

Nielsen, Rob (from The Forester Dec 2006)

Robin (Rob) Nielsen died in Canberra on October 17, 2006

Rob took up a Queensland Forestry Department cadetship in 1945, graduating in 1950 from the Australian Forestry School (with Distinction), and from Queensland University. As happened to many new graduates at the time, his first job was running a forest inventory camp. This was followed by a series of appointments to district offices in south-east Queensland dealing with native forests and softwood plantations. In 1956 Rob moved to head office as officer in charge of the state's forest inventory. But just three years later he resigned to manage a private radiata pine plantation in the higher altitude border country. This was owned by Hancock and Gore, a major Queensland plywood manufacturer. In 1961 Rob returned to Brisbane as Hancock and Gore's logging manager - and also to continue to manage the plantation. But circumstances were to change again: the firm had management problems and Rob could see little future with them. He resigned to take up a position with the Snowy Mountains Authority.

Rob was to stay with the Authority from 1964 to 1981 and to become widely known for his work in developing poplar plantations on river flats close to Tumut. Here he was dealing, among other things, with the selection and testing of the most appropriate cultivars (with contributions from Professor Lindsay Pryor and Alan Brown), leasing the plantations for grazing and interplanting with other crops, the sale of thinnings as small logs, chipwood and wood wool, and the marketing of high quality ply logs to major match and plywood companies in several Australian centres. The business side of Rob's management role, and a great interest in economic matters, motivated his undertaking an external economics degree through Queensland University. This was completed in 1976.

From 1972, poplar rust was beginning to have a serious impact on the poplar-growing industry throughout New South Wales. In response to this disease and a declining demand for, and increasing importation of matches (the major poplar product at the time), the Snowy Mountains Authority sold the plantations in 1980. Rob moved to Canberra to pursue other interests.

Throughout his career and in retirement, Rob maintained a close association with the Institute of Foresters of Australia. He was, from 1957-1959, Secretary of the Institute Council while located in Queensland, and later held various positions in Divisions and Branches of the Institute in southern NSW and the ACT. He was elected a Fellow of the Institute in 1991 and was, for a number of years, Australian Secretary of the Commonwealth Forestry Association.

Rob was not a man attracted to climbing the rungs of the corporate ladder. Rather he gained satisfaction through remaining close to the land, trees and the forests, and working, as an individual and largely as his own master, to achieve personal and professional goals.



