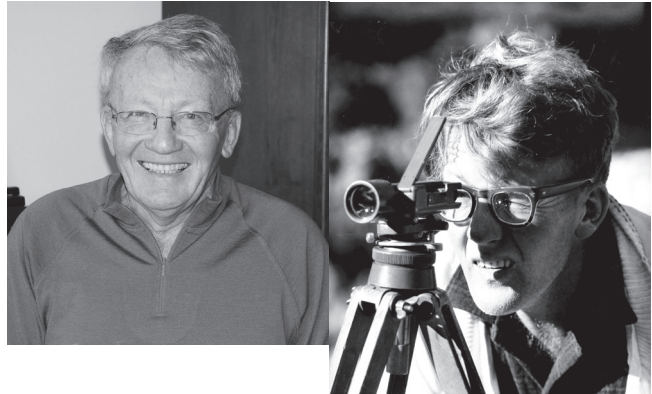
He was genuinely interested in people, their lives and aspirations, he would listen, avoid judging too quickly or hurtfully; so people felt at ease under his smiling gaze and questioning. They would confide their thoughts to a man they could clearly trust.

Colin showed himself to be a gifted leader and he built a very successful research team that soon attained recognition both at home and internationally. Many of his scientific papers were published jointly with members of his team, and colleagues at other research centres in New Zealand and overseas. He shared not just his ideas and the hard work, but also the rewards and saw the need for recognition to further the career of others.

Born 1936 in Dunedin, Colin grew up in Greymouth with his 2 brothers. Later in life he would tell boyhood stories and proudly claim to be a Coaster, after a beer or two.

On leaving High School he started at Hanmer as a Forest Service trainee in 1955. He said he was influenced to join one Arbor Day by the Conservancy forester from Hokitika.

The Forest Service supported him through his B.Sc. at Canterbury University, with the long summer vacations working on High Country Surveys with Jack Holloway,



the forest ecologist and Director of the Forest and Range Experiment Station located at Rangiora. These early vegetation surveys of Canterbury Mountains, Westland's Hokitika Catchment, and the North Island Tararua Range inspired his life-long interest in the mountains, and his career to study the influence of forests on the hydrology and slope stability.

There followed the completion of his forestry diploma in Canberra 1962 under the guidance of the remarkable Dr Max Jacobs.

I first met Colin in December 1962 in Oxford, Canterbury, when as a field party leader he was back on summertime high country survey, a dream job for fit students and young foresters. He walked us from Lees Valley up and along the Puketeraki Range. Colin's happy enthusiasm was infectious, and combined with his thoroughness to complete the task in hand, he stood out. There began a life-long friendship.

Researchers were expected to specialize in fields relevant to management of our eroding mountain lands. Colin was given responsibility for climate and hydrology. With it came our realization that under the new forest science direction set by Dennis Richardson our careers in research would clearly require advanced training and higher tertiary qualifications.

Colin responded by completing in 1969 an MSc in geology at Canterbury University, followed in 1972 by a PhD at UBC, Canada with a first rate thesis on 'the stability of steeppland forest soils' with special reference to impacts of harvesting.

Returning to New Zealand in 1972, Colin was given charge of a Geohydrology Section within the Protection Forestry Division of FRI (the Forest Research Institute),

and he soon built up and lead an impressive research team establishing long-term experiments in steep-land catchments for studying forest management effects, especially of roading and harvesting, on stream- and sediment-flows, water quality, slope stability and soil tree-root reinforcement. Key study catchments included steep-land forests and tussock grasslands in Canterbury (the Craigieburns), Westland (the Maimai), Nelson (Big Bush), Central Otago (Glen Dhu) and North Island East Coast (Mangatu).

He found time for similar related work in Malaysia, he participated in many conferences, and kept up an active international scientific exchange and cooperation, including leadership of a Working Group of the International Union of Forest Research Organisations.

Colin was to succeed John Morris in 1986 as Director of the Protection Forestry Division thereby increasing his staff responsibility from 20 to 100 and moving more into science administration. He was a much-liked and hard working director who regularly took the time to sit down or go into the field with staff to keep well informed about their research projects.

In 1987 Colin was called to Wellington as Chief Director of Research for FRI, then an organization of about 450 people. It was a time of much change after the dissolution of the Forest Service with two Colins in Wellington (Colin Bassett and Colin O'Loughlin) battling to move FRI intact into the Ministry of Forestry. It was a period of hard dealings with Treasury, Ministers, State Services Commission, and Government departments, and in the end tough decisions had to be made. Colin rose to Assistant Secretary (Research) in the new Ministry of Forestry.

When in 1992 FRI was transformed to a user-pays commercially orientated Enterprise (i.e. CRI) Colin retired from the public service. But he never really retired and continued working as a very successful consultant at home and abroad, but doing only the things he enjoyed, by taking short contracts right up to the time of his illness in December 2010, when he had just completed his annual commitment of evaluating research proposals for the NZ Fire Service.

In his time, science reviews, strategies, policy development, including indigenous forests, advice to Ministers, etc. all came thick and fast, with Colin's clear head, quick analysis and speed of writing standing him in good stead.

He gave advice to companies and governments about slope stability and sustainable forest management in NZ and overseas including, Canada, China and Kenya.

Colin always gave freely of his time, especially to the New Zealand Institute of Forestry and was for many years on the editorial Board of the NZ Journal of Forestry. Likewise he has been an active member and contributor to various organizations including the Hydrological Society, The Royal

PROLIFIC WRITER

A search of research database shows Colin O'Loughlin published 52 items and internal reports between the years of 1964 and 1992. This does not include library held material or the many articles and reports published during "retirement".

Society of New Zealand, and IUFRO. For a time Colin was on the Snow & Avalanche Committee of the NZ Mountain Safety Council. His interests and abilities were wide. He was always a keen sportsman, rugby and cricket in younger years, and then a passion for golf in latter years. He took pride in keeping fit, went jogging and to the gym. He loved tramping and walking and was great fun to be with.

Colin was highly respected as a scientist and research administrator at home and abroad. He has some 150 publications, including books, plus many major reports. He was a leader in his field.

His Honours included:

- Full Fellow of the NZIF
- Member of the Royal Society of New Zealand
- The Kirk Horn, prestigious Royal Society award for Forestry
- FRI Research Pioneer award in Protection Forestry as a geohydrologist

To close it is worth quoting from some light-hearted, but apt, comments penned by a colleague reflecting on Colin's character:-

"He could be thought of as a late developer, for those who knew him in the 50s and 60s would not have imagined him in a collar and tie and becoming a future Director or Secretary for Research.

He has a brilliant mind and a delightful sense of humour, but there is also a certain naivety about him, and he never lost his sense of wonder at some nonsensical aspects of life and some people. This means that besides being a trusted colleague, and a highly valued administrator, he has always been entertaining company no matter what the circumstances."

Colin is a great loss to Joan his wife, Phillipa his daughter, and indeed to all the family, but also to the greater scientific community, the forestry profession, and his numerous friends in all walks of life.

Colin is one who has surely made a difference to New Zealand and New Zealanders. He will be greatly missed.

Udo Benecke - Westpark Chapel, Christchurch on 21 Feb. 2011