

1st FC Posting of John C. Keenleyside.

After serving my time as an apprentice for five years on Ford and Etal Estate near Berwick on Tweed; attending a course at Raby Castle Estate, Durham and two years at F.C. training school Glentress, Peebles, my first posting in August 1953 was to Silviculture North outstation, Wykeham near Scarborough, North Yorks. I was under the supervision of John W Weatherell who spent his whole career on Research.

The post carried the grade of ex-school ganger industrial. Re-organisation in 1955 upgraded the post to Assistant Forester which was a non industrial grade and carried a housing allowance of £1. 'Cheers' - we were on our way to the top, the only snag was we had to survive for a month before the first salary cheque came in and monies paid as overtime for fire watching duties had to be repaid. The area covered was extensive, from Harwood Dale on the coast near Scarborough to work in West Yorks, mainly on water catchment areas for Halifax Corp. The furthest west plot is now buried under the M6 Motorway. The southerly limit was Doncaster where the project was to plant poplars on former agricultural land which suffered from coal mining subsidence. Hamsterley Forest near Durham was the most northerly boundary and the main project was to plant a D.F. provenance trial.

The main work was centred on the North York Moors. At the time Wykeham had three different types of nursery:-agricultural, heathland and woodland. Wykeham had a Research reserved area with over 80 experiments dating from the 1920s decade (ploughing with horses). When I arrived the first project was concerned with changing the Scots Pine coniferous woodland into a broadleaved area.

Broxa was the follow on from Wykeham where we had Heathland nurseries and areas of nursery beds set aside for sowing and growing Broadleaved trees (this work carried out in conjunction with Oxford University Dr Dimbelbey and Dr Rennie). The main work at Broxa showed the benefits of cultivation, fertiliser, provenance and mixtures. Broxa 100 was planted in P.55 with broadleaves which used up the available ground in the Research Reserve. The heathland nursery work mainly concentrated on the growing of Sitka spruce seedlings. One expt in the BS group which dealt with nutrition was large and took a week to assess and so we were sitting out there on Reasty top wrapped up in ex-army greatcoats from WWII measuring and recording numbers and heights.

Harwood Dale was another experiment reserve with 40 odd experiments dating back to the 1920s and culminating in the large cultivation Experimentt 41 on a very tough exposed site. The ploughs involved were RLR (Russell Lord Robinson). Russell being an agricultural engineering firm and Lord Robinson was then the Chairman of the Forestry Commission. The first of the Tine ploughs were used here. A late arrival was the Majestic Stump Jump plough which arrived in a box from Australia and had to be assembled at Dalby workshops. Its problem was its length and needed the half of Britain to turn round in!!!

The things that stuck in my mind from that period were the hard working native staff who liked piece work in order to earn an extra shilling. I can remember a team of two brothers who lined out 16 thousand seedlings in a day and when planting on ploughed ground aimed to plant up to two thousand plants per day. The price was 10 pence a thousand for Lining out and 10 pence per hundred for planting - none of them ever became millionaires!!!

We had no transport initially but were paid 75 pence per month cycle allowance, followed by the issue of a Hillman pick up truck of WWII origin this was a clapped out vehicle. One day we were proceeding down from Reasty Top when a rear wheel, complete with half shaft, passed us. We proceeded to the first lay by on 3 wheels and went back and retrieved the fourth wheel and half shaft!

A brand new Landrover complete with hard top and heater was then issued. Conservancy foresters were jealous as they had no heater and canvas backs which were very cold. My work mates were first of all Ron Robson the only person that I knew who could ride a motor cycle over RLR ploughing. He spent his whole career in Research and ended up in Wales. Calvin Booth followed him and later went to Aberdeen University then returned to the F.C. in a higher grade post.

A letter stating a posting to Bush Nursery arrived stating that I had to appear there in 1956. Good bye to Yorks, the hard working folks I met and the wonderful digs I had at Prospect Farm, Snainton, whom I kept in touch with for over 50 years till they all passed on.



Root system of old Scot
Findlay's Seat--showing
of rooting, one in the
and the other above th
one foot depth.

