

Free, Roy (obituary from The Forester June 2014)

Roy was born on 13 February 1928 at Quambatook, Victoria. His father, Leslie Free, farmed at Lalbert before moving to Albury, New South Wales. Roy attended Albury Public School and Albury High School, where he was sports captain in 1945.

In 1946 Roy commenced a forestry traineeship in March at a salary of £110 per year. In 1950 Roy graduated as a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from the University of Sydney, and Diploma of Forestry with distinction from the Australian Forestry School. Following secondment after graduation he became a demonstrator and researcher at the AFS for the next academic year.

Roy was appointed a forester on probation at Batlow in March 1951, and was confirmed in the position shortly after. In August 1956 he was appointed Senior Forester Silviculture assisting the District Forester and in November of that year he assumed control of Batlow Subdistrict. At the end of July 1958 he became Senior Forester Tumut, and in March 1962 became District Forester at Tumut. At the same time he was also appointed Departmental Officer and a member of the Upper Murray Regional Development Committee of New South Wales Treasury. In February 1969 he was appointed District Forester in charge of pine plantations in the Sydney head office, and in January 1971 he became Chief Forest Inspector.

In December 1979 Roy became Deputy Chief of Forest Operations Division, and in October 1980 was appointed Assistant Commissioner for Forests. Roy served in that position until his retirement in September 1988. He was part of a dynamic team along with Commissioner Dr Wal Gentle and Assistant Commissioner Jack Stewart.

During his service life Roy served on a number of other departmental advisory and consulting bodies, was the government's nominee on the board of Sawmillers Exports Proprietary Limited, and was a member of the New South Wales Bushfire Council and its coordinating committee. Following his retirement he was appointed by the Minister as Chair of the New South Wales Timber Advisory Council.

Throughout his career Roy was a leader among his peers, with many successful endeavours including:

- The implementation of the Hume Snowy Bushfire Prevention Scheme which actively enlisted the cooperation of all stakeholders in the coordination of bushfire prevention and control within the region. It became the model for similar organisations throughout the eastern part of New South Wales.
- The successful formulation and implementation of occupational health and safety programs within the Forestry Commission with a dramatic improvement in lost time injury statistics throughout the workforce. These efforts reduced the Accident Frequency Rate to less than 10, which was unheard of in forestry at the time. The value of this work continues to this day.
- Served for 16 years on the committee of the Forestry Field Officers Association, a vocational branch within the New South Wales Public Service Association committed to improving the industrial welfare of members.
- The initial development of the Tumut Batlow Tumbarumba softwood plantations and the subsequent creation of major industries based on this resource including Australian Newsprint Mills at Albury, Visy, Hyne Timber, and Carter Holt Harvey's which set the professional standards underpinning today's plantation management. He took a keen interest in plantation nurseries and strongly supported technical advances in his positions at head office.

As Chief Forest Inspector Roy was responsible for directing recruitment and development of professional and technical staff within the commission. Many a career succeeded or perished as a consequence of his legendary mentoring sessions that were held over a few beers. Roy told many a good story about his time around Tumut and Batlow. One such story concerns the construction of the wooden chapel at the now defunct afforestation prison farm at Laurel Hill. With Roy's ingenuity, assistance from Kopsen's sawmill, prison officers, and inmates, a handsome A-frame building was constructed. When the camp closed down years later the chapel was moved to Tumbarumba where, with additions, it is now the Shire Library. Roy was behind the scenes there as well!

During Roy's 19 years at Tumut he was responsible for the development of many operational and administration practices

Roy was a Life Member and Fellow of the Institute and maintained an active interest in its affairs. He was Chairman of the IFA NSW Division, and National President from 1979 to 1981. The N.W Jolly Medal for 2001 was awarded to him. This is the Institute's highest honour, for outstanding service to the profession of forestry in Australia.

Roy is missed by his friends and colleagues, but sadly many of the younger foresters around Tumut will have never heard of the peerless master forester who created the resource and investment in the region that now supports their livelihoods.

Roy is survived by Gwen, his wife of 63 years and children Alan, Rae and Brian. Brian still lives in Tumut.

Compiled by Peter Crowe, assisted by Bob Newman