



JOHN BILTON JACK

1 March 1927 - 25 March 2022



John Jack was a consummate professional forester and a forward thinker, well versed in field administration, who progressed to leadership of research and education activities in the Forests Commission of Victoria. He later transferred to the Department of Premier and Cabinet to be a senior advisor to the State Government on environmental matters.

During his early upbringing he lived on a farm in the central goldfields area of Victoria. His experience of nearby bushland and the company of some learned family members influenced him to take an inquisitive and studious interest in tree culture and scientific matters.

He decided on a career in forestry and undertook the three-year course at the Victorian School of Forestry, Creswick, during 1944-46, from which he graduated as Dux of his year of 12 students. On joining the Forests Commission staff he worked for two years at Mansfield in areas of native forest. He then continued his training at Melbourne University to achieve the Bachelor of Science in Forestry. His next appointments were to Districts with pine nurseries and plantations, including Macedon (where he made his first home with his wife, Joan) and Stanley. When the Commission decided to amalgamate the administration of plantations with that of the larger, surrounding Districts with native forest he was transferred from Stanley to Beechworth in 1958, and in 1964 to Myrtleford.

His next move, in 1965, was to Melbourne for a short period as Assistant Chief Superintendent of Plantations. This was followed in 1966 by appointment to Chief Forest Research Officer where he guided the work of a team of scientists and technicians undertaking work on a wide range of disciplines with significant achievements. These programs included silviculture, hydrology, genetics, nutrition, management and mensuration, pathology, entomology and pest and disease control.

While in this position he examined the competitive effects of 'weeds' (eucalypts and wattles) on the growth of pine trees in plantations, for which he was awarded the Master of Science in Forestry in 1970.



In 1971 he became Chief of the Division of Forestry Education and Research.

About 1974 he took six months long service leave to travel extensively through Europe and Japan with his family, during which time he made contact with many forestry centres. Part of the return journey was an eight-day adventurous journey on the Trans Siberian Railway, crossing communist Russia during the 'cold war' time. Very few Australians did that.

In 1976 he left the Forests Commission when he transferred to the Department of Premier and Cabinet as a senior advisor and planner, and even as Deputy Secretary to two Premiers. He was particularly well equipped to advise on the need for scientifically based forest management, policy and practice to meet increasing public awareness of environmental issues. He also became involved with issues beyond forestry. These included the initial chairmanship of the Victorian Garden State Committee and a continuing role with the Potter Farmland Plan. The latter enabled him to advance his ideas on appropriate tree planting, location of fences and windbreaks, management of soil erosion and salinity, in order to optimize crop and livestock yields.

He retired from the Victorian Public Service in 1987 but continued his interest with the Potter Farmland Plan until 1998. In 'retirement' John continued to communicate with friends and colleagues on these subjects. In 1998 he co-authored a book 'Analog Forestry Handbook' published by Monash Press.

John's service to the Institute of Foresters of Australia, including as Chair of the Victorian Division (1978-80), his support for a successful cross-border group, the Murray Catchment Branch, of which he was the inaugural Chair in 1959, and significant contributions to the many facets of forestry, was recognized by the Institute by making him a Fellow, a well deserved award.

Leon Pederick