

Bush Boy to Bug Man - the making of a forest entomologist

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By T.C.R. White

Reviewed by John Kininmonth

This is a truly remarkable book that traces nine years of Tom White's life from the time he joined the Forest Service as a Technical Trainee in 1946, through his field training and time at Auckland University, culminating in his second degree at the Forestry School of Edinburgh University. The text is 427 pages long and gives an incredibly detailed description not only of living conditions and work but also his interaction with family, friends, colleagues and other social contacts – including an account of his series of relationships with the opposite sex! Like the rest of the trainees, Tom kept a diary to compile monthly training reports but he went way beyond that and was able to draw on detailed diaries of all aspects of his experience, even down to which films he saw, and when.

He was recruited from School in Hawera and, in those days, trainees went straight to the field. He went to Gwavas, then a new forest site complete with a plague of rabbits. It was a matter of doing your own cooking, no power and minimal ablution facilities. Definitely character building for a new recruit.

After attending a seven-week course in Rotorua he was soon sent timber cruising in Ohakune. Tom had several periods in cruising interspersed with time in Conservancy office and his descriptions of the rigours of life in the field under canvas and in miserable conditions brought this period of his training into sharp relief. He also attended a second trainee's course at Tapanui and a period at Ashley Forest before being accepted to attend Auckland University. He completed his B.Sc. in 1951 and, as was common in those days, went part-time for most of his study period.

Tom described how he had developed an interest in insects at school and, for his BSc, managed to wangle a double major in zoology as well as the usual botany – contrary to Head Office policy that required a greater measure of chemistry, physics or maths.

He spent the first of his long vacations at Golden Downs Forest but then managed two at the Forest Experiment Station (later renamed FRI) working with Joe Rawlings on the then serious concern – the *Sirex* woodwasp. For his

final long vacation, Head Office insisted that he get more plantation experience so he was at Tairua Forest, however, this did not diminish his determination to specialise in entomology.

After his two years getting a forestry degree at Edinburgh University (this was long before a forestry school had been re-established in New Zealand and trainees were sent overseas to get forestry qualifications) Tom had the opportunity to return via Canada to gain experience in their forest biology survey methods and facilities. This had been negotiated so that Tom could set up a similar system here, which he did.

Tom White left New Zealand more than 40 years ago to pursue an academic career, holding University posts in Australia and Fiji, yet felt a great urge to record what he saw as a very important part of his early working life. His objectives were two fold. "Firstly I want to record something of forestry history in New Zealand in particular the very successful Technical Traineeships". (In an appendix, he gave a background to the important contribution the trainee scheme made to staffing and eventual leadership of the Forest Service and other parts of the sector and listed almost all those who were recruited from 1941 to 1968 after which there were no further intakes). "Secondly, I will tell something of life as seen through the eyes of a young, small-town lad, highlighting some of my reactions and attitudes".

In fact the second objective has become the main one and the author has gone into great detail about every event during the whole period including candidly sharing his worries and disappointments with us as well as his successes.

This book is an important addition to what is still a fairly sparse New Zealand forestry literature. It should appeal to those interested in that period of our forestry history and even to a wider audience who are offered a detailed personal account of the life of a young man growing up in New Zealand in the late 1940s/early 1950s.

