

FCRA News

The newsletter about retired Forestry Commission employees

Issue 9 July 2000

A GREAT DAY AT GWYDYR

The Retirement Association AGM was in North Wales this year. Around 50 of us gathered at the Esplanade Hotel in Llandudno on Tuesday 23 May for two excellent days. Highlights were the AGM Dinner, at which we were addressed by Bob Farmer, Director Wales; and the visit to Gwydyr the following day. The dinner menu was excellent, Bob's speech gave us an encouraging glimpse of the forward looking and imaginative plans for management of Forest Enterprise's Welsh estate, and the obvious fellowship and pleasure of a reunion of old friends made the evening most memorable.

The weather was kind for our day at Gwydyr. Some of the hills have clearly grown steeper and distances are greater than they were but nothing can detract from the triple pleasures of good company, a walk through a magnificent forest and a picnic in the sun. However, perhaps the greatest pleasure was to see what capable and enthusiastic hands are now in control. Gwydyr is good but it will get even better!

Before the above pleasures we had our formal agenda of the AGM. The principal outcome of this was endorsement of the Management Committee's recommendation that the association structure should be based on Groups rather than the present set-up of Branches and subordinate Groups. Each active

"cell" of members will be an autonomous Group dealing directly with the central Management Committee. From next year one delegate from each group will be eligible for subsidised attendance at the AGM, although the very limited funds available suggest the subsidy will fall well short of the cost of attendance. I doubt if this will be a matter of any great moment. It is clear that the pleasure and satisfaction that everyone got from these two days was well worth the cost. If you have not been to an AGM keep the last week in May free in your diary next year. We shall be meeting in the Lake District and are confidently anticipating another good meeting. Come and join us. You'll enjoy it and your presence will add to everyone's pleasure.

THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM

Ken Crump of Alice Holt, and now retired to Haslemere, recalls an amusing incident after the Great Storm of 1987. Pathology Branch had devised a spectacular display which was to be the FC's main exhibit at the Ideal Home Exhibition. Ian Hickman took on the task of constructing a model house showing the impact of a tree - smashed roof, broken windows, scattered glass (bits of plastic) - an impressive portrayal of destruction. It was assembled in the old Pathology Arcon.

The day arrived for it to be transported to the Exhibition at London - photographers standing by - and standing - and standing. Removal had stopped. The house would neither go through the door nor windows. A short discussion followed, and a solution was found. An oxyacetaline cutter separated the metal window frame from the structure. The house was on its way. It took a little longer to remove than planned and left behind a few red faced Pathology staff!

WELFARE RECALLS

I had a letter from Don Tyre who was CO in SE(E) 1952-63 and EO in HQ 1963-67. He knew Eric Hale well, but does recall that on going to Savile Row in 1963 Bill Wilbraham was doing welfare work - but perhaps it wasn't considered a full time post. He also recalls the Paramonov of Fred Hummel's stories, who made beautiful models from cigarettes soaked in glue and covered. FCRA NEWS jogs many memories.

BACK TO THE PAST

A trip into the early working life of the Editor

For many of us, our first job is a memorable event. There can only be one "first job". The remainder are "other jobs". But we are often not able to return to the location of our first job and recapture some of its magic. This has just happened to me! My first job after graduating from Bangor in 1961 was in Belize (then British Honduras). I had an urge to travel and it seemed remote, interesting and exciting. Married in August and off in September. I had three fascinating years involving a wide range of activities including building construction, enumeration, research into pine growth, and just exploring the wonders of tropical forests and ancient Maya ruins. But most of all we made friends. As we were in remote locations, the nearby small towns appeared bustling centres of activity. We met so many people who seemed to have mystical, exciting or exotic backgrounds. None was mundane.

But that was 39 years ago. This year we returned to Belize. We had maintained a single contact. After landing we met her and all the pleasure of personal relationships returned. She knew of the whereabouts of some mutual friends. We made more contacts and suddenly doors began to open. Barely a day went by when we didn't call on some long-distant friend. All remembered us - and of course there were great welcomes, and the telling of yarns, suitably enhanced by the passage of time, and a few drinks. Most memorable was my meeting with the Forest Guard, since retired, who was in charged of our gang of research workers. I had been told of his house. I walked into the backyard calling out Hello! Hello! He came round the corner, and his look of surprise was so welcoming. Then followed more meals, drinks, reminiscences and family gatherings. It was a truly unique holiday. All the memories of my job came flooding back. Small trees had become very big trees. Natural regeneration of pine had become tall mature forests. Narrow roads with fords and primitive bridges had become highways with high level steel spans. I took a walk in the tropical forest with the Forest Guard. He tested me on species recognition. After 39 years I didn't do too badly! A few wrong, but most correct. The heat and damp of the forest is so evocative. I had forgotten what biodiversity really means - the amazing interaction and variation between birds, animals and plants.

And now in Scotland again, I can look back on the special attraction of that "first job" and the return visit 39 years later which rekindled so many friendships and memories.

Life after retirement

This issue looks at the Scottish connection.

Finlay MacRae may not be known to a few down south, but he is the stuff of myth and legend in the north. He is the source of stories, where fact and fiction merge to produce a great yarn. His life in the FC was one of enjoyment, entertainment and devotion. He could slyly deflate the pompous and trick the unwary. I recall a course held at Fort Augustus where late at night he instigated a race down the hotel stairs - sliding on tea trays! My mind is less clear on the outcome. The FC owes much to his mischievousness and professional ability.

So now for his life in retirement.

I decided prior to retiring from the Commission in 1985 when I hit 62 years, that it was essential to become physically and mentally involved in something or other to do with land - I know not, exactly what.

The opportunity to become involved in wildlife and forestry design with Fountain Forestry was a godsend and I roamed Scotland from John o' Groats to the Borders.

The work was challenging and different from that of the Forestry Commission. I met a wide range of owners, foresters, rangers and thoroughly enjoyed my 3 years. In 1985 I decided to work in my own account, winding down a gear at 65 and turning my thoughts towards general land use in the Highlands.

Retiring from teaching my wife and I helped our elder daughter to run our family hotel in Skye. In 1987 we sold up in Skye and never regretted escaping from the hotel business which I suspected, correctly as it transpires, was in for a rough time, especially in the islands. Breaking my native bond with Skye was not easy, since I was a Skyeman to the marrow, brought up in the Gaelic.

Travel loomed large in our plans and we visited many countries, to see the land, and in particular the forests.

Foremost in my memory are the many trips to South Africa and Botswana, where I attended the First World Wilderness Congress, trailed in the bush, slept out in the wild, an exhilarating and scary experience.

My bagpipe went everywhere with me and I played at recitals, judged piping competitions, and spoke at Burns Suppers.

One day I met David Seal in the Drakensberg as I headed up to play the pipe in one of their great caves - what fun.

Visits to Canada, Alaska and Eastern Siberia, and more recently to the Muir Woods in California followed. The Muir Woods are breathtaking and the vast "taiga" of Eastern Siberia leaves one speechless, our native Scots pine surviving there in -50°C.

Teaching piping and judging piping at Highland Gatherings occupied much of my time. The highlight of piping was escorting newly weds to Pier 43 in San Francisco where they plunged 15 feet into the Pacific Ocean to the strain of "Over the Sea to Skye" and "Crossing the Minch". They survived.

Our younger daughter was head teacher at a local school, and I coached her boys and girls in shinty, the ancient game from which sprang golf and hockey and the ability to swing the claymore.

I coached until I was 73 but getting slower and wary of 12 year old boys felt it was time to call it a day.

Involvement with the Highlands and Islands Consultative Council and the Inland Revenue Commissioners I found mundane after Alaska, Siberia and the African bush.

I still function in land use with 2 small estates, one devoted entirely

to forestry. The other of about 7,000 acres, with 1,000 acres of woodland is being developed for native pinewood, stalking, fishing and game, a very exciting land use project.

I walk my chocolate labrador daily, play the pipe, write letters with a Parker and Ivory ink - a daughter gave us a computer - it went in the bin.

Archie Smith's book on David Douglas encouraged Ben Seniscal to write, particularly as they were at Benmore together. He feels he has many personal connections with David Douglas; a photo of one of the two original Douglas Firs on Mansfield Estate at Glenalmond - working on the Scone policy woods, spending much time in the Pacific North-west. He has a fascinating account of significance of his name.

I retired on medical grounds in 1969 and this led to much interesting temporary work and lots of travel. My pension was always sufficient to keep me in food if nothing else. I attempted retraining but my mind was no use for thinking jobs and my body no use for hard labour.

During the 1980s I worked the summers as an assistant lockkeeper on the River Thames, spending the winters in Mexico staying mainly with a family in the manner of a slave at the time of Aristotle, as helper and tutor. In 1991 I married Rosa with the hope of living there, but it proved impossible and I returned to this country. Due to age I was given a house here and now with my forestry, State pensions and Child Benefit (for Daniel 6½) permission has been given for Rosa to live here; they came over in mid-January. Given the chance to study and write, in the tradition of the Gaelic bard - the Senachie, my name has become very significant. As the Latin version of Stewart it means service as old servant, it is the one in charge. Going back to the time of the caves, it is in place names, mainly ports, it is in tools, including the weeding hook and the plough. It is in trees, forest learning circles and sorcery. This leads on to beliefs, religion, myths and legends; sacred and profane is in the name, the hooligan and royalty. They are the barbarians who became indispensable and eventually took over. In law there is the Seniscal as Sheriff (from a plaque in Latin in Dunkeld Cathedral) with the Marshall and Fiscal. The strangest result was finding that my name, my life work experiences travel are all in the name; my name is my life. Most of my postings were to Stewart lands, even in Bedfordshire. I also followed the path of the Celtic Church with place names and mountains wherever.

My daughters-in-law, the MacDonalds are involved. The students at Benmore from Northern Ireland also qualify as the Dalriada, and all are linked in fact and legend with Glen Etive and the Buchaille Etives above Glencoe. I looked after the planting on Ben Cruachan in 1966. There is an old song called Cruachan Ben with many references in the area and Scotland generally, especially the islands. Benachie, where I was sent in 1959, has the translation of Belle Isle on Terre, which is quite appropriate with an actual place of this name in Brittany.

There is a considerable amount of material on all aspects of the name which has in it the origin of the Celts and Gauls, it links Caledon with the Chilterns. There are more old slaves in modern surnames than is apparent, like those Stewarts who are not "sib to the king". I have been finding objects related to the name and places and they are forming a collection for display. A weeding hook would be very welcome if someone knows of an ex-forestry one for sale. As Calabozo it is an example of the earliest tool ie me in 1953 going on to the plough in 1954 (at Ledmore) with Coulter.

FROM THE EDITOR

In the last issue Geoff Rouse suggested the older members may like to contribute wartime stories. I have only received three replies. Either memories are very very dim, or there are few entertaining stories. If there are no more contributions the idea is a "dead duck", but I shall publish the stories in FCRA NEWS. Henry Smith has had more

success with memories of the Forester Training Schools as his article shows. FCRA NEWS relies on you, the reader, to send us some entertaining story or anecdote, I cannot "manufacture" them. If you want to keep in touch with friends or colleagues - start writing. Just send it to me, I'll do the rest. Material in any form is welcome.

OBITUARIES

Alan Mackay has sent an account of **DAVID WOODBURN's** life, who died last August aged 90. He graduated at Edinburgh in 1938 and went to Malaya as a rubber planter. During World War II he was captured by the Japanese and endured three years as a prisoner. On his return he joined the FC in 1945, retiring in 1981. He had tours in Lochgilphead, Perth, Dunkeld and finally Inverness. His connection with forestry continued during retirement when he became secretary of the North Region RSFS. After his first wife's death, he married Scilla. They moved to Lossiemouth in retirement, where he enjoyed new friendships, an extended family, hours of pleasure on the bowling green and his post as secretary of Moray Golf Club.

It was with sadness that we learned that **SANDY MORRISON** died suddenly but peacefully at his home in Glasgow on 9 December 1999. On first joining the Commission in 1953 Sandy worked as a Forest Worker and Ganger in Research before being appointed to a District Officer II post in North Scotland where he worked in Inverness and Fort William. A spell with the Director Scotland Office led to promotion in 1962. The following year he took over as District Officer in Fort William where he remained until he was promoted to Assistant Conservator in the West of Scotland Conservancy in Glasgow in 1969. Further promotion to Conservator in 1976 took him to the East Scotland Conservancy in Aberdeen. Two years later he took over as Director Private Woodlands and Land Use Planning in HQ. His final tour of duty took him back to Glasgow as Conservator of what had become the Mid Scotland Conservancy where he remained until his retirement in 1990.

Sandy will be remembered for his positive and energetic management style. He could be relied upon to provide frank and honest opinions at all times and his advice and good sense were greatly valued. The standards of management and professional discipline which he set were of the highest order.

Following his retirement Sandy remained in

Glasgow where he pursued his interest in music and in recent years became actively involved with Scottish Opera.

Roger Nock at Llandoverly FD tells of the death in September of **TREVOR DAVIES** of Llanllawddog, aged 77. For 35 years he gave unfailing loyalty to Brechfa Forest both as a skilled worker and as a Signs Unit Technician, while also caring for his small holding. He was highly respected by colleagues and staff and will be greatly missed by all who knew him including his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"MELYS YR HEDD Y GWEITHIWR"

Helga Lane, who was **JOHN WHITE's** District Clerk until he retired in 1979 has sent in a commemoration after his death in November.

He graduated in forestry at Edinburgh and during the war worked with The Timber Corps where he met his future wife. After the war he went to the Dean and Sussex. Then in 1952 it was off to South Wales during the time of great forestry expansion, and finally to Wiltshire where he retired.

I have heard of **PETER AWBERY's** death. He spent most of his career in South East England, finishing as Head Forester. He retired to Faversham and was an active member of the Retirement Association.

Tony Palmer tells of **VIC WILLIAMS** death last July at Aberystwyth, aged 80. He started his FC career in mapping work in the Wales directorate in the late 1940s. Promotion took him to the Scotland Directorate at Edinburgh. He later moved to HQ Basingstoke, but on promotion in 1974 to Senior Cartographer, he transferred to the Central Water Planning Unit at Reading. Vic had a strong personality and played a key role in standardising draughting practices throughout the FC. He was an unforgettable character.

I have drawn together reminiscences from a number of sources about **MALCOLM**

MACPHERSON who died in March. He graduated from Aberdeen in 1949, starting work with Tilhill, but joined the FC in 1950. His early career took him to Argyll, which was followed by a tour as Acquisition Officer, Edinburgh. He then became DO first at Fochabers, next at Craven Arms in the Marches District, and finally back to Lorne. His career had given him wide experience in land use management. So in retirement in 1986 he became a consultant for a number of smaller mixed estates in West Scotland and had an extensive range of other clients.

His hobby was his work, and even after two severe illnesses in retirement, fast recovery was in part due to his desire to "get back to work". The sea was also in his blood, probably due to a spell in the Navy from 1943 to 1946. Sailing around the west coast was one of his passions. He was also a keen supporter of the RSFS, serving on Council and making a special study of recruitment. A charming quiet man with many friends.

ALISTAIR MORRISON's widow would like him to be remembered. He died at 75 after 10 years in retirement from Cowal FD as forester. He had started at Carradale, then Kintyre, Lochawe, Oban and Tighnabruach.

ARCHIE MACDONALD, a forest worker of the former Lochawe FD died in April after retiring in 1991. When he left school he worked with the Caledonian Propping Co and then Hall of Aberdeen when they were building the Eredine houses. After this he started with the FC and had a break to complete National Service with the Argylls in Cyprus.

TOM DALGLISH's son would like him to be remembered. He died in May just before his 86th birthday. He retired from Sherwood as Chief Forester in 1974.

The obituary for **DON MACCASKILL** will appear in the next issue.

FRED REMEMBERS

In this issue, Fred Hummel recalls Lord Robinson and his assertive approach to issues. Sir Harry Champion had urged the FC to locate its research centre at what was then to be called the Commonwealth Forestry Institute at Oxford, insisting that a back-up of academics and other researchers was essential. Lord Robinson on the other hand favoured Alice Holt, and stated that FC research must be practice orientated, and of direct value to the afforestation programme which he had been instrumental at planning. He won the argument, and the FC established its research base at Alice Holt. Lord Robinson believed in a very direct, and hands-on approach. He came in one day and said "Hummel - what do you know about the growth of oak in the absence of competition? How fast can you get it to grow?" I said "Well, I am afraid we haven't done any work on that yet, sir, and there is very little published information." He replied "Alright, go and find out and report back in 2 months." We had to drop everything else and go for it! He got his answers.

Welcome to Retirement

Mary Black	Edinburgh	Moir Barty	Edinburgh
Helen Johnson	Edinburgh	David Veitch	Cairnbaan
Agnes Gorman	Galloway FD	Louise McLay	Edinburgh
Gareth Davies	Resolfen	Elizabeth Porter	Edinburgh
Petra Bray	Aberystwyth	George Meacham	Northants FD
Mike Sanderson	Kielder FD	Dick Byrne	Ae FD
Sandy Sandilands	Kincardine FD	John Knight	Cambridge
Andrea Murray	Edinburgh	Robert More	Aberfoyle
Marion Walker	Edinburgh	Robert Cairnie	New Galloway
Ailsa Ward	New Forest FD	Lawrence Wingham	Wickham, Hants
Doreen Turner	Dean	Harry Pepper	Alice Holt
Tony Sharpe	Newton	John Rickards	Sherston, Wilts
Alan Craythorne	Edinburgh	William Gowans	Strachur
Arthur Barlow	Edinburgh	Mrs M Greenwood	Alice Holt
Alistair Grant	West Argyll FD	Morgan Bulman	Tregaron
Clive Large	Kielder FD	Brian Watson	Norley, Cheshire
Jeanette Atkinson	Roslin	Walter Dickson	Kielder

SURVIVING A RETIREMENT HOLIDAY!

Graham Smith was Head Forester at Culloden in production until he retired in the early '90s. Prior to that he had been mainly on machinery research in Work Study, particularly with John Drummond on winches in West Scotland.

Another Monday! Drain the water system, lock up the house - then off to Dalcross -4°C for the start of our trip of a lifetime, six months of travelling half way round the world. The Public Address System announced that the flight to London Heathrow would be delayed due to high winds! Eventually arriving at Heathrow we were out on the tarmac with a large container in free flight in the 70 mph gusts and very little time to change terminals. A good relaxing start! Hong Kong on 29 October 1996 at 1800 hours a warm 27°C for 2 days, with our luggage catching up with us 6 hours before we left! Kowloon was memorable for the park with hundreds of 3-5 year olds, all in the uniform of their schools with matching school bags, the delight expressed when a pigeon came down to eat some grain. Nathan Road with fascinating bustling shops (firm grip on credit cards). The high population and concentration of everything making just walking and observing an education. On 31 October we took off via Singapore, arriving in Perth at 0050 on 1 November - a sociable time to meet friends we had not seen for 28 years! Summer had not arrived so we were informed that with temperatures of 27°C it was pleasantly hot which tempted us not to hurry anywhere. We were staying in Armadale which is situated on the leading rise of the Darling Range, therefore any winds from the west helps to cool temperatures. Our hosts suggested a trip to Albany on the south-west coast. Australia is big - as we passed through good farming country as far as the eye could see with large herds of cattle and sheep - very little habitation. The occasional road train - with very large multiple trailers broke the monotony of the journey. A visit to the Walpole-Nornalup National Park to see the Valley Of The Giants with the remnants of three species of red flowering eucalyptus which are only found in a few thousand hectares of this corner of Australia. The trees are suffering due to soil compaction of visitors. A walkway has been erected throughout the area 40 metres up in the tree canopy - 600 metres long. The trees still tower 15-20 metres above the walkway. They are 16

metres round the base. Albany is a good centre for numerous National Parks with many unusual features. The world's largest Whaling Museum in a closed Whaling factory. Some amazing rock structures, bays, beaches and blowholes all made by the Southern Ocean hitting the basalt rocks on the coast. Memorable interesting meal of yabbies. Returning to Perth through the Stirling Mountains. Thirty-five kilometres from habitation, burnt bush as far as the eye could see, both sides of the road. Bang a rear tyre on an untarred road. Eventually finding the spare under the boot in 4 inches of water! "Where is the jack?" - "I've got the handbook" - "Good" - pause to read handbook - "It is under the bonnet". "How long ago were these nuts taken off, they are rusted." Five minutes and a hernia later - "That's got it". No pump and a soggy tyre. Next 35 km driven as if on thin ice, breathing out to keep the car lighter! Under 10 psi is not good on unsurfaced road. Off once again 2,000 miles across the 'Island' - Sydney welcomed us with high humidity and temperatures of 24°C. A beautiful but brash city with lots to do including the harbour, Kings Cross, miles of underground shops, markets, museums etc. After 3 days we made our way up the Pacific Highway, 8 hours in a car with 35°C temperature, thank goodness for air conditioning. Welcoming wineries, banana and blueberry plantations, koalas and many other funny animals and the heaviest rain and greatest heat we have ever experienced, 20 inches in 36 hours, temperatures 40°C within 2 days of this deluge. Flight to Sydney and onward to welcome cool Auckland, NZ of 22°C - for the next five months.

TIM STEAD: AN APPRECIATION

Tim was a sculptor in wood, a craftsman in designing and making furniture and someone who could connect trees and forests with art. He may have been better known in Scotland, but his work can be found throughout Britain. His works included furniture for Cafe Gandolfi in Glasgow, a wooden version of Skara Brae in the McClelland Galleries, Glasgow and Explorations in Wood at Inverleith House and the Botanic Ash, both in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. 1993 was significant, for while foresters at the "Restoring Borders Woodlands" conference were focusing on tree planting, he was evolving ideas for a Wood School. He sold symbolic axe heads to help finance the successful purchase of woodland which was to become Wooplaw Community Wood. The Wood School was set up at Monteviot near Jedburgh, with the help of the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust, as one of the major aspects of the "Working with Trees" project of the Borders Forest Trust.

One of his final projects was the Millennium Clock for the Royal Museum in Edinburgh. It was a co-operative venture using his woodwork and work of others in animated sculptures, coloured glass and the clock mechanism. It's there in the main hall. For his contribution to art he received the MBE last year, a fitting tribute to a man who was an artist, a woodman and a forester, and who gave pleasure to all with an amazing output of unforgettable works.

Tim died in May, aged only 48. (More of his work can be seen in "Explorations in Wood - The Furniture Sculpture of Tim Stead" by Giles Sutherland.)

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FORESTER TRAINING SCHOOLS

In the last issue of FCRA NEWS Henry Smith suggested it may be possible to write a history of the Forester Training Schools. He says there has been a good early response, but he needs more replies to give a comprehensive cover of the many years they were in existence. The information he has received is mainly on Glentress, Dean and Lynford. He hopes that more of you will write so that he gaps can be filled. There is not enough material yet to proceed, so please do send in any contribution so he can judge whether it is a viable project.

Send information to him or me.

COME ON - JOIN US!

The Yorkshire Group has sent in its 2000 programme in the hope that any non-members may wish to have a "try out" before parting with the subscription. All are welcome - how about members from elsewhere while on holiday in Yorkshire. These Yorkshire folk are very hospitable!

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26 July - Newby Hall and Gardens

27 September - Theakston Brewery and Uredale Glass, Masham

25 October - Castle Museum, York

FAREWELL

		Retired	Age
James Adams	Petersfield	1986	78
William Barnes	Wellingborough	1966	86
Graham Cook	Gt Shelford Cambs	1979	85
Henry Henderson	Glasgow	1982	80
Philip Hitchin	Dawlish	1974	82
William Jeffrey	Dunoon	1986	65
Roderick Jones	Llanrwst	1988	75
Evan Jones	Port Talbot	1980	84
Evan D Jones	Abergeron	1979	76
George Lamb	Slatterthwaite	1985	78
William MacDonald	Dunkeld	1986	77
Mary MacLeod	Lochgilhead	1979	78
James Munro	Munlochy	1986	78
William Murdoch	Forres	1965	84
Glyn Owen	Newtown Powys	1990	74
William Partridge	Cinderford	1976	83
Raymond Ray	Falstone	1988	76
Jessie Reid	Inverness	1969	89
Donald Ross	Ardross	1978	86
George Stewart	Brechin	1969	79
Ann Wyatt	Hampton, Middlesex	1995	48

FCRA News is a joint Retirement Association and Slasher production.

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