

Bruce Burson from US to NZ & Back

You could say that Bruce Burson has been there and back again. The American sawmill veteran just returned from an 11-year stint in New Zealand to take over as Bright Wood's new Lumber Quality Control Manager.

Bruce was born in Guam while his father was serving in the Air Force. He grew up in Ohio and moved to California with his family after graduating from high school. He landed his first sawmill job in 1974. "That was when working at sawmills and lumber mills was one of the prime jobs that you could get," Bruce said. He passed the test to become a Western Wood Products Association (WWPA) certified lumber grader in 1984.

Fourteen years later Bruce was working for a small sawmill in Marysville. "They were getting lumber from New Zealand, something called radiata pine," Bruce said. "I went out to dinner with the sellers and they told me about New Zealand. This was the first time I had heard of New Zealand and I was thinking how much I would like to go there."

He got his chance a short time later when he answered a classified ad in the Random Lengths newsletter for a WWPA certified lumber grader at a NZ mill. He arrived at the Wanganui airport on the country's north island in 1998 with a suitcase, set of golf clubs, and a carry-on bag.

Bruce worked for NDG Pine for six years before that operation folded and he hired on with Bright Wood New Zealand (BWNZ). His responsibilities expanded from teaching U.S. grading rules to also managing the sawmill's planer and kilns.

He moved back to the U.S. in October to take over the Lumber Quality Control position after Jim Buckley retired. "My whole background has been sawmills and planer mills, so working for Bright Wood who takes the shop lumber I have graded all these years, cuts it up, and produces door and window parts, mouldings, and millwork gives me a better appreciation for what my job was actually doing."

"Grading is judgment," Bruce said. "When you are grading, you are putting a price on a piece of lumber. Bright Wood

wants to be sure they are getting their money's worth and that is where I come in."

Bruce's first reaction to New Zealand was awe at their vast plantation forests along with culture shock. "It is a very laid back country," Bruce said. "Where Americans tend to be more focused on our jobs and future, New Zealanders seem to live for the moment. Their big thing is overseas experiences and they travel a lot."



Bruce Burson, pictured with his wife Dorothy during a visit to Sydney Harbor, returned to the United States after working in the New Zealand lumber industry for 11 years. The certified lumber grader and former manager of Bright Wood New Zealand's planer mill and dry kilns took over as Lumber Quality Control Manager for the Oregon operations when Jim Buckley retired.

Bruce caught the same travel bug shortly after he married his wife Dorothy, a New Zealander. They visited many places in New Zealand along with Australia, Hong Kong, China, and New Caledonia (an island in the south pacific).

"I really liked Hong Kong," Bruce said. "Even though it was a big city and very busy, they had a great infrastructure; you could jump on a train and go anywhere in the city. China was the most different because when you think of going to a new place, you assume all you have to do is get a map.

But you can't do that in China because you can't even recognize the characters to find out where you are."

When Bruce and Dorothy moved from the north island to the southernmost tip of the south island for his job with BWNZ, they had to adjust to a new climate. "It gets very cold and wet," Bruce said. "The temperatures are penetrating because it is so humid. Where I come from in Fresno, California, it could be 103 degrees and you'd feel hot, but it was dry heat. I have felt hotter at 76 degrees in Invercargill because it is so humid."

Now the couple is in for another adjustment as they settle in to the high desert of Central Oregon. "I am looking forward to summer because I went from winter to winter by moving in October since New Zealand's seasons are the opposite of here," Bruce said. Dorothy, who stayed behind with their two cats and is waiting on residency approval, came for a 10-day visit in February to see their new home for the first time. "She said she is glad to be here and that she liked all the brown because she is tired of seeing green all the time," Bruce said.

Sounds like they came to the right place and welcome to Central Oregon Bruce and Dorothy.