SEEING THE WOOD THROUGH THE TREES

Buttons as well as Houses from New Zealand's Forests

WHEN you build a house, or have one built for you, the monotonous tapping of the carpenter's hammer is but the echo of the axe which swung in a forest months or years before. But the man with the axe was not the first who laboured to provide the house. The measurer had been there before him, and the surveyor still earlier. But the measurer's steel tape is actually the first tool used in building a house.

The measurer is a trained man. He may have been to a University, or to the Foresty school at Rotorua or Tapanui, Otago. He has learned the appraisal of timber, how to assess the value of a standing forest in millable feet. He must be able to fend for himself in the bush, know the use of tools, be something of a draughtsman and have a knowledge of forest administration.

Off on a Cruise

Once the timber-measurer knows the boundaries to be worked — a surveyor may have attended to these preliminaries—how much timber stands inside these boundaries must be calculated. He measures sample areas of an acre each to arrive at the average volume per acre; then he goes through the region, measuring and marking every tree to be felled. A few years ago, the common practice was to make a "ten per cent. cruise," which meant measuring all the trees in strips eight chains wide, these strips representing 10 per cent. of the total area, and running parallel through it. Nowadays, however, the cruise is a complete one, and all millable trees are measured.

Two Trees May Make a House

With his tape the measurer takes the girth of the trees and calculates the diameter breast-high whence comes the contraction "D.B.H." used by timber workers. The length of millable bole is measured with another instrument, to the point where branches or knots make the timber not worth converting into boards.

A modern five-roomed house contains about 10,000 feet of timber, and it is not uncommon in parts of the North Island for rimu trees to produce up to 5,000 ft., so that it will take at least two, and probably more trees to build a dwelling; anything more than that quantity of timber in a tree is exceptional. The average tree in the New Zealand bush does not nearly approach that volume. It is a good tree that gives the builder 1,000ft. of sawn boards.

Most of New Zealand's remaining forests are owned by the State or the Maoris; and in the latter case it is a complicated business arranging for the milling of timber. There are negotiations with the owners, appraisal by the State Forest Service, and ratification by

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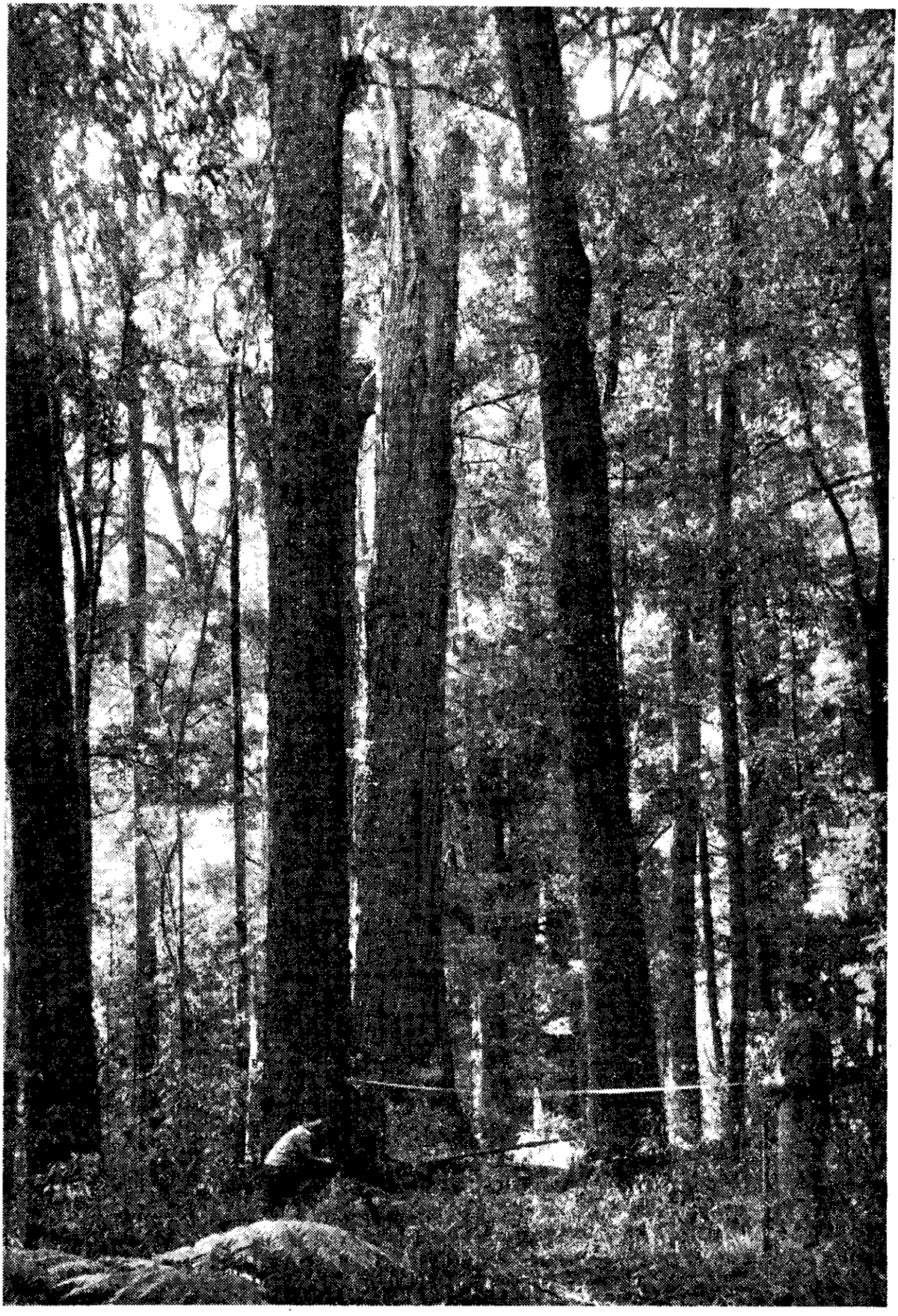

MEN of the State Forest Service measuring the amount of millable timber in a mature rimu