



AUSTRALIAN  
**Forest History**  
SOCIETY

Newsletter no. 11

December 1995

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

## **FOREST HISTORY AND FOREST HERITAGE**

Of all the genera of Australian forest history, forest heritage studies are perhaps thriving most sturdily as the cultural, as well as the ecological heritage of our forests is starting to be recognised more widely. Of course, there is an enormous amount to be done, but public forest history, fertilized with public funding is producing some encouraging new growth.

We can trace the site preparation back to the Australian Heritage Commission which was set up in 1975, following the Hope Inquiry, to register sites of national significance as part of the 'National Estate'. The well-established National Trust movement with its long tradition of preserving historic buildings and sites of early white settlement gave it a head start, but it immediately moved to a wider concept which embraced the natural and Aboriginal heritage as well as the historic heritage. States also legislated to register and preserve heritage values. At first, the idea that the forests have their own historic and cultural heritage, much of it resting in the history of the timber industry, had little official recognition even though the sterling work of the Light Railways Research Society and its members were surveying and documenting much of it so well.

The situation gradually changed. An important influence was the start of joint State-Commonwealth regional surveys, first in Western Australia and then in Victoria. Another was the systematic survey of sites in the forests of Tasmania. We are delighted to learn that Queensland has started similar work and that site recognition and management guidelines are being developed in Tasmania. Now, the Commonwealth and the States are to conduct 'Comprehensive Regional Assessments' of the forest regions. Heritage assessment will be a part of this process which should provide an opportunity, and we hope funding, for the industrial and cultural heritage of the forests to be included.

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## Rainforest extent in the Illawarra

I read with interest the article by John Carnahan in the AFHS *Newsletter* No.10 about the are of rainforest in Australia 200 years ago compared with the area of rainforests remaining today. Although I can offer no comment on the original area of rainforest in Australia as a whole, I have undertaken detailed work on the original area of rainforest in the Illawarra District, between Sydney and the Shoalhaven River. The results of this work were reported in my 1988 paper, 'Clearing of the Illawarra rainforests: problems in reconstructing pre-European vegetation patterns' (*Australian Geographer* 19(2): 230-40), and more recently in our 1995 book *Rainforests of the Illawarra* (see publication notices - ed.).

The rainforests of the Illawarra District have been reduced by about 70 per cent since 1788. Following detailed fieldwork and mapping, at scales of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000, I determined the original extent of the rainforest to be about 23,000 hectares. Today, the rainforest covers about 7,000 hectares in the District; this is a loss of about 70 per cent of the original rainforests. Seventy per cent of the original rainforest was contained in three large 'brush' areas, while the other 30 per cent occurred in various sized patches spread throughout the district.

Similar attrition rates may have been experienced in other parts of Australia but, in most cases, studies have not been carried out to clarify them. Whether the total loss of Australian rainforest is nearer to the 45 per cent quoted by John Carnahan or the 70-75 per cent often quoted, remains to be determined.

Kevin Mills

## News of members

Brett Stubbs in Southern Cross University at Lismore is well advanced with his PhD study of the environmental and forest history of the Northern Rivers region of NSW.

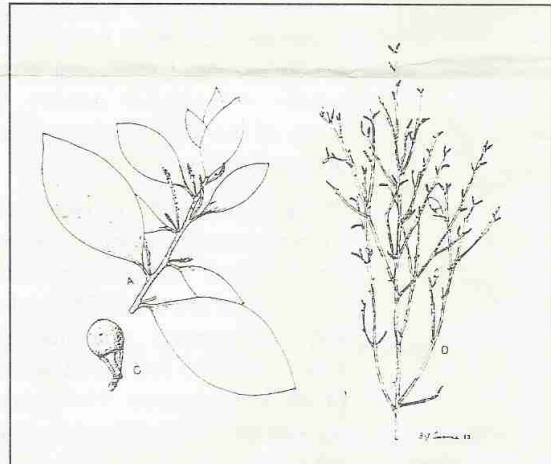
Jenny Mills has had to delay starting her Masters thesis at Edith Cowan University until 1996. She will be researching the changing relationships between industry and the WA forest service.

## Which were our first Christmas trees?

I was attracted to this Christmas card in the National Library of children carrying branches of what? I have heard that native cherry, also known as cherry ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) with its red berries was used as a Christmas tree (incidentally, it is a root parasite). Which other species did the early Europeans in Australia use to decorate their homes at Christmas? Can any reader help with information?



*Christmas in the Bush: An Australian Homestead*, nd. Oswald Rose Campbell. Published in the *Supplement to the Illustrated Sydney News*, 16 January 1867. National Library of Australia.



Native Cherry, *Exocarpos cupressiformis*

## *Australia's ever-changing forests III*

**Third national conference on Australia's forest history  
24- 27 November 1996 at Jervis Bay**

The notice of our third conference and call for papers, announced in the last *Newsletter*, has met with a warm response. The proposal to devote a day to gaining a deeper understanding of the concept of forest age is clearly one which people believe to be important.

### **International invitations accepted**

Two distinguished forest historians, Oliver Rackham and Donald Hughes, have accepted our invitation to come and contribute to the conference session on concepts of forest age. Oliver Rackham from Corpus Christi College in Cambridge is best known in Australia for his work on reconstructing the ancient woodlands of Britain. He is now working on similar studies in the Mediterranean. Donald Hughes from the University of Denver is a classicist who has specialised in the environmental history of Mediterranean forests. He will present a paper on the classical background of the old growth concept drawing in Pliny, Pausanias, Theophrastus and many of the poets.

### **Encouraging research into the concept of forest age**

The research proposal in the last Newsletter called for work to be done on how foresters, botanists and others have come to see and think about age in the forests. It has been discussed with academics in various universities in the hope of encouraging some work on the topic in time for the conference.

### **The programme**

The model for our previous two conferences has been to have papers across the whole range of forest history topics that people offer to contribute. We have tried to be inclusive of everybody concerned with forest history and it has been one of the great pleasures of the meetings that people from many walks of life, backgrounds, disciplines and professions have come and contributed their papers or experiences. It seems a good model to follow again. One day will be devoted to the concepts of forest age, while the other two will have papers and discussions on all sorts of topics grouped as best we can. There will be plenty of opportunities for short presentations for those who do not want to give a full paper, but would like to let others know about their work in progress.

Although we are an *Australian* - well really Australasian - forest history society this does not mean that we are not open to hear about forest history elsewhere. We had a valuable USA paper at the last conference and hope to have two British papers this time.

### **Calling out for papers**

Several people have already offered papers, but more are called for as we need a rich and diverse collection to make this conference as rewarding as the first two. Members are asked to make the conference widely known among their friends and colleagues.

## Environmental history goes multi-media

David Rich and his colleagues in Macquarie University teach an undergraduate course in Australian environmental history. It has lectures, a text book and reading lists as usual, but also has an exciting, very new computer package as an integral part of the course. I was lucky enough to have a 'play' with it when I visited him in October.

When I started the package, I was presented with a screen with a menu setting out the 'chapters' of the course. Being a dutiful chap, I started at Chapter 1 which was on the evolution of Australia's biota on a geological time scale. I was presented with a screen displaying the geological time scale. By moving the pointer to a particular era and 'clicking the mouse'\* I was presented with a screen showing the layout of continental Australia or Gondwanaland at that time. Following screens showed pictures of the type of vegetation and gave a brief description. Having digested that, I went back and clicked on the next time period, was shown the next screen, and so on. There is plenty on Aboriginal land use in the package, and on the European period where the gradually decreasing extent of the forest is convincingly displayed.

The beauty of this package for students is that they can log on to the computer at any time they like and can refer backwards or forwards to any topics that they might want to revise. Perhaps one day it might be released on CD and we will certainly have to try and persuade David to give a demonstration of it at the AFHS Conference. *John Dargavel*

## Book reviews

Jack Gillespie and John Wright. *A fraternity of foresters: a history of the Victorian State Foresters Association*. Jin Crow Press, PO Box 276, Daylesford, Vic 3460 (pp.148).

In 1983 the Forests Commission of Victoria was absorbed in a massive departmental amalgamation in consequence of which the Victorian forest service lost its identity. In 1986 the Victorian State Foresters

Association resolved to disband because it had lost its relevance. A minor proportion of its assets was allocated to the publication of a history of the Association and its distribution to the past and present membership.

The task of producing the history was assigned to Jack Gillespie and John Wright. They searched high and low for Association records and associated papers but encountered an acute shortage of material relating to the early years. Oral information from older generations of ex-members was a valuable source.

The Association came into existence before 1900 and at least seven years before the Department of State Forests was formed. It had an ambiguous and evolving relationship with the Victorian Public Service Association, especially during the nineteen year period when the Forests Commission was separated from the public service. The relations between the Association and the management of the Commission were generally cordial and non-confrontationist, despite occasional irritations. The book highlights the progressive attitude of the Association to departmental organisation and its input to Commission thinking whenever restructures were on the agenda. Such co-operation existed at least as early as 1966 and was carried over into the 1982 planning period.

The authors' research unearthed information about Victorian machinations and certain interstate negotiations relating to the proposed formation of the Institute of Foresters of Australia. The three-page account of these activities from the Victorian standpoint makes a fascinating supplement to Dr Les Carron's 1985 paper for the IFA Jubilee published in *Australian Forestry* (48(1)).

It is clear that the Victorian State Foresters Association was always an industrial advocacy group whose main objective was to protect the interests of the body of foresters and forest technicians employed by the State of Victoria. However, the reader can clearly perceive that the Victorian forest service was no ordinary group of public servants carrying out field duties on a widespread scale. The bonding, *esprit de corps*, single-mindedness, even camaraderie, plus the commitment to the cause of forestry - all of which crossed the boundary between the professional and the technical staff - may be discerned between the lines all through the book.

\* No, David doesn't keep arthritic rodents - this means pressing a special sort of button attached to the computer by a wire!

This history was obviously written for a target audience of Victorian foresters of former times, their spouses, widows and families. Such people who have received and read it have indulged in misty-eyed nostalgia. However, it is likely that their counterparts from other Australian forest services may find an interest in revisiting the era and drawing parallels with their own experiences. On library shelves, it provides a valuable addition to the Australian forest history of the twentieth century. The two authors, who laboured mightily, pursuing sources with the doggedness of true historians, have produced a fine account.

*Norman Endacott*

Grove, R.H. 1995. *Green imperialism: colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism 1600-1860*. Cambridge Univ. Press (pp.540, \$125.00 hardback).

This is a magisterial treatment of the origins of forest environmentalism and conservation in the tropics. I can not do justice in a short review here to the rich and complex strands of Grove's arguments so exhaustively sourced and documented; rather I can only hope to tantalise you into reading the book.

Grove argues that the environmental importance of forest functions was recognised most clearly at the periphery of empires, especially in island colonies such as St Helena, Mauritius, and St Vincent where deforestation under the colonial transformation was both severe and readily observable. A case for forest preservation developed in such places and was advanced, principally by their colonial surgeons and botanists. It was transmitted to the core and disseminated to other colonies through the international network of botanists and scientific societies. This contrasts with the conventional view that science originates in the core and is transmitted to the periphery.

Grove brings out how climatic effects were attributed to deforestation as well as the more observable effects of erosion and siltation. He emphasises the extent to which the case rested on a 'dessicationist' theory: that the deforestation of a catchment would decrease the amount of rain falling on it and would make the whole region more arid. Now this is seen to be false - indeed annual runoff is increased by deforestation - but the early arguments were correct in observing that forest cover ameliorates the peaks and troughs of runoff and mitigates soil erosion.

Grove locates his history in the intellectual discourses of the enlightenment, the physiocrats, the romantic movement and much else. He describes a *global* environmentalism as beginning in the late eighteenth century with the voyages of Cook, for example, and being quite well established early in the nineteenth century in the writing of Humboldt.

He devotes considerable attention to India. Interestingly, he reports authoritarian approaches to forest reservation by princely rule as existing well before the British period. Rapidly extending deforestation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century led mainly medical men to advance 'dessicationist' arguments, which when allied to famine and health arguments, proved powerful influences in the formation of organised forest services in India. The Indian *Forest Act* of 1865 firmly marks the establishment of forestry there, as a result of both climatic environmentalism emerging timber shortages.

It was none too soon. Unregulated cutting had grossly depleted the forests of the durable sal (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and the great era of railway building had commenced. Over the next half-century over 90,000 kilometres of track were laid on both Indian and imported timbers, including some jarrah from Western Australia. The imperial model of forestry, developed in India, relied on the 'demarkation' of the best forest land, dispossession of the original owners or curtailment of their rights, ownership and control by the state, and management by a cadre of professionally trained foresters who, at first, came mainly from Germany. The imperial model was later applied to African and other colonies and eventually adopted in Australia with influences from British estate and French plantation models.

*Green imperialism* offers a profound analysis of the intellectual and practical roots of forest environmentalism and forestry. It is a rich and rewarding book which helps us understand where the 'case for forest conservancy' in Australia and much recent environmentalist argument came from. *John Dargavel*

### Timber bridges

The Noojee Trestle Bridge is possibly the tallest timber trestle bridge built in Victoria. It stands 21 metres high and has 19 trestles supporting its 102 metre length. It was burnt in the 1926 fires, but repaired and used until 1954. The government has set aside \$100,000 to restore it.

## Theses

Stephen Legg. 1995. *Debating Forestry - An Historical Geography of Forestry Policy in Victoria and South Australia, 1870-1939*. PhD thesis, Monash University

### Abstract

Forestry has played a central role in the history of natural resource management in the New World. Its impact on the evolution of the forested landscape, the growth of the forest products industries, and the rise of the conservation movement, has been of particular interest to geographers who have portrayed these developments as part of an overall learning sequence by which societies have come to terms with their environment. This dissertation provides a comparative analysis to examine the evolution of public forestry policy in South Australia and Victoria between 1870 and 1939. The study period encompasses the 'custodial era' in which Australia's modern forest services were established to manage a complex system of forest reserves for a variety of purposes defined by the state.

A range of philosophical, ideological and political foundations for at least six different approaches to forestry history is examined, and the implications for historical-geographical analyses are considered. The approach taken focuses on the contribution of parliament to the policy-making process, and ultimately to the geography of forestry. This is viewed from three different levels: notions of the role of the state, conceptions of the public interest, and policy ends and means. Several models of the policy-making process relevant to environmental management are incorporated. In particular, the various factors shaping the evolution of policy are investigated. These include locational and environmental variables controlling the distribution of forests and human factors such as the nature of the political system, the influence of various interest groups concerned with forestry reforms, and the impact of different ideas and information used to legitimise policy positions. The major focus is at the state level, but relevant international, federal, regional and local themes are also examined.

Extensive use is made of the parliamentary record, including all relevant Debates, Papers, and Votes and Proceedings from both Houses of Parliament in South Australia and Victoria. These include transcripts from

Select Committees and Royal Commissions on forestry and related matters; the debates on around 50 major forestry bills and numerous others in related areas of resource management; and thousands of questions and notices of motion. These are supplemented with annual and special reports from the various forest services and related land management agencies; metropolitan and regional newspapers; relevant journals from trade, professional, and conservation lobby groups; foresters' letterbooks; census, yearbook and statistical register data; other government publications; historic maps and photographs. Content analysis of the Parliamentary Debates and metropolitan newspaper coverage of forestry, timber and related issues is incorporated in the examination of the changing political agenda.

A wide range of ideas for and against forestry was considered in popular and official forums, but the political process was found to have used and abused information selectively to maintain prevailing community values and dominant economic interests. This contrasted sharply with (and, in turn, constrained) the more objective, rational learning process by which administrative practices in the forest services evolved. This vindicates the 'consumption model' of the political process used in this study, and helps explain mixed reactions to the promotion of a popular 'forest conscience'. The landscapes that evolved under this system were severely compromised by political concessions to various interest groups. These included the forest services and other land management agencies, conservationists, the mining, sawmilling and tanning industries, and the agricultural and pastoral lobbies.

The political processes in these states was remarkably similar, but considerable variation in forestry policy emerged because of economic, environmental and locational factors. Despite these variations, and the apparent growth of forest service independence, political interference persisted. Factional change within parliament shaped the geography of forest reserves, and frequently led to considerable turmoil and discontinuity in key management areas controlling production, regulation and co-operation - especially in relation to afforestation, fire control, grazing, water management, recreation, and timber production.

### Publications

The thesis, which was completed in the Dept. of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University in 1995, is leading to annotated research

guides for the parliamentary record on forestry and related matters for Victoria and South Australia, 1870-1939. They will be published through the Monash Publications in Geography series and should come out in 1996. Stephen Legg also hopes to interest a commercial publisher in the narrative of political intrigue and landscape transformation in his thesis.

### Publications noted

Mills, K and Jakeman, J. 1995. *Rainforests of the Illawarra District*. Coachwood Publishing, 222 North Curramore Road, Jamberoo, NSW 2533. \$30 including postage.

This book introduces the beauty and complexity of the rainforests of the Illawarra District, from Royal National Park to Nowra. It is written for all people with an interest in the natural environment.

MacCleary, D.W. 1994. *American forests: a history of resilience and recovery*. Durham, N.C.: Forest History Society (pp.58.)

This little book in its third printing provides a simple factual background to the history of American forests. It is illustrated with 18 charts showing long-term trends in human and animal populations, areas of cropland and forest, growth and stock of the forests, and recreational use. The reforestation of large parts of the USA is a notable feature partly attributed to the replacement of draft animals, which needed a quarter of the cropland to grow their food, by trucks and tractors. Something similar which was accurate and cheap enough to be readily available in public and school libraries could be of great value in Australia.

### Confusing international journals

The new journal *Environment and History* was launched last year from Britain as we reported in the last AFHS Newsletter. Now we read that the two much older environmental history journals from the USA - *Environmental Review* and *Forest and Conservation History* (formerly the *Journal of Forest History*) - are to merge under an almost identical title, *Environmental History*. To have such similar names can only cause confusion and difficulties for readers and librarians alike. We can only hope that the new merged journal will find an alternative name before it is published.

Issue no.3 of *Environment and History* (that is the British one) has just arrived in Australia. It is a special issue on Zimbabwe with half a dozen papers on water, ivory, and environmental politics in both the colonial and post-colonial periods.

IUFRO's Forest History Group puts out an occasional publication, *News of Forest History*, which usually focus on forest history in a particular country. Issue no.22, published in June 1995 in English, deals with Finland. The editor is Dr Elisabeth Johann, Wlassakstr. 56, A-1130 Wein, Austria.

### Historical records centres

There are many historical record centres outside the capital cities which are lively centres for regional and local history and are of considerable value to forest historians. Readers may like to note more of them for subsequent *Newsletters*.

*Gippsland Studies Centre, Monash University*  
Churchill Campus. Archivist: Meredith Fletcher

This Centre not only supports the teaching and research programme at Churchill, but acts as an important focus for historians of Gippsland. Moray Douglas, for example, finds it invaluable for working on his history of the forests of East Gippsland. The Centre has been going for ten years and is open on a half-time basis. This year it held a conference on the mechanics institute movement in Victoria. An index to the *Gippsland Times* 1861-1900 is in the final stages of editing and preparation for publication.

*Geelong Historical Records Centre, Little Mallop*  
Street, Geelong. Archivist: Norm Houghton

This busy Centre is very well set up as a reference point for Geelong residents and students. It serves the district as well as Geelong city and has extensive material on the Otway forests. The Centre has been suffering from the repeated re-organisations that plague local government in Victoria, has survived so far. Long may it continue.

### A new forestry school

Southern Cross University at Lismore will start Australia's third undergraduate course in forestry in 1996. It will specialise in tropical, sub-tropical and plantation forestry. We hope that it will include some historical understanding in its teaching.

### Forthcoming Australian conferences

*Australian Historical Association*

14-17 July 1996, Melbourne

Contact: Andrew Markus, Dept of History, Monash University (Clayton campus).

*Mueller conference*

29 September - 1 October 1996, Melbourne

Contact: Linden Gillbank, Dept of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne

*Australia's ever-changing forests III*

24-27 November 1996, Jervis Bay

Australian Forest History Society

Contact: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615 (Tel/Fax 06 258 9102)

### Forthcoming international conferences

*Multiple use forestry from the past to present times*

2-4 May 1996, Gmunden am Traunsee, Austria

IUFRO Forest History Group

Contact: Dr Elisabeth Johann, Wlassakstr. 56, A-1130 Wein, Austria (Tel/Fax 04226216)

*Advances in forest and woodland history*

2-6 September 1996, Nottingham, UK

Forest Ecology Group of British Ecological Society

Contact: Charles Watkins, (Fax 0115 951 5249)

### AFHS finances and membership

The good news is that the Society is still financial. But to keep us that way, produce three Newsletters a year and have enough on hand to run the conference, we need to raise our subscription for the calendar year 1996 to \$15 (and \$20 for overseas members because their postage is higher).

The Society is open to all who support its objective which is '*... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.*' New members will be welcomed and existing members are asked to make the Society known to all who might be interested.

### The next Newsletter

Please send details of your work in progress, interests, ideas for new studies, requests for information, books for review, publications to be noted. The *Newsletter* is a good way for forest historians around Australia to keep in touch.

### Membership subscription for 1996

Name:

Organisation (if any):

Address:

Tel:

Fax:

email:

Field of interest in forest history:

Please mail to: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615 with \$15 cheque or postal order for 1996 subscription (Overseas \$20).

**Reminder !!** Papers or short presentations for the conference. Please send a title and a short paragraph describing the paper or short presentation you would like to offer for the conference.

