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AUSTRALIAN  
**Forest History**  
SOCIETY Inc.

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Newsletter no. **30**

**October 2001**

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

**Explore! Enjoy! Contribute! Improve! Promote!**  
**<http://cres.anu.edu.au/envirohist/afhsociety.html>**

Australian forest history and our Society now have a presence on the internet as an integral part of the Australian environmental history network established by the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at The Australian National University.

Readers are encouraged to explore what it offers so far. There are links to other sites and a calendar of events. Our conference flier and newsletters are there. Also, there are data sets of historical statistics on the timber industry that can be downloaded into spreadsheets. Moving up the site, one can find details on many of the environmental historians working in different fields at ANU, various reviews and other material.

Seeing forest history within the general domain of environmental history will encourage forest historians to set our interests within the wider debates of the time, and encourage others to investigate the rich resources which have been built up on the environmental history of the Australian forest sector.

However, the site will only be as good for forest history as we make it, so please contribute your ideas, material, data sets etc. of historical statistics by writing to this newsletter or preferably by emailing them to [envirohist@cres.anu.edu.au](mailto:envirohist@cres.anu.edu.au). The site will be as useful as it is known, so please link it to your sites, or suggest it to others.

For members without their own internet connection: please be assured that this Newsletter and other material will continue to be mailed out. But if you haven't yet explored the internet, may we suggest calling in to a public library—or even an internet café—and having a look.

**Our conference: *Australia's Ever-changing Forests V***

Hobart, 18-20 February—Study tour 20-22 February 2002

A registration form is included. Early bird registrations available until 15 December.

Editors: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615 Tel: 02 6258 9102 Email: [foresthstory@asiaonline.net.au](mailto:foresthstory@asiaonline.net.au)  
Caroline Polak Scowcroft, 33 East Gate, Winnipeg, MB R3C 2C2, Canada Email: [tenby@mts.net](mailto:tenby@mts.net)  
ABN 56 477 824 185

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## New members

We welcome Roger Heady and Bill Semple to the Society. Roger is a wood anatomist and microscopist whose brilliant pictures of the structure of *Callitris* opened a whole new vision of the forest. Bill hails from Orange where he works for the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation.

Congratulations to Peter Davies on the award of his doctorate from LaTrobe University.

Rosalind Hunter-Anderson writes from Guam: I am an anthropologist with a keen interest in the environment. I have been particularly involved with the issue of human vs. geo-climatic causation of the Micronesian savannas, also the currently popular, but in my judgment wrong, idea that Easter Island was once heavily forested and the people cut down all the trees. I have published on both these subjects, among others, while earning a living doing contract archaeology, mainly in the Marianas (where remote Oceania's settlement began over 3500 years ago).

We also welcome John Husmann who will be joining the Society and visiting Australia in October and November. He is writing his doctorate in the University of Nebraska by comparing the history of plantations in South Australia with that in Nebraska.

## Recent Journals

*News of Forest History* 36. Special issue on Social changes and forests. Proceedings of Group 6.07 Forest History at XXI IUFRO World Congress, 7-12 August, 2000, Kuala Lumpur.

This special issue contains 17 papers which focus on the issues of social changes in forests. A particular effort was made to encourage papers from the tropics and developing countries. Malaysia, Guatemala, and former German colonies were among the regions considered. These were complemented by three papers concerned with European experience.

*Environmental History* 6(3) July 2001.

Simon Cubit has an interesting paper in this issue on what he calls 'Tournaments of value'. It is concerned with the Central Plateau of Tasmania and deals with the conflicting values between those who argue for the primacy of preserving wilderness values and those who argue for maintaining the cultural heritage values of horse riding.

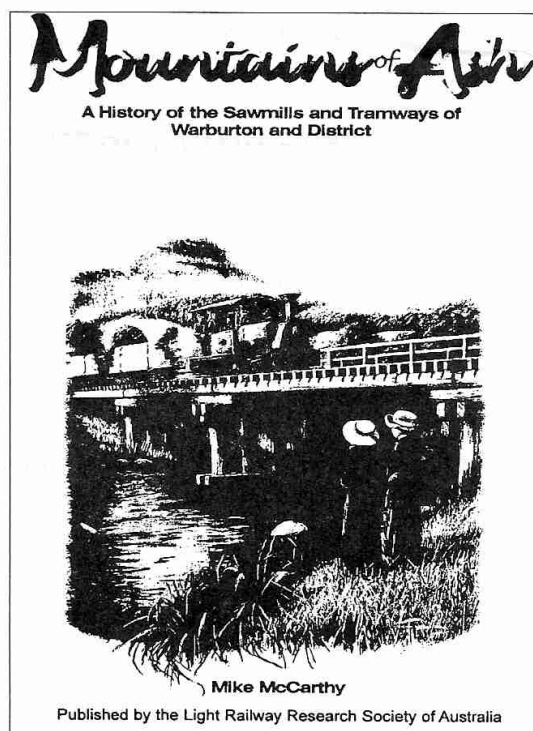
Mark Stoll also has an interesting paper dealing with values. In this case disputes within the American environmental movement and their relationship with sets of moral values inherited from Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism.

*Environment and History* 7(2), May 2001.

The five papers in this issue are concerned with the effects of expanding long-distance trade on local ecosystems; antecedents to what we now call 'globalisation'. Periods covered range from medieval to the present, and regions from the Arctic to Panama.

## Forthcoming publication

We look forward to Mike McCarthy's new book on the important Warburton district of Victoria.



Due for publication in October, with 320 pages, 285 photographs and 14 maps. From LRRSA Inc., PO Box 21, Surrey Hills, NSW 3127. \$59.00 + \$7.10 postage.

## Publications noted

Bradshaw, M. 2001. Newsprint Mills in Australia: a story of shifting optimal location. *Australian Geographer* 32; 241-257.

Wallace, B. 2001 *Battle of Titans, Sir Ronald Trotter, Hugh Fletcher and the Rise and Fall of Fletcher Challenge*. Penguin, Books, Auckland. ISBN 0 14 100472 x.

## Letters to the Editors

From Eric Rolls

David Paull's chapter in *Perfumed Pineries: Environmental history of Australia's Callitris forests* (J. Dargavel, D. Hart and B. Libbis eds, 2001) troubles me. He isn't writing history, he is writing what he wishes was history. He gives no primary sources in his references. His statement at the top of page 64 that Ward did not note the density of Narrow-leaf Ironbark is not true. Ward's count was published in New South Wales Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings *First Annual Report upon the Occupation of Crown Lands of the Department of Mines, New South Wales, for the year 1879*, published in 1880. In 54,200 acres of the Robertson Reserve (the first declared) in the county of Baradine, he counted 1½ mature pines to the acre over 30,000 acres with 15 young pines to the acre on 37,000 acres. In the same reserve he counted 1 mature ironbark to the acre on 35,000 acres and 10 young ironbarks to the acre on 40,000 acres. In the Wee Waa section of 17,820 acres in the county of White, there were two mature trees to the acre of a mixture of Pine, Silver or Broad-leafed ironbark, Belar, Ironbark and Gum (as spelt in the document).

In broken cardboard boxes in a tin shed in the backyard of the Forestry office at Baradine are the records of very extensive and thorough transects run by Gordon Burrow and B. Priestman in most of the Pilliga forests including a great deal of the west during the 1920s. (Elaine van Kempen had photocopies made and sent them to headquarters State Forests). They also counted ironbark, it averaged a little more than two to the acre, half the count of pine. It is of interest that one small area that Priestman described as 'magnificent advanced Pine forest' averaged a fraction more than eight pines to the acre. These records are not in Paull's references.

Our conception of what is heavy forest has changed dramatically.

A counted average does not mean that there were no areas with much thicker timber, the marvel of Australia as Europeans found it was its diversity.

When referring to the count of pine at the Royal Commission of Enquiry into Forests held in 1908 (not in Paull's references), Robert Edward Beavis told the commissioners that he had been drawing timber from the western forests for about ten years and he knew the entire forest intimately. He estimated that the forest carried an average of two mature pines to the acre. 'In some parts,' he said, 'I suppose there would be twenty-five mature trees to the acre, but, on the other hand, there are places

where you could go for miles and see no large timber at all.'

Here from the NSW *Votes and Proceedings* (1880 or 1879), is an assessment by Arthur Dewhurst, District Surveyor, on Forest Reserve 1104, the first declared:

The timber consists of -

Iron-bark—for railway sleepers, building, posts, rails, &c. (of magnificent quality).

Pine—building (of large growth and excellent quality).

Wattle—for bark and tannin.

Oak—for fencing, hurdles, and cabinet-work.

Red gum—inferior.

Apple—inferior.

Brigalow—not used (ornamental).

Box—inferior quality.

Scrub.

Wattle, Yarren, Coocoraba—may be utilized in commerce hereafter for axe-handles, &c., &c.

Under-growth of brown prickly bush and porcupine grass.

Of all the descriptions and varieties of timber named in the foregoing list, the iron-bark and pine are the most valuable, and are seen in this forest, perhaps, to the greatest perfection. Their value for commercial purposes is scarcely to be excelled. They are almost proof against changes of temperature, and the effects of moisture or age.

I am unable to give an estimate of the number of these trees to the acre with any degree of accuracy, but I may say that many ironbarks I saw would turn out 2,000 feet super to the tree.

It must have been only a few months after that letter was written that Ward came up with his count of one mature ironbark to the acre and ten young ones.

J.H. Maiden's *The Useful Native Plants of Australia* (1889, facsimile 1975, pp. 442-4), reports on *Eucalyptus crebra*: 'An excellent timber; hard, tough, of interlocked fibre, durable and useful for many building purposes. It is much in use for fence-posts, railway cross-ties, bridge material, piles, waggon-building, etc., including spokes of wheels.' He writes that the timber was sent to the Paris Exhibition in 1855, to the London Exhibition in 1862 and to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 where 'spokes were turned from the sample, and boards planed, the finish of both being excellent'.

There was one area of thick, mature ironbark, probably in the far eastern section of the forest since it was not mentioned in any of the transects which covered the west, centre and north of the present forests. When looking for a station between the Namoi and the Castlereagh, nineteen-year-old John Robertson who later became Premier five times told of ironbarks thick enough in parts to be a forest 'such

as we hear of as existing in other lands'. Probably seeds from one of these patches caused the growth of the forest of young ironbarks that gave Oxley so much trouble.

From the description of his difficulties the area sounds enormous. The exact point at which he turned back can be calculated by the work of John Whitehead (Coonabarabran Shire engineer) on his route. In 1974 I pushed my way in there along an overgrown track. The ironbarks (*Eucalyptus crebra*) had thinned themselves out and grown into a magnificent stand covering about fifteen kilometres by fifteen. That forest comprised less than a third of the run Garrowramere taken up as good grassland by John Robertson as a nineteen-year-old. Frederick York Wolseley later bought it as a sheep run and began work on his shearing machine there.

This absurd rewriting of history not only confuses how we go about rectifying our wrongs (only thinly wooded grasslands, not forests, will save the majority of our birds from extinction - they have declined by 45 per cent in the last ten years) but it makes fools of many very knowledgeable early graziers. They were not settlers bringing their axes to clear land for the plough, they were squatters taking up grasslands. What use would heavily timbered country have been to them? Sheep and cattle don't eat trees.

There is still one man alive who could take Paull into any part of the forest and tell him what trees grew there and how thickly - young Dan Casey who lives in Coonamble. There are others, there were once many, who saw parts of the forest in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Others have stories from fathers and grandfathers. Oral history is legitimate history as these men tell it. Bob McGlashan told Elaine van Kempen that his father came to the Pilliga in 1927 as a sleeper cutter. Bob was born in a tent 'down the back of Yarrigan' in 1932. Yarrigan is a part of the forest that now looks primeval. 'Yarrigan was our cow paddock', said Bob. 'You could ride your pushbike all through it, pull up anywhere and see for half a mile around you.' When Bob was young his father told him of a conversation he had with one of the old pastoralists: 'You could drive a mob of sheep from Baradine to Narrabri without losing sight of them. Bob commented that at the present time 'you could not keep track of a herd of camels'.

It is frightening to have years of exact work called wrong by people who have not carried out the original research.

*North Haven, NSW*

*From David Paull*

Response to criticisms by Eric Rolls Firstly I would like to state that my paper to the Pineries Conference last November was primarily an analysis of the stump densities at twenty sites in Pilliga West State Forest. It was not intended to be a critique of the primary sources regarding the historical structure of the Narrow-leaf Ironbark community. A lot has already been said and published on this matter and Mr Rolls' interpretations of the historical evidence has already been questioned by other authors, e.g. Benson and Redpath.

I would be willing to show Mr Rolls where the study was undertaken and to explain my methods. Narrow-leaf Ironbark is not an open woodland species, it was the main component of a forest ecosystem, one that was also featured by a grassy understorey. Before the unmanaged cypress regrowth choked out large areas of this forest, partly aided by the decrease in canopy cover by the logging of mature trees, it would have been very suitable for grazing. The assertion that cattle and trees can't co-exist is not one that stands up to scrutiny.

I do intend to follow up this matter with an examination of the early resource inventories held by State Forests. Hopefully this will address some of the assertions made by Mr Rolls on this matter. He should look carefully at some of the photos taken in the 1920s of ironbark forest in Pilliga West and reprinted in Van Kempen's history of the Pilliga. It clearly shows mature ironbark trees with a spacing that would easily fit 25+ trees to the hectare. Even today I could show Mr Rolls stands which approach this density in the Pilliga West. These trees did not pop up in the last 100 years.

*Coonabarabran, NSW*

## European Society for Environmental History

A major focus for environmental history was created when the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) was formalised and held its first conference in St Andrews University in September. Its creation had been greatly assisted by funds from a charitable foundation which had enabled the organisers to get together. It has about 250 founding members. A Board has been elected with Verena Winiwarter (Austria) as President, several office bearers and regional representatives. An Executive Secretariat will operate from Umea in Sweden. Its proceedings will be conducted in English and it will be very Internet-oriented (<http://www.eseh.org/>).

From January 2002, annual membership will cost 20 euros (about Aus\$37). It plans to hold biennial conferences, the next is to be in Prague in 2003.

The European Society complements the older and well-established American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) which publishes the journal *Environmental History* in collaboration with the US Forest History Society. The journal *Environment and History* is published in the UK and has a wide international focus. Both journals carry articles from Australia from time to time. We have no comparable organisational structures for environmental history in Australia yet, although the Environmental History Network operating from the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) at The Australian National University, and the Australian Forest History Society endeavour to meet similar needs. Links with both ASEH and ESEH are maintained through personal contacts and Internet connections.

I was able to attend the conference in St Andrews (thanks for support from CRES for registration and accommodation). The conference was hosted by the Centre for Environmental History and Policy which is a research and postgraduate centre run jointly by the University of Stirling and St Andrews University. It proved to be a stimulating event with some 150 delegates presenting 100 papers over four days. Many of the papers were particular to time and place, few were concerned with urban history. I selected the more theoretical sessions and came away with many ideas to follow up here. One paper by Mark Stoll on the influence of religious tradition on the form taken by environmentalism in different countries generated a particularly extended discussion. I want to follow up with his book, *Protestantism, capitalism and nature in America*, his article in the most recent issue of *Environmental History*, and seeing if his ideas are reflected in the Australian environmental movement.

*John Dargavel*

### **Noel Butlin Archives Centre at ANU**

The Australian National University has announced the establishment of the ANU Archives Program, bringing together the University Archives and the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC) from 1 August 2001. The University Archivist, Dr Sigrid McCausland, heads the Archives Program, reporting to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Chris Burgess. Recurrent funding for the Program has been allocated, ending uncertainty about the future for the NBAC and its staff. Funds have also been made available for capital works.

The decision will enable the University Archives to improve its services to the University community

and to the public. For the NBAC, it means there is now a stable base from which it can continue its role of promoting the national record of Australian business, labour, rural and industry activity.

These new arrangements give the NBAC a fresh start. With an assured future at the ANU, the Archives can now get on with its excellent work as in the past. However, this fresh start could not have been achieved without the dedicated and vigorous support of all the Friends of the NBAC (including the AFHS) throughout the country and overseas. It's been a long haul since 1997 and there have been times when all seemed to have been lost. But determination and some luck have pulled the Archives through from the threat of closure.

The NBAC holds several deposits of timber union, forest industry and conservation organisations, but few timber companies are represented in these or other archives in Australia. This is a major weakness for the future of forest research in Australia.

### **Natural resource atlas on-line**

The Australian Natural Resources Atlas, the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on the continent's land, water and vegetation resources, has gone on-line at [www.nlwra.gov.au/atlas](http://www.nlwra.gov.au/atlas)

### **Justice Higgins on the Basic Wage for Country Places, 1920.**

The basic wage for Melbourne in 1907 was fixed for city conditons. ... But what is to be done when men go out to the distant forests where there are no houses—or no suitable houses—or shops? ...

At Narbethong mills (Victoria) most of the men built their own huts of bark, slabs, saplings—paying the company for the material, including galvanised iron for the roof. They put in their own floors; they lined the hut with their own hessian. In one hut, 10 feet by 8, there would be 2, 3 or 4 men. Sometimes the men had tents.

At Craven State saw-mill (New South Wales), the huts (paling) are 8 feet by 8 feet, unlined, unceiled, no glass for windows; two or three men occupy each hut—with vermin. No water laid on; no provision for washing; no sanitary conveniences. The families live in the nearest town. ...

Surely it is better to do what we can to encourage the growth of little village communities, and normal social life, rather than retain the present slipshod conditions, with a number of men “pigging it” together in huts or houses which are unfit for family life.

*Commonwealth Arbitration Reports*, 1920, pp. 831-6.

## Calendar

### Australia

*Rings of History: Contemporary Craft from Historical Timber.* Touring Exhibition  
Contact: Aroona Murphy, ☎ 02 6262 9333

21 Sept – 9 Nov	Craft Qld, Brisbane
21 Nov – 6 Jan 2002	Cooloola
28 Jan – 3 Mar	Riddoch Regional Gallery
16 Mar – 21 Apr	Araluen Centre, NT
3 May – 2 June	Flinders Art Museum
14 June – 28 July	Bunbury Regional Gallery
31 Aug – 29 Sept	Gippsland Art Gallery
1 Nov – 17 Jan 2003	Geelong Gallery
31 Jan – 16 Mar	Tasmanian Museum

18-20 February 2002. Hobart. *Australia's Ever-changing Forests V: Fifth national conference on Australia's forest history.* The conference will be held in Jane Franklin Hall at the University of Tasmania. It will be followed by a study tour of the southern forests staying at Geeveston on 20 and 21 February. Registration forms available by post or at <http://cres.anu.edu.au/envirohist/> Early-bird registration available until 15 December.

Contact: Denise Gaughwin, ☎ 03 6336 5384 email: [deniseg@fpb.tas.gov.au](mailto:deniseg@fpb.tas.gov.au), or  
John Dargavel, ☎ (02) 6258 9102 email: [foresthstory@asiaonline.net.au](mailto:foresthstory@asiaonline.net.au)

### International

9-15 October 2001, Kumaon University, Naini Tal/Himalaya, India. Forest History of the Mountain Regions of the World. IUFRO Working Party on Tropical Forest History.

Contact: Dr Elisabeth Johann, A—9173 St Margareten, Freibach Austria.  
Email: [elis.johann@carinthia.com](mailto:elis.johann@carinthia.com) ☎+43 4226 216

#### APPLICATION/RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP FOR THE YEAR TO 30 JUNE 2002

The subscription for the year to 30 June 2002 has been set at \$25 (overseas \$30 Australian).  
Discounted rate for students of \$15.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....(State) .....(Postcode) .....

Tel: ..... Fax: ..... Email: .....

Please mail cheque or money order for \$25 or \$15 for students (Overseas \$30 in Australian currency) payable to:  
Australian Forest History Society Inc., 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615

