‘… to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.’

Scarred and hatted: *E. camaldulensis* carved by Taungurung people, north-east Victoria.

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Newsletter update

At the Society’s AGM in Augusta last year a new position was created to oversee newsletter production by guest editors. The intention is to standardise the layout of the newsletter, without compromising its flexibility or informal qualities. The holder of the new editorial position (it needs a name; any suggestions?) will liaise closely with the guest editors, undertake final editorial review of each issue and be responsible for finding guest editors. We hope also to make production and distribution of the newsletter more regular, with three issues per year in April, August and December. Members then have certainty about when they need to submit contributions. We would like to introduce regular features such as ‘Letters to the Editor’ and ‘News from Members’. Sue Feary, who kindly offered to be the first person to hold the new co-ordinating position, will be happy to hear from members wanting to take on the role of guest editor for the April and August 2006 newsletters.

LEAF LITTER

The future of Red Cedar

Fyfe Bygrave and Patricia Bygrave are the authors of a new book being published by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) - "Growing Australian Red Cedar and Other Meliaceae Species in Plantation" (RIRDC Publication No. 04/135). The scarce timber from Australian red cedar, other species of mahogany and true cedar, and the cedrelas of the Americas is amongst the most sought after world-wide. Until early last century, red cedar grew in abundance along the east coast of Australia before being virtually wiped out through logging and land clearing for agriculture. Successful establishment of Meliaceae plantations in tropical regions is restricted by a tip moth which damages the young tree, resulting in trees of little commercial value. As a consequence much research has investigated whether the deleterious effects of the insect can be understood and controlled. This book summarises this multi-disciplinary research to give the reader an overview of the problem, and the prospects for future plantations of these species. The book will be launched in early May and copies will be available for $36 (incl postage) from RIRDC - (02) 6272 4819 (tel), <publications@rirdc.com.au> or order through the website www.rirdc.gov.au.

The rise and fall of poplar forestry in Australia

Recently oral historian Dr Margaret Park, assisted by Tony Fearnside, interviewed Rob Nielsen about the use of poplars in commercial forestry in Australia and the reasons why a poplar-based industry did not eventuate. The interview and transcript will be useful for others who might want to take up the story or research this topic further. The interview yielded useful information for interpreting the populatum at Blundells, particularly if other FACTAs (Friends of the ACT Arboretum) contribute details of research and urban forestry aspects. Rob also talked about his early days as a forester in Queensland, the Bryant and May Match Company and the Federal Match Company, as well as his student days and involvement in the Institute of Foresters of Australia.

Tony Fearnside

ACT Arboretum

A new arboretum is planned in Canberra to replace the older one burnt out in the Christmas bushfires of 2003. The 250 hectare site adjacent to Lake Burley Griffin stretches from the cork plantation at the Glenloch interchange in the north to the Molonglo River in the south. The arboretum is intended as a place not only of scientific study, research and education, but also recreation, entertainment and enjoyment. Co-convenors of FACTA – Friends of the ACT Arboretum – Tony Fearnside and Kim Wells believe that ongoing support of governments for many years will be necessary to ensure plans for the arboretum are fully realized. FACTA was established in response to the bushfire that destroyed 15 of Canberra’s 19 arboreta, some dating back to the 1920s.

A decision on the successful design concept is expected by May, with work to begin in July.

Tony Fearnside and Kim Wells

Hunting down Hutchins’ missing report

Australian forest historians will probably best know colonial forester David Hutchins for his 1916 volume A Discussion on Australian Forestry which was important in paving the way for legislation in several Australian states. Hutchins in an appendix offered a critical commentary on the report of the 1913 New Zealand Royal Commission Forestry unaware that he would also be asked to report on forestry in the Dominion. Once in New Zealand he extended his brief far beyond that originally intended, a report on afforestation activity. He ultimately produced two major reports, Waipoua Kauri Forest, its Demarcation and Management in 1918 and New Zealand Forestry Part 1, Kauri forests and forests of the north and forest management the following year. These were the
first really detailed reports informed by colonial scientific forestry to be competed on the New Zealand forests. They occupy an important role in the moves to separate forests administration from the control of the Lands Department and to implement scientific forestry in New Zealand. Hutchins is typically given credit for bringing indigenous forest management back to centre stage in terms of New Zealand forest policy in the early post war years when popular and official attention was firmly focussed on exotic plantations. But as its title suggests Hutchins New Zealand Forestry part I was not the complete report. In preparing material for the Brisbane symposium on the ‘History of the Araucaria forests’, the question of the second part of New Zealand Forests has distracted my attention. In short the accepted position was that the material draft manuscript was incomplete on Hutchins death in November of 1920. Subsequent archival work indicates that the picture is actually somewhat more complicated and that Frank Foster of the State Forest Service in 1923 undertook to edit the manuscript for publication. The work was completed in his own time and took the best part of eight years, by which time Phillips Turner, the Director of Forests, believed that there was no longer any value in its publication, especially given the cost of printing in a period of public service financial stringency. The manuscript was apparently returned to the Public Trust (Hutchins’ executors) and destroyed. That might be the end of the matter with the second part of the report lost. It now seems likely that while the only copy of Foster’s edited manuscript has been destroyed at least some portions of Hutchins’ part II report remain both in Archives New Zealand and at the New Zealand Forest Research Institute in Rotorua. These fragments may be sufficient to provide some additional insights into Hutchins’ politically unpopular views on exotic afforestation activity in New Zealand.

Michael Roche

Research query

As part of a zoology project on a rare invertebrate, I’m interested in reconstructing the forest cover in a part of West Gippsland, Victoria. By “reconstructing” I mean mapping forest boundaries at intervals from about 1870 to today, at a fairly coarse scale. Before I start, I’d like to make sure I’m not repeating what someone else has already done! Does anyone in the Society know of such work, published or unpublished?

Dr Robert Mesibov

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RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN QUEENSLAND’S FORESTS

Mill Point Archaeological Project Field Season Report 2005

Sean Ulm, Jon Prangnell, Judy Powell, Catherine Westcott, Tom McDonald, Karen Murphy and Stephen Nichols

Introduction

February 2005 saw the second year of archaeological fieldwork at Mill Point, situated on the shores of Lake Cootharaba in the Cooloola Section of Great Sandy National Park. Mill Point is the site of one of the earliest timber settlements in Queensland, operating between 1869 and 1892. The Mill Point Archaeological Project was initiated in 2004 primarily in response to community concerns about the long-term future of the site. The project aims to inform ongoing management and preservation issues as well as enhancing our understanding of colonial life in a rural setting. The 2005 field season specifically aimed to build upon the detailed survey work that was commenced during 2004. This year the site also became the focus for the research projects of two PhD students from the University of Queensland.

The 2005 field season was coordinated by Judy Powell and Catherine Westcott (Environmental Protection Agency), Sean Ulm and Jon Prangnell (University of Queensland), Tom McDonald (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service) and Karen Murphy and Steve Nichols (University of Queensland PhD candidates). This year’s fieldwork was conducted with the assistance of 30 archaeology students and community volunteers. Over the two week field season more than 1,600 additional artefacts from the sawmill period were identified and recorded, a substantial portion of the tramway system was mapped in detail and exploratory surveys were undertaken along the lakeshore both north and south of the mill site. In addition, two public open days were held and the site was visited by primary and secondary school groups. The Mill Point Archaeological Project continues to attract a high level of local community interest and support.
and the 2005 field season was featured in both local and national media.

Site History
The Cootharaba sawmill opened at Mill Point (or Elanda Point) in 1869. The sawmill was established to exploit the extensive timber resources of the hinterland and during its heyday employed over 200 men. They and their families made up a thriving community. A school, hotel, shops and other businesses supported the community. An extensive tramway system was constructed to bring timber from the hinterland to the mill, and boats carried the sawn timber down the lake and river system to Tewantin for shipment to Brisbane.

A cemetery was established at the Mill Point settlement, and 43 burials were recorded between 1873 and 1891, including 9 men, 4 women and 30 children. The first burials included four of the five men who were killed in a boiler explosion on 29 July 1873, namely Charles Long, Patrick Tierney, Joseph White and Phelim Molloy. The fifth man, Patrick Molloy (brother to Phelim) was buried in the Gympie Cemetery after transport to Gympie Hospital for treatment of his severed foot as a result of the explosion. Children buried in the cemetery died of causes such as lung problems, wasting, thrush, convulsions and drowning.

From the mid-1880s, a series of events occurred that would influence the eventual decline and closure of the sawmill in the early 1890s. The Queensland Government introduced royalties on timber which disadvantaged the local industry in competition from cheaper imported timbers. By the early 1890s softwood resources near the Cootharaba sawmill were nearing “economic exhaustion”, having been exploited for close to 20 years. The sawmill finally closed in 1892.

Dairy farmers moved into the area in the early twentieth century, but dairy farming was never really successful owing to the poor pasture available. The property changed ownership a number of times until it was transferred to the Queensland Government in 1983. The Mill Point area was gazetted as part of Cooloola National Park in 1985.

2005 Fieldwork
The team of staff from UQ, EPA and QPWS continued the project at Mill Point over a two week period from 7-18 February 2005. They were assisted by a large group of student volunteers from universities in Queensland and New South Wales. Also attending for the first week was the great-granddaughter of Frederick Goodchap, one of the original owners of the sawmill.

Aboriginal elder Dr Eve Fesl was unable to attend but sent a letter of welcome, after which volunteers were introduced to the history of the site by local historian Dr Elaine Brown.

The first task was to clear weeds (largely lantana) from what was believed to be the domestic housing area of the site. On the second day volunteers were divided into teams and rotated through four main tasks: clearing and recording artefacts in the domestic housing area; mapping components of the site with QPWS surveyor Tom McDonald; recording the route of the tramway from the sawmill to the Park boundary; and surveying the lake shore north and south of the settlement to identify and record archaeological features.

Detailed archaeological surface artefact recording was conducted over two 25m x 25m grid squares just inland from the boiler where it was believed the domestic housing was located. Over 1,600 individual artefacts were found in these two grid squares consisting mainly of glass, ceramic, bricks and metal. All of these artefacts were described, mapped and photographed and will be entered into a site database. As a side issue, the bricks recorded in the 2004 season were re-examined to establish a clearer typology which was then used for recording purposes during this year’s fieldwork.

The main tramway route was recorded using a differential geographic positioning system (DGPS) where vegetation cover allowed. A secondary tramway, reported to have looped south from the main route, was also investigated. Only a short portion of this secondary line could be recorded before disappearing into a swamp.

One team recorded archaeological features along the lakeshore, in the shallow waters at the edge of the lake and in the adjacent bush. These included the remains of more pylons from another wharf, old fence lines, tram wheels, artefact scatters and sawn timbers. While one of the aims of the feature recording team was to try and locate the site of the school house, no clear evidence of such a structure was found this year.

Providing opportunities for the local community to be involved in the project was also a key aim. One day each week of the fieldwork was a designated public open day where groups were given a guided tour of the site and the chance to see the archaeologists at work. The project was widely reported in local newspapers and both local and national radio programs. Visitors included great-grandchildren of Frederick Goodchap and Abraham Luya who were two of the original owners of the mill; a local man who had been born at the dairy in the 1930s; and a nonagenarian who had picnicked at...
Mill Point with her husband during the 1920s and 1930s.

A new initiative this year was the visit by a school group each week to learn the history of the site, see how archaeological investigations are carried out and take part in hands-on archaeological activities themselves. Teachers’ and students’ feedback was extremely positive.

**Future Project Aims**

We hope that the project will continue as a collaboration between UQ, EPA, QPWS and the Noosa heritage community with another two week field season planned for 2006 and future years. Fieldwork will continue to focus on detailed survey and feature mapping with possible excavation. Excavation is likely to centre on issues associated with the two PhD research projects that were initiated during 2005. Other aspects of the Mill Point Archaeological Project, such as data entry and analysis, will continue throughout the year between field seasons. The Mill Point site constitutes an important community resource and the public archaeological potential of the site remains a key issue that will inform the ongoing research agenda and fieldwork plans for the project.

**More Information**

For further details visit the project website at:


**Rainforest research in north Queensland**

Richard Cosgrove, La Trobe University, Melbourne

Modern humans had colonised most global environments by 35,000 years ago, including Australia’s arid centre, glacial Tasmania and the Melanesian islands. However, archaeological evidence suggests that occupation of the Australian rainforests began only 5,000 years ago—about 5,000 years after rainforests had begun to re-invade areas of Australia at the end of the last ice age. Why did it take so long for humans in Australia to colonise them?

Until recently archaeologists had also shunned these forests; they were viewed as unhealthy, wet, dark and impenetrable places to work in, and preservation of organic and inorganic remains was thought to be poor in the acidic soils. However, recent archaeological work has dispelled many of these views. Studies at Jiyer Cave in the wet tropics of north-east Queensland have shown good preservation of organic remains, principally the nutshells of rainforest fruits that people had eaten. Research indicates that Aboriginal people had occupied these forests for at least 5,000 years, but only intensively for the last 2,000 years. Historical records indicated that rainforest people relied on different species of fruit trees to provide substantial quantities of protein and carbohydrates. The problem was that many were highly toxic and, in the case of *Macrozamia* species like cycads, also carcinogenic.

Given that Australia has been occupied for at least 40,000 years and that people were already present in tropical rainforests about 35,000 years ago on Melanesian islands to our north, we began to explore the possibility of occupation before 5,000 years and the part played by toxic plant foods in the development of rainforest societies. In particular we wanted to learn just when the rainforests came back after the ice age, when people began to live in rainforests on a sustained basis, and what role climate and toxic foods played in permanent settlement.

We focused our study on the Atherton Tableland in far north Queensland and more particularly in areas around Lake Koombooloomba. The area is very remote and we had to use boats and helicopters to survey for sites. The Jirrbal people were involved in all fieldwork, helping us identify suitable sites and assisting in excavations. Maise Barlow, a Jirrbal elder, has an intimate knowledge of plants and animals used by rainforest Aboriginal people. This was invaluable to our research and in reconstructing the ways of life of past rainforest Aboriginal society.

Our work has provided us with some surprising results. First, the four excavated sites only began to be occupied in the last 5,000 years and it was only within the last 1,800 years that intensive occupation started. Before this time only very low levels of human presence are recorded in the sites with some very ephemeral occupation about 7,500 years ago. Second, we have recorded well over 11,000 fragments of charred nutshells, almost all the remains of nut processing. Charred remains of toxic varieties are present, particularly the Yellow Walnut in the upper levels from all sites. It seems that people started using these noxious nuts intensively about 1,800 years ago. Analysis of nearly 100,000 artefacts from all our sites suggests that Aboriginal people imported raw material for stone-tool manufacture from up to 60 kilometres away and had developed specialised tools for the processing of toxic foods.

Recent research on the Atherton Tableland on long pollen cores from volcanic lakes shows a very detailed vegetation record, which is a key to understanding the late occupation of Australian rainforests. All cores show that before 7,500 years ago eucalypts were the most common trees, suggesting drier climate conditions. Old buried tree
stumps that we studied near the coastal township of Babinda, just south of Cairns, confirm this pattern. The wood was identified as River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and dated to about 9,300 years old. Today, by contrast, Babinda has one of the highest rainfall averages in Australia with up to 4–5 metres per annum. Chris Turney (University of Wollongong) and others have found substantial increases in charcoal beginning about 45,000 years ago, which they argue is indicative of human presence. However, there is no archaeological evidence on the Atherton Tableland for humans at this early time and the charcoal may have come from other non-human sources like lightening. More convincing are recent studies by Simon Haberle (ANU) that show strong increases in firing from 5,000 years ago, particularly between 2,700 and 1,200 years ago. Evidence for humans is unequivocal at this time with 33 of our 41 radiocarbon dates falling within this period.

It appears that fire also played a role in forest biodiversity right up until the recent past. Dates we obtained on charcoal collected from the forest floor near Lake Eacham on the Atherton Tableland suggest fire occurred there within rainforest in the last 400–300 years. These may have been low-intensity fires that cleared the thick understore while promoting economically important Aboriginal plants. Other radiocarbon dates from the Urumbal Pocket site on Lake Koombooloomba show firing pulses about 250, 650 and 1,000 years ago. The charcoal came from 30-centimetre soil pits that we dug in a eucalypt forest patch where grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*), she-oaks (*Casuarina sp.*) and Long-fruited Red Mahogany (*Eucalyptus pellita*) grew surrounded by lush tropical rainforest. Eucalypts and fire were also present at least 1,300 years ago at Cape Tribulation, right in the heart of what is now tropical rainforest. The palaeoenvironmental evidence shows that rainforests are not the stable and untouched systems that we are led to believe. They are dynamic systems that respond to both climatic and human influences.

What emerges from these studies is that the rainforest expanded after 8,000 years ago in conditions much wetter than the preceding period, yet humans only began to permanently settle them 1,800 years ago. An explanation for this pattern perhaps lies in the highly variable climate found in the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events. Studies of corals from the Great Barrier Reef reveal the onset of ENSO events throughout the Pacific region about 5,000 years ago, with strong increases in magnitude starting 3,000 years ago. Higher ENSO values and greater frequency occurred from 2,500 to 1,700 years ago, coincident with increased levels of Aboriginal activity in the region. Rainfall appears to have not only been 20–40 per cent lower but highly seasonal. These fluctuations may have had a profound effect on the surrounding semi-arid regions, forcing people to permanently occupy rainforest only used occasionally on a seasonal basis before 1,800 years ago. Making a living may have become increasingly risky and unpredictable, encouraging people to find alternative sources of subsistence such as the abundant but bitter-tasting toxic nuts and fruits of the rainforest previously ignored as too time-consuming to process.

Thus a factor in the ability of Aboriginal peoples to successfully settle the rainforest in the face of climatic perturbations was the exploitation of the wide array of highly toxic nuts and fruits by cooking and complex processing. This appears to be based upon the recent development of a very specialised and elaborate material culture like the T-shaped Ooyurka and incised grinding stones found nowhere else in Australia. They were also attractive because of their abundant production, their durability and high food value. The elaboration of leaching technology probably increased the amounts of starch and protein that could be processed, which could have been a catalyst for the increase in the intensity of occupation and population growth 1,800 years ago.

Our work on the Atherton Tableland has shown that toxic plants were incorporated quite late into the rainforest economy probably as a result of climatic instability with the onset of ENSO events 5,000 years ago. Since it is costly and time-consuming to process such resources, the pay-off must have been significant in terms of higher food quality and subsequent population increases. Although speculative at present, the rise of the large and regular ceremonial gatherings at the beginning of the wet season in north-east Queensland rainforests, as witnessed by European settlers, may have been a consequence of this development. The widespread processing of toxic species appears significant in Aboriginal people’s adaptation to rainforest settlement and may be central to notions about how humans adapt to rainforest ecosystems worldwide.

**CALL FOR PAPERS – ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND COMPARED**

The Australasian Association for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Science is meeting in Dunedin, New Zealand, in December 2005. There will be a special session on Environmental History. Papers are sought that ideally will consider Australian and New Zealand environmental history in comparative perspective. An emphasis on the history of environmental science or technology is
also preferred. The relevant day for environmental history is likely to be either Sunday 4th or Monday 5th December.

Expression of interest and other details available from:

LIGHT RAILWAYS

Excerpts of interest from Light Railways, the Journal of the Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc (LRRSA), No. 176 (April 2004) to 182 (April 2005).

Sue Feary

LR 177 - ‘Heritage and Tourist’ section
A brief report on the Bush Mill Steam Railway and Settlement, Port Arthur, Tasmania. This is an award winning tourist complex, currently for sale. It features a working steam sawmill based on the Stingaree Bay sawmill, which operated at the site between 1897 and 1927. There are also buildings from the early settlement as well as a range of visitor facilities.

LR 179 – ‘Letters’ section
A letter from Len Purcell refers to a locomotive called The Hewer, that operated out of a small mill and hewn timber centre near Collie in south-west WA in 1911. It moved subsequently to South West Timber Hewers Co-op Society's (SWTH) much larger operation at Holyoake and entered traffic on the rapidly eastward expanding logging railways. SWTH was taken over by State Sawmills in 1920 then sold on to Hawker Siddley Building Supplies, which merged with Bunnings in 1970. The Hewer’s latest journey was to Pemberton in 2004 and is the sole survivor of the few trains that came direct from the builder to work in the south-west forests.

LR 179 – ‘Research’ Section
John Kramer and Jim Longworth are continuing research into logging tramways in the Coffs Harbour area, NSW.

LR 181 – Feature Article
An interesting article by AFHS member Peter Evans on locomotives associated with operations of Rubicon sawmill in Victoria’s Central Highlands. Between 1912 and 1935 the Rubicon Lumber and Tramway Company ran steam locomotives on the railway between Rubicon and Alexandra but because they had a tendency to start fires, they were replaced by a diesel locomotive designed by Kelly and Lewis for Rubicon sawmillers Clarke and Pearce – the first of its kind to be built in Victoria. Output from the Rubicon forest increased after the Depression ended and the company put on another Kelly and Lewis train. The two trains worked the line until 1947, and then fell into disrepair until they were eventually purchased and restored. A ceremony, well attended by enthusiasts was held at Alexandra in November 2004 when these two oldest surviving Australian built locomotives were celebrated as representing the pinnacle of timber tramway locomotive development in Victoria.

LR 181 – ‘From the Archives’ section
A fascinating report on the 1934 Annual Engineering Conference of the Institute of Engineers, Australia, held in Tasmania. The conference included a five day excursion to the west coast to inspect various natural features and engineering feats. About 70 members and ladies attended and by all accounts had a thrilling time, despite the steep and rugged terrain and sometimes inclement weather. The report contains some wonderful descriptions of the forested landscape and mentions the impacts of recent bushfires in the area.

LR 182 – Feature Article
Jim Longworth’s article is about timber tramways at Mayers Point on the northern shore of Myall lake near Newcastle, NSW. Alexander Croll constructed the first timber tramway in 1896, after his first job as a benchman in 1862 in a local sawmill. He set up his own sawmill in 1872, from which grew a new village called Bungwall Flat (later Bungwahl). The mill did well, even during the 1890s depression and milled mainly tallow-wood, blue gum, flooded gum but it burnt down in 1911, putting 50 men out of jobs. Croll began constructing a tramway in 1896 but was caught illegally cutting down grey gum for the sleepers. He got off the charge and the tramway with its termini on Mayers Point operated successfully until about 1912.

LR 182 – ‘Heritage and Tourist’ section
Peter Evans gives a report on the historic mill workshops at Yarloop, visited by delegates to the Forest History Augusta conference in 2004. He notes that they are of great heritage value because of the intact nature of the original buildings and the careful conservation work carried out by Yarloop volunteers. The Yarloop Workshops provide an important insight into the technology and the people involved in a major workshop responsible for maintaining a massive array of company forest industry assets from 1895.

LRRSA also has many publications and the following may be of interest to Forest History Society members.

Echoes through the Tall Timber by Dorothy Owen. $22.95
Recent Publications


Mythic Woods Jonathon Roberts $69.95 (includes the mountain ash forests of Tasmania and the ancient rainforests of Cape York peninsula).


AFHS Publications Still Available from CRE:

Australia's ever-changing forests II 1993, Dargavel, J. and S. Feary (eds), pb 300p, $25.00.


Australia's Ever-changing Forests IV 1999, Dargavel, J. and B. Libbis (eds), pb 388p


Order forms available from

AFHS Conference Proceedings

Mike Calver has distributed the CD-Rom to all conference delegates.


available from Millpress Science Publishers,
http://www.millpress.com/ price: €105

Membership of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) Inc is $25 a year, or $15 a year for students. For overseas addressees, it is $30 (in Australian currency please). These prices do not include GST as the AFHS is not registered for paying or claiming GST. Membership expires on 30th June each year.

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