



AUSTRALIAN Forest History SOCIETY

Newsletter no. 9

April 1995

'... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.'

WE'RE NOT HISTORY !

Australian forest history is very much alive, indeed we have all been so busy doing it that the Society and the *Newsletter*, like adventitious buds below the bark, have had to lie dormant. But the season has changed and it is time to shoot forth with renewed vigour!

Our last *Newsletter*, No. 8, was issued in 1992 just prior to our Second National Conference at Creswick, the proceedings of which were published in 1993. Existing memberships will be valid until the end of 1995. We have also started to think about holding another conference and enclose a questionnaire to gather members' views. Anita Brady and Stephen Legg recruited John Dargavel as a third Convenor for the Society and Editor of the *Newsletter*. We intend to put out two or three issues of the *Newsletter* a year, while Sue Feary and John will try and advance the Conference proposal.

The Newsletter

It is worth reminding ourselves that the main function of this *Newsletter* is to put people interested in Australia's forest history in touch with one another. Members of the Society are spread around a great continent and have a wealth of knowledge drawn from many different experiences, backgrounds and types of research. We can help each other if only we know who to contact and how to do so. Queries, requests for information, and notes of research in progress are all logs to the mill! So, the more people drop a line to the editor about what they are doing, or what they would like to do, the better the *Newsletter* will be.

Our new design is the work of Nicci Haynes at Green Words in Canberra. It features blackbutt, *Eucalyptus pilularis*, taken from J.H. Maiden's (1910) *Forest flora of NSW*.

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Members on the move

Jane Lennon left the Historic Places Section of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and moved to Brisbane where she is working as a Heritage consultant. Anita Brady took over the section until she moved to undertake a heritage survey of South Western Victoria for the Land Conservation Council. Anne McConnell left the Tasmanian Forestry Commission for a spell in Nepal but will return to work as a consultant archaeologist in Tasmania. Sue Feary finished her secondment to the Australian Heritage Commission and returned to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. She has moved to Jervis Bay as the manager of the State's new national park there.

The Australian National University has gained Richard Grove who has taken up a position in Economic History in the Research School of Social Sciences. He is working on the forest and environmental history of south Asia. John Dargavel has retired from the University and is working half-time in a new 'think-tank', The Australia Institute, in Canberra.

Research in progress and inquiries

Dawn McMaster is doing some research for the Wallamba and District Cooperative Historical Society on timber mills in the area and is trying to find out when Porter's mill at Tuncurry was built. She is looking for the date and any other relevant information about Maxwell Porter. Can anyone help? Her address is: Glen Ara, Nابیac, NSW 2312.

The Department of History at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has two new postgraduate students looking at forest history. Jan Mayman is looking at the history of Dwellingup and Jenny Mills, one of the founder members of the Society, is looking at the relationships between the forest service and industry.

Judith Bennett is working on the history of forests and logging in the Solomon Islands and is looking for information on the connection between Australian timber firms and Vanikoro Island. She is particularly looking for information on: 1) Australia's import/tariff policy from 1901 to the present, but particularly pre-World War II; 2) whether there were 'timber cartels' against the importation of Islands' timber pre-

war as all the Solomons material indicates; and 3) the Island Timber Co. Ltd operating in Sydney about 1910. Her address is: Macmillan Brown Centre of Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Les Carron, in a recent issue of the Institute of Foresters *Newsletter* (35(5):22-3) has put out a call for more histories of individual forests to be written and urged foresters to the task. Some, of course, are already in progress. Moray Douglas has gathered a great amount of material about the forests of East Gippsland and is about to start writing, and we look forward to Norm Endacott's history of the Wombat forest. The Comprehensive Regional Assessment process that has been so much in the news recently will presumably require assessments of cultural as well as natural heritage values. These may help but are unlikely to study much of why people shaped the forests the way they did. The Australian Forest History Society would undoubtedly echo Les' call. He would be glad to hear from members (c/o Department of Forestry, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200).

John Dargavel has, at long last, finished his book, *Fashioning Australia's forests* which Oxford University Press will publish in August. He is now getting back to studying Evelyn's *Sylva* which is the most long-lasting forestry textbook ever written. First published in 1664, it went through four editions in Evelyn's lifetime and was re-published in variously amended editions until 1825. A facsimile reprint of the first edition was published in 1972.

John Gray is continuing his research on the career of Charles Weston (1866-1935), the British born horticulturalist who laid the foundations, between 1913 and 1926, both of the pine plantations estate in the ACT and the urban forests of Canberra. John has completed a history of Commonwealth Park, one of Weston's plantings, for the ACT Heritage Council and has studied others around Canberra. He hopes to visit Britain to see the sites of Weston's early work before he migrated to Australia to work in the Sydney Botanic Gardens.

David Rich in the School of Earth Sciences at Macquarie University is working on the history of the South Australian industry, initially on the Cellulose plant at Millicent.

Field work on the massive oral history project, *The People's Forest*, is all but complete. Gregg Borschmann talked to a remarkable range of foresters, cutters, bush workers, a bullock driver and more modern contractors, seed collectors, environmental managers, artists and botanical illustrators, a politician, a botanical gardener or two, plenty of farmers doing the right thing, and even a judge. More than 90 life stories of men and women who have worked in or been associated with the forests are now stored in the National Library's oral history collection. Gregg is now engaged on the even bigger task of editing transcripts for the book expected in 1997. He can be contacted on (047) 878 873.

The National Museum is continuing its interest in environmental and forest history. One of the curators, Tom Hardson, is looking for information on the history of chainsaws and the impact of their introduction on the forests (GPO Box 1901, Canberra, ACT 2601).

Historians on the super-highway

Historians and environmentalists, as well as scientists, use the Internet to good effect and it would seem to have a lot to offer forest historians who are often isolated from each other and whose studies commonly span several areas. The Australian history journal, *Clionet*, is published electronically and there is an associated bulletin board/conference which can be accessed by sending a message to:

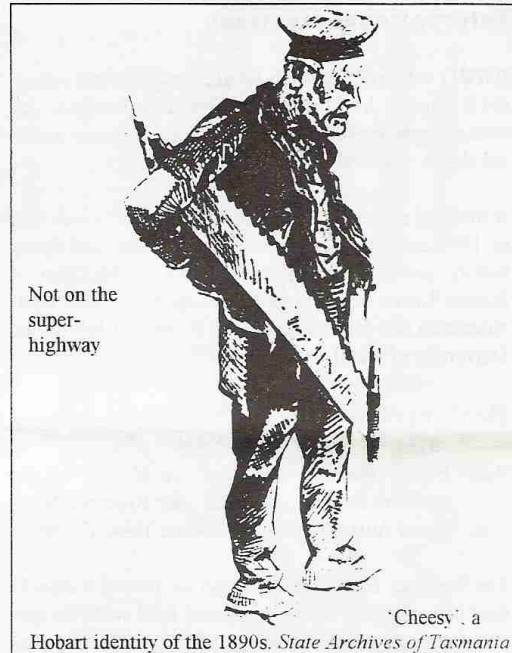
LISTSERV@msu.edu

sub H-NZ-OZ <First name Last name>,
<school or Department if relevant>

H-NZ-OZ is currently co-edited by Dr Paul Turnbull of the James Cook University of North Queensland (Paul.Turnbull@jcu.edu.au) and Dr Alan Mayne (amayne@ariel.unimelb.edu.au), of the University of Melbourne.

The Government's environmental information network, ERIN, can be accessed through the gopher system. It contains mostly scientific information, but also has potted histories of Australia's World Heritage Areas. There are several environmental discussion groups, mostly related to various environmental campaigns.

Internationally, there are bulletin boards and discussion groups on almost any aspect of history you can think of but not apparently on forest history. There is



a special forestry network run out of Finland that focuses mainly on scientific matters. It can be accessed by sending a message to:

mailserver@nic.funet.fi

subscribe forest <your first name> <your last name>

The Forest History Society in the United States has made its extensive bibliography available for searching through the Internet. Point your gopher at:

iliad.lib.duke.edu

and then follow the menus: Other Duke Resources/ Forest History Society/ Forest History Bibliography

And you could always send an item for the next *Newsletter* to: jdargavel@peg.apc.org

New international journal

Environment and History has been launched as a new international journal. It is published in Britain and intends to complement the strengths of the *Environmental Review* and *Forest and Conservation History* by providing European and Asian material. Its editor is Richard Grove (Economic History, RSSS, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200). We look forward to seeing the first issue soon.

International meetings

IUFRO will hold its XXth World Congress in Finland, 6-12 August. Its Forest History Group sessions will include eight invited papers on European issues, tropical issues, and timber industries.

A meeting of the African Studies Association was held in 1993 and the papers on environmental and forest history are now available from Dr J. McCann at Boston University. Another meeting on African environmental and forest history will be held in July in the University of Natal.

Book reviews

Peter Evans. *Rails to Rubicon - A History of the Rubicon Forest*. Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc, Melbourne 1994. (200p)

The National Estate Grants Program funded a significant proportion of the research and field work for this comprehensive forest history, when the author was based in the Historic Places Section of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for a twelve month period in 1992-93. But as Peter Evans acknowledges, documenting the history of the Rubicon Forest was really eight years in the making - eight years of walking in the forests and searching for relics, eight years of making contact with those who had lived and worked there, and eight years of collecting historic photographs and other people's memories.

The Rubicon Forest lies one hundred kilometres to the north-east of Melbourne, on the ranges dissected by the Rubicon and Royston rivers. The rich cultural heritage of these Mountain Ash forests was known to a select group before Peter's work commenced, but no-one had attempted a systematic survey of both the historical records and extant features of the region. Peter's investigations yielded many treasures. The Rubicon was home to Aboriginal people, pastoralists and sporadic miners, before the sawmillers and hydro-electricians moved in to exploit the abundant natural resources. It was these last two groups who left behind an extraordinary collection of relics and remains, generated during more than 50 years of forest occupation. Peter has focused on the sawmillers and their industry, but not only on their timber getting, processing and transportation activities. He has also documented the experience of the families, their living

conditions, social activities, and their brushes with fire and accident.

Peter's work in the Rubicon has also contributed to the protection of many of these features. Recommendations to the Register of the National Estate and the Victorian Historic Buildings Register have resulted from the survey, and go some way towards redressing the imbalance on our national heritage registers, of sites associated with forest industries and activities.

Rails to Rubicon is the product of a dedicated and sympathetic historical investigation of a rich forest area. It is well researched and clearly written, with beautifully presented photographs, drawings of site features, graphs and tables. The maps and plans of the sawmill settlements and tramways are also, as with many Light Railways publications, of a very high standard.

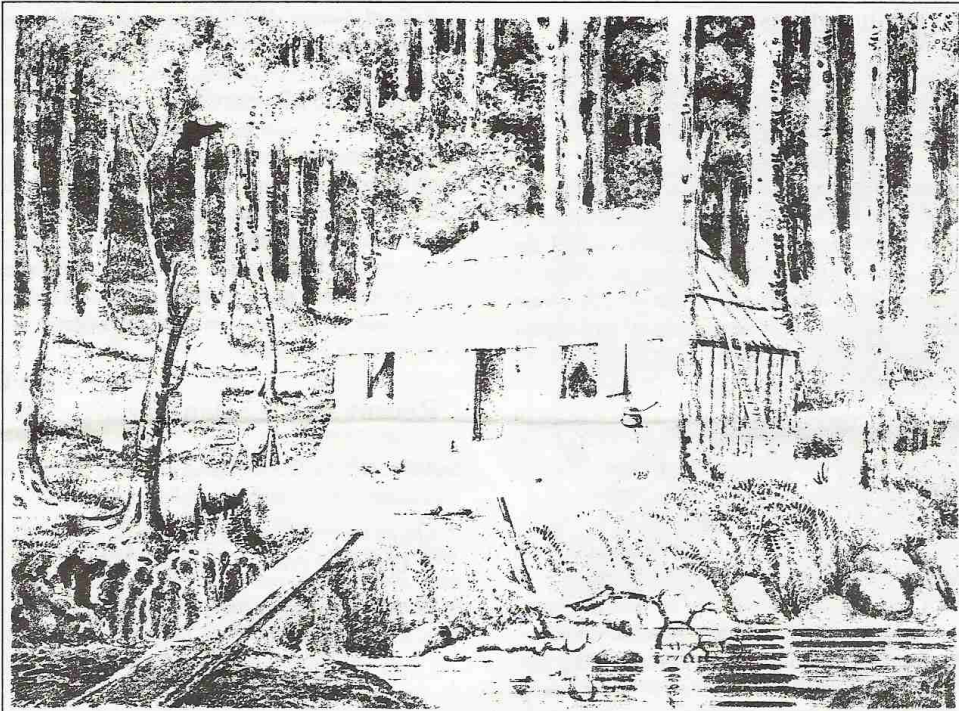
Anita Brady

Mike McCarthy. *Settlers and sawmillers - a history of West Gippsland tramways and the industries they served 1875-1934*, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., Melbourne, 1993. (168p)

The tramways of West Gippsland, in a region where roads were few and of poor quality, were for many years the primary means of transporting goods through the local forests. They were used not only by sawmillers and others involved in local industry, but also by the farmers. The opening up of this forested region in the last decades of the 19th century in fact involved an unusual association between the sawmillers and farmers. The transition from forest to farm generated an intensive burst of timber production, and consequently, tramway construction. Over 130 sawmills once operated in this undulating agricultural landscape, but unlike many sites of former timber production elsewhere in Victoria, the forests have generally not grown back to hide and protect the sawmill relics.

Mike McCarthy has written before on sawmills and tramways, notably on the forest industry of the Gembrook and Erica districts. But he grew up in this part of Victoria, and brings to the task a love of the region and its history. Many years of research and preparation have resulted in a fine volume, which easily maintains the high production standards of the LRRSA.

Anita Brady



A sawyer's hut on the River Huon, Van Diemen's Land, 1842 by William Knight.
S. Jones 1988. *Early Painters of Australia 1788-1880*.

D.B.Lindenmayer and H.P. Possingham. 1995. *The risk of extinction: ranking management options for Leadbeater's possum using population viability analysis*. Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, The Australian National University.

On opening this book by two notable scientists one is confronted by all the paraphernalia of modern conservation biology - cabalistic computer models, arcane statistical notation and never a human name, except as a bibliographic reference. But the forest historian should persist; it is more accessible to the non-scientist than one might expect and although theirs is a non-human world, it is not an ahistoric one. Indeed, persistence will be rewarded with fascinating insights into the dynamics of how fire and logging shape the forest and the lives of its creatures.

This little possum was thought to be extinct until some were rediscovered in 1961 in the mountain ash forests of Victoria's central highlands. Its survival depends on there being enough really old eucalypt

trees with hollows in them for it to nest in and there being plenty of wattle in the understorey for it to feed on. As the habitat is periodically ravaged by fire and altered by logging, the maintenance of its needs can not be taken for granted. It is not only the amount of suitable habitat that is critical, but the way the patches are dispersed across the landscape. If they are too far apart, the little animal would not be able to reach new areas if the old were destroyed.

The authors projected the *future* of the forest in hundreds of different ways according to how fires might happen, or logging occur. For each way they looked at how the animals in each patch would be affected in their ability to disperse and breed. Hence, they could estimate the likelihood of their extinction and choose the least risky ways of creating reserves and managing the forests. All this stimulates us to think about how the fires and usages of the *past* have created the present. For anyone who has read Tom Griffith's delightful *Secrets of the forest*, this book enlarges one's conception of the ever-changing nature of these forests.

John Dargavel

Publication notices

Karen Twigg. 1994. *'Sixpence for a piece of timber...'* a history of Bowen and Pomeroy 1894-1994. Bowens, North Mulgrave. (188p).

This most attractively produced centenary history documents one of the few significant timber firms to remain in family ownership. It traces the rise of the company from a small timber yard to the chain of retail timber and hardware stores that stretch across Melbourne today. We hope that a review will appear in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

Heather McRae. 1994. *Forest history in Victoria: a guide to government records 1836-1994*. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Victoria (71p.).

Those at the Society's Conference in Creswick were treated by Paul Barker to a thorough exposition of Victoria's archival records relating to forestry. Now, thanks to a National Estate Grant from the Commonwealth, a guide has been published covering filing systems, maps, aerial photographs, Forests Commission minutes, personnel records, photographs, films, newspaper clippings and computer databases. The guide provides an invaluable start for anyone working on forest history in Victoria, although it can still be fruitful to hunt around in old district offices. We can only hope that other States will follow suit.

John Dargavel and Sue Feary (eds). 1993. *Australia's ever-changing forests II: proceedings of the Second National Conference on Australian forest history*. Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200 (p296) . \$30.00 plus \$5.00 postage and packing.

Stephen Dovers (ed.) 1994. *Australian environmental history: essays and cases*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

This collection of essays includes five on general aspects of our environmental history and seven specific case studies. These include a history of the Brigalow by Henry Nix, a description of two contrasting periods of forest history by John Dargavel, and a history of environmental changes on the Bogong High Plains by Ruth Lawrence.

Richard Grove. 1995. *Green imperialism: colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Oxford University Press.

This is an authoritative, major study of the emergence of environmental awareness, particularly concerning the conservation of forests, in the British Empire from the seventeenth century. It draws on detailed archival research on British India, Mauritius and a number of island colonies in the Carribean. It will be released in Australia in June and we hope to review it in a later issue of the *Newsletter*.

Recent New Zealand bibliography

Anon. (1994). Geoff (Claud Geoffrey Rowden) Chavasse. *New Zealand Forestry* 39(3):45-6.

Arnold R (1994). *New Zealand's Burning*. Victoria University Press, Wellington.

Chavasse G (1993). John de Berri Graham Groome. *New Zealand Forestry* 38(1):39-40.

Lynch P (1993). Mary Sutherland 1893-1955. *New Zealand Forestry* 38(2):40-1.

Maplesden F and Langer F (1993). Women in Forestry Science. *New Zealand Forestry* 38(2):28-31.

McKelvey P (1991). Thomas Kirk in New Zealand Forestry. *New Zealand Forestry* 35(4):16-22.

Wilson G (1992). Survey of attitudes of landholders to native forest on farmland. *Journal of Environmental Management* 34(2):117-136.

Wilson G (1993). The pace of indigenous forest clearance on farms in the Catlins District. *New Zealand Geographer* 49(1):15-25.

Wilson G (1994). Towards sustainable management of natural ecosystems on farms: a New Zealand perspective. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 37(2):165-85.

Wilson G (1994). Woodchipping of indigenous forests on private land in New Zealand 1969-1993. *Australian Geographical Studies* 22(2): 256-73.

The TDA stamp mystery solved

In *Newsletter* No. 8 we showed an unusual Timber Development Association (NSW Branch) 5 shilling

stamp which had been used. Con Lembke, who had worked for the TDA in the 1950's was able to solve the problem. He recalled that this 'stamp' was used as a record of contributions to raise funds for the TDA (NSW) Branch. Timber wholesalers purchased the stamps and attached them to invoices to indicate that a 'surcharge' on the invoice was for a contribution to the TDA which the wholesaler had pre-paid. The over-stamp 'Punchbowl' on the example shown was to avoid its re-use ! The TDA archives and minute books for 1950-60 make no clear reference to this system.

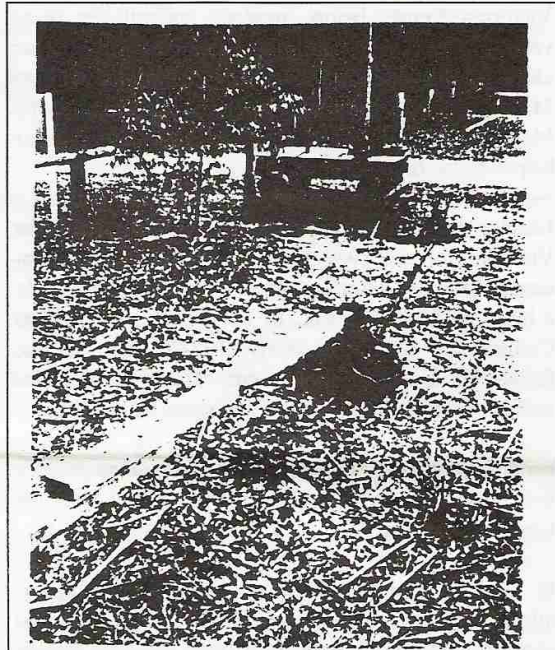
Old growth surveys

Anita Brady

Since late 1990, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in Victoria has been undertaking surveys of old growth forests in three regions of the State, where extensive areas of forested public land occur. East Gippsland, the Central Highlands, and currently the North East, have been the focus of intensive study, with the forested estate of each area covering approximately one million hectares.

Forest history has had a role to play in all these surveys. Archives of the former departments of Crown Lands and Survey, Minerals and Energy, and the Forests Commission of Victoria, yielded information on past land use activities in the regions. The data was collated, analysed and mapped, using Geographic Information Systems technology. A unique collection of data layers resulted, which record the extent of historic grazing, mining and logging activities. The location and extent of ringbarking, associated with early farms in the forests which were later forfeited or abandoned, were particularly well documented in the archives, and could also be mapped and dated with confidence.

This documenting of historic 'disturbances' in the forest domain has assisted with the identification and analysis of both the natural and cultural values of the regions under study. In the context of current community debate about protecting older age forests, and the appropriateness or otherwise of logging these forests in Australia, a recognition of previous activities and their impact on the environment should assist with the decision-making process. At the very least, forest history in the form of systematically collated disturbance data, can help in the identification of the least disturbed forest stands.



A horse-drawn sawmill at Timbertown in Wauchope. The horse walked in a circle pulling the bar (seen in the foreground) which turned the shaft connected to the saw bench (at rear). *Photo: John Dargavel*

Labour and internment camps in Victorian forests

Anita Brady

As an historian working for some years in a public land and forest management organisation, I frequently came across references to forest workers' camps, many of them set up during the Depression of the 1930s, in the war years of the following decade, and in the post-war period. The men were mostly engaged in silviculture or 'forest improvement' work, including the thinning and cutting out of inferior trees from forest stands. They also established pine plantations, produced sleepers, and cut firewood for families in the needy years of the Depression or during the fuel shortages of the early 1940s. After the 1939 fires in particular, these camp-based forest workers also built roads and tracks where few had existed before.

In effect, the Victorian Forests Commission was given control of a very large and very cheap labour force, which admittedly was untrained and therefore often unproductive. The environmental consequences of all this activity in Victorian forests have never been fully documented, though Forests Commission annual reports of the 1930s describe thousands of hectares of

Victorian forests being 'treated' annually in these years. The social history of this unique experiment has also waited for some time to be told, but a recent Masters thesis in Public History, undertaken by Monash University student, Eleanor Bridger, has helped to fill the gaps.

Eleanor's thesis, 'Labour and internment camps in the Victorian forests, 1930-1945', sheds light on this unusual phase of Victorian history, and what was really a huge social experiment. In 1936 alone, the Forests Commission deployed nearly 10,000 men in the forests. Each man received a tent, sheets of corrugated iron for a chimney, two blankets and a mattress made from straw and chaff bags. They were also given cooking gear, and were generally expected to prepare their own meals, with ingredients purchased from the Commission store.

In Victoria, men on unemployment relief were generally given two months work in the forests. Married men were paid more than single men, but five eighths of their pay was sent directly home to their wives. Many had never worked in the bush, and were unused to rough conditions. The social consequences were often devastating, the more so for "enemy aliens" resident in Australia during the War, who were also despatched to the forests. Prisoners of war, very often Italian servicemen, were also placed in forest camps under Forests Commission supervision.

In the post-war period, European refugees were sent to some of these camps. This history was beyond the scope of Eleanor's thesis, but we can imagine the cultural dislocation experienced by these men, and their reaction to being sent to work camps after the horrors associated with camp life in German-occupied Europe.

Eleanor was also concerned with the heritage of this activity. Most of the camps were temporary and transient in nature, as the men were moved on when their work in a forest area was complete. But trenches, tobacco tins, broken bottles and sometimes discarded building materials, can draw attention to the location of the camps. These relics will continue to deteriorate and disappear, but the plantations and roads, and the impact of the men's 'improvement' work, will remain with us for a long time yet.

Meetings of retired personnel

We have learnt that some forestry organisations have gatherings of their retired members. The Victorian Forests Commission Retired Personnel Association has been in existence for over 40 years, and APM Forests organises field days for its retired members occasionally. We will send them copies of this *Newsletter* and would be glad to hear of any similar organisations with which we should make contact.

New Membership Application

Name:

Organisation (if any):

Address:

Tel:

Fax:

email:

Field of interest in forest history:

Mail to: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615.
with \$10 cheque or postal order for 1995 subscription (overseas free).

