

An appreciation Joe Rawlings (1906-1978)

Alan E. Esler

Note – this article was originally published in the *Botany Division Newsletter 33*, May 1978 – which was part of a compilation by Alan Esler and Lynne Scott: "Joe, in memory of GB (Joe) Rawlings, forest pathologist and Character" (copy held in Auckland Museum library, 16p.).

"Joe Rawlings died at his home at Tokerau Beach near Kaitaia on 28 April 1978. When Lynne Scott visited him a few weeks earlier his body was weak but his mind was as astute as ever as he treated her to samples of his wit, expounded his theories about the influence of the moon's gravity on germinating seeds, and showed her how to tell the time from the stars. The obituary writers will tell of George Boris (Joe) Rawlings leaving England as a youngster, his degree in forestry at Auckland and Canterbury, his Depression years as a gold miner and his career as New Zealand's first and most renowned forest pathologist. In this appreciation it would be his wish that I write of Old Joe as DSIR Botany Division staff remember him.

Above all Joe was a character of the kind that John A. Lee refers to as an unstandardised man. Education, the leveler, did not put him in the same stream as the rest of us but was a springboard that his intelligent mind could use – not for personal advancement, because that meant nothing to him, but to unravel the mysteries of nature. He refused to be caught up in the scurry of life and always made sure he had plenty of time to investigate profoundly.

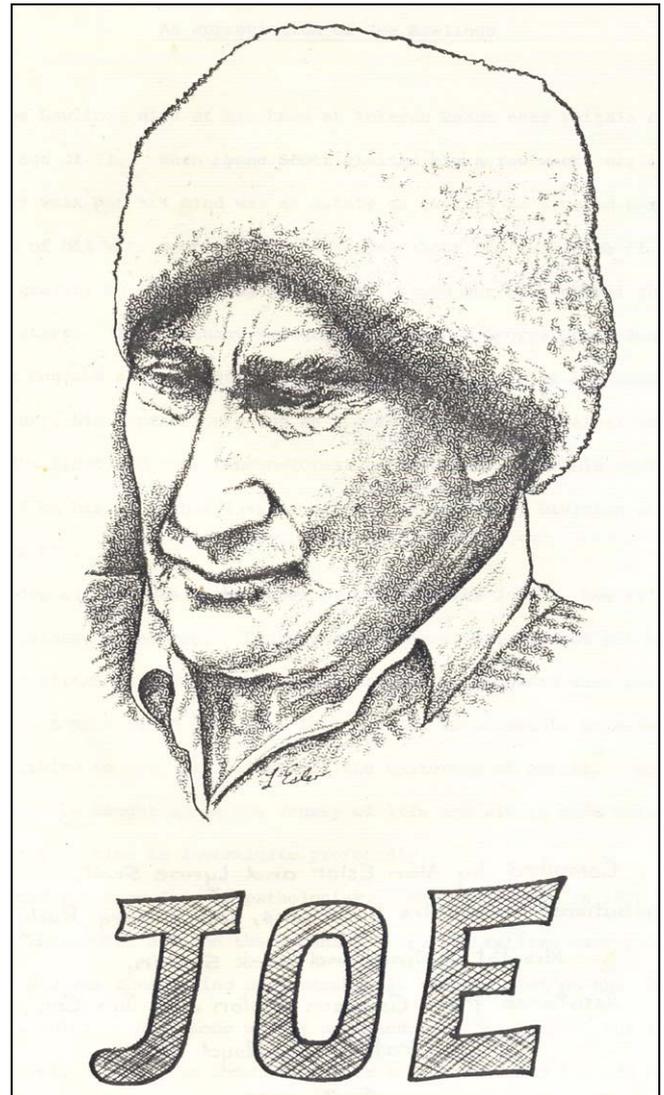
I did not know Joe the pathologist. When I met him in 1970 he was Joe the character, and Joe the botanist. He had retired some years earlier and was then living on a scrubby 10 ha plot on the edge of the Kerikeri Inlet. His abode was as unorthodox as Joe himself but it was not a hovel. The walls were no barrier to the wind and the odd blackberry shoot. He was not a man for routines but he went to bed when the sun went down and rose with it in the morning. He had no electricity and he reasoned that this system was natural and logical. Joe later moved to Tokerau Beach.

In his retirement he set about finding every native and introduced plant species which had been recorded in Northland. His quests lead to many new records, among them the discovery of *Grammitis rawlingsii*. His greatest delight was to pull on his gumboots and woolly hat and go out and look for "some nice things". Most of these found their way to the Botany Division Auckland substation for checking. Even in the sober business of plant identification he

found fun. A specimen of tall fescue for checking was accompanied by a note:

*"As a feed it's not so hot,
It makes their little feet rot –
Maybe ergot maybe not."*

He found very little reason for being serious if seriousness was not called for. Not everyone knew how to take Joe's leg pulling but when he joined us on forays in Northland he found jolly company with Ruth Mason, Sandra Astridge, Diane Smith and Shirley Bowman. His humour was typified in the following incident at Waipoua while he was lumbering along a track in his gumboots and woolly hat. A group of tourists had caught their first glimpse of an immense kauri. Amid their gasps of wonderment Joe was heard to say loud enough for everyone to hear "... and just to think of it, I planted that tree".



There are enough Joe stories to fill a book – about Joe the botanist, Joe the character, the mathematician, the astronomer, the entomologist, the mycologist, the soldier and the would-be sailor. New Zealand lost one of its most colourful characters and the former Botany Division lost one of its very good friends.”

Postscript by Ewen Cameron

Although most of Joe Rawlings’ plant collections are in the Landcare Research herbarium at Lincoln (CHR), 75 sheets are held in the Auckland Museum herbarium (AK), of which two-thirds came from the gifted herbarium of Alan Esler. They are mainly collected from Northland in the early 1970s, they are all vascular plants (two-thirds native, one-third naturalised), often jointly collected, and include many ferns and fern allies. Interesting records from Northland include:

Natives: *Blechnum vulcanicum*, *Cyclosorus interruptus*, *Hebe acutiflora*, *Korthalsala salicornioides*, *Microlaena carsei*, *Peperomia tetraphylla*, *Pseudopanax ferox*, *Spiranthes novae-zelandiae*, *Thelypteris confluens* and *Utricularia australis*.

Naturalised species: *Callistemon rigidus*, *Carex divisa*, *Iberis umbellata*, *Illecebrum verticillatum*, *Panicum huachucae*, *Polygala virgata* and *Sacciolepis indica*.



Illustrations by Lloyd Esler.

Book Review: “Legumes of the World” edited by G. Lewis, B. Schrire, B. Mackinder & M. Lock.

Review by Rhys Gardner

About half a century ago Kew giant John Hutchinson single-handedly began to revise Bentham and Hooker's "Genera Plantarum". The Leguminosae take up most of first of the two volumes he completed – 483 genera, in 269 pages of description, keys and bibliography (Hutchinson 1964). The treatment is a classical one (Fig. 1A), consisting of text only (though H. was a capable artist, his vast experience giving him an eye for unusual features of habit, leaf arrangement, etc.; Fig 1B).

The present book too is based on Kew resources (¾ million legume specimens!), but is a world apart in character: it is an illustrated overview of the world's

legume genera. Floras and journals have been searched for line or sometimes colour illustrations, and colour photographs have been obtained from many botanist-photographers. Where older drawings could not be found, several artists, notably Kew's Pat Halliday, have supplied originals (e.g., Fig. 1C). Although only of A6 size the drawings are first-class in clarity and together showcase three centuries of devotion to the craft. The photographs, generally of flowers or inflorescences, are excellent too, colourful of course but also thoroughly testing the temperate botanist's concept of "typical" in this huge group.