

AUSTRALIAN

# Forest History

SOCIETY Inc.

Newsletter No.35

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

## ***Forests, Bushfires and History***

Photographs taken on the International Space Station on 18 January 2003 graphically show how winds swept the smoke across the country during last summer's bushfire emergency in Southeastern Australia. The crisis demonstrated how limited the resources available to protect houses and towns, native bird and animal species, were. This has revived widespread debate about fire behaviour and forest management amongst scientists and preservationists alike. Forest historians should surely be contributing to this. Southeastern Australia has the reputation of being one of the three most fire prone areas in the world. Australian native trees evolved to cope with the dry conditions, which makes the area distinctly different from the other two, southern California and southern France. We should surely be directing research towards documenting the effects of past forest management on fire control. What, for example, were the bushfire results of the practices of the early European timber getters and early government protocols on forest management? The full implications of the accepted idea that the Aborigines managed by controlled burning to prevent massive burning and to encourage new growth need to be urgently re-examined.

The website of the Quebec conference reminds us that of the 6.2 billion people on the planet, 25% depend to varying degrees on forest resources for their livelihood. 350 million people living in or near dense forest depend highly on it for their subsistence or livelihood. Forests cover 39 million km<sup>2</sup> or 30% of the Earth's landmass, are home to 80% of the earth's biodiversity, and play essential ecological roles. Under the combined effect of demographic growth and deforestation, the *per capita* forest cover is expected to drop 25%, or an average of 0.6 to 0.45 hectare, by 2025. Demand for non-wood forest products and environmental services may affect 15 to 25% of the wood allocated for industrial production. Planted forests constitute 5% of the world's forest cover and produce 35% of all wood harvested. We are all concerned in the use or abuse of this important part of the globe.

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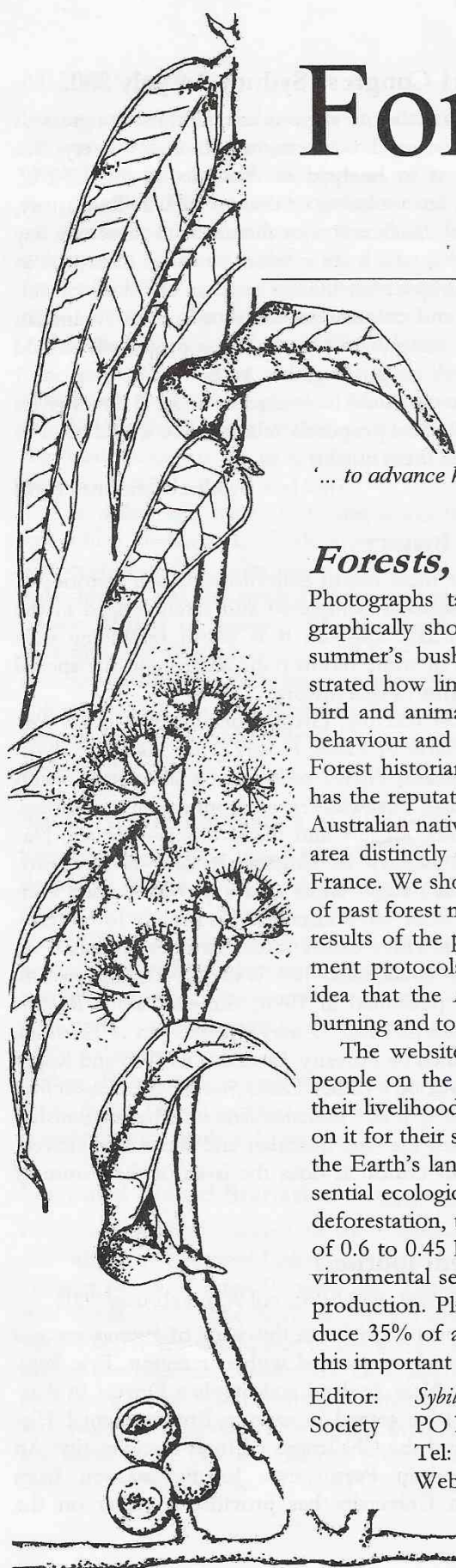
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**AFHS Sixth National Conference  
on Australia's Forest History,  
Augusta, WA, 12 -17 September 2004  
*Forest Conscienceness***

Jenny Mills and her committee are going full steam ahead, Fliers will shortly be circulating and those wishing to present papers should contact her.

**IUFRO Congress, Brisbane 8-13 August  
2005 *Forest in the Balance: Linking  
Tradition and Technology.***

A 1-day symposium during the Congress period will be held in the Queensland Museum. It is a modern building with an excellent lecture theatre that will hold 150 comfortably and is within walking distance of the Congress Centre. The theme to be 'Forest History of the Araucariaceae'. As a Gondwanaland family there are species in South America, especially Brazil; *Araucaria cunninghamii* and *A. bidwillii* are the principal conifers of Queensland; there are genera in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia; and the Woollemi pine will feature in the main IUFRO Congress programme.

The topic will not cut across the theme of the AFHS conference to be held in Western Australia in September 2004. Although a substantial scientific conference was held last year on the family, it did not include the social and cultural history aspects. We envisage having about 6 substantial papers and probably starting mid-morning to fit the plenary sessions of the IUFRO Congress.

A formal proposal is being put to the Congress Organising Committee in June so that our meeting will be recognised as a Complementary rather than a competing Meeting. We will argue that offering a Complementary Meeting may encourage some people to come to the IUFRO Congress who might otherwise have been undecided or marginal. We will also argue that it will offer delegates interested in forest history, a richer set of options to choose from.

IUFRO thinks that there may be up to 30 Concurrent sessions. If this proves to be so, some of them will need to be held outside the main convention centre. We will try to have the IUFRO Forest History Group Sessions scheduled in the Museum Theatre too.

The Society will prepare an issue of IUFRO's *News of Forest History* as an adjunct to the Congress.

**CISH Congress Sydney 3-9 July 2005**

The vast and prestigious international congress of the Historical Sciences, which meets every five years, is to be held in Australia at the UNSW. There are a number of themes such as Ecohistory, natural disasters (major themes with three one day sessions) which are relevant to forest historians as well as specialist themes such as collisions of cultures and colonialism under which an Australian forest history session might be proposed. Should we seek to put together such a short session? I imagine it would be limited to under 2 hours given the 50 panel proposals selected. We would need to contact them quickly if so.

*Sybil Jack* (sybiljack@hotmail.com)

**Oral history**

As the most recent collections of oral histories of the forests is completed and safely lodged in the appropriate museum it is worth reminding ourselves of some recent publications and the special problems of oral history.

Most recently, Gregg Borschmann, in *The People's Forest: A Living History of the Australian Bush*. Blackheath, NSW: collected 88 interviews—with botanists, bushwalkers, environmentalists, farmers, foresters, loggers and many others—for the National Library of Australia's oral history programme. Eight short essays provide varied contexts from environmental history to forest economics. Three earlier forest histories are based on similar collections. Ian Watson's *Fighting over the forests*, published in 1990. Simon Cubitt's *Recollections from the forest: 75 years of forest service in Tasmania*, published by Forestry Tasmania in 1996 and Roger Underwood's earlier *Leaves from the forest: stories from the lives of West Australian foresters*. The relationship between the oral historian and those interviewed, remains critical as does the issue of the nature of memory itself.

**Recent Journals**

*Environment and History*, vol 9(1), February 2003

Two of the articles in this issue of *Environment and History* are concerned with our region. Eric Pawson in New Zealand and Stephen Dovers in Australia have joined in writing *Environmental History and the Challenges of Inter-disciplinarity: An Antipodean Perspective*. Joanna Sassoon from Curtin University has provided a paper on the

Cultural Ecology of Fish-eating Birds in Western Australia. This is a particularly welcome addition to the sparse literature on Western Australia

*Light Railways*, no.169, February 2003

This issue has a delightful account by Jim Harvey of riding on the tramway to the Federal Mill, near Warburton in Victoria, in 1948. It was one of the last timber tramways to run in Australia. Harvey remembers it as surprisingly quiet.

*Light Railways*, no. 170, April 2003

Norm Houghton has a substantial article on 'Pioneer Tramway Technology in Victoria' which concerns the Wombat Forest in Victoria's Central Highlands. It traces changes in tramway technology up to the early twentieth century.

*Environmental History* 8(1), January 2003

Although mainly concerned with North America, *Environmental History* carries some papers of wider interest and extensive reviews. A series of 'Reflections' on broad themes, has been started in this issue with a paper by Paul Sutter titled 'What can U.S. environmental historians learn from non-U.S. historiography?' Despite the current political climate the author has the considerable grace to admit that he started from an insular position, which he abandoned after reading widely in environmental history, particularly of South Asia and Africa. This enabled him to compare and contrast the themes of U.S. historiography with those elsewhere. Sutter emphasises the importance given to the imperial/settler transition in African and South Asian historiography and its relative neglect in the U.S. literature. In Australia, Libby Robin has stressed the importance of such comparative studies, and Sutter's paper provides a good example. He concludes that 'we must move beyond our borders as a way of making sense of our home ground'

*Forest History Today*, Spring 2002

The US Forest History Society's magazine carries North American articles plentifully illustrated with very high-quality photographs. One describes the influence of Bob Marshall, a young forester, on the formation of the Wilderness Society in the 1930s. Apparently he published a book called *The People's Forests* in 1933 that was fiercely critical of the timber industry and called for the timberlands to be placed in public ownership. Another

describes the restoration of a large steam sawmill as a National Historic Site in Canada.

*British Columbia Forest History Newsletter*, no. 68, November 2002.

The dramatic impact of gold rushes on the forests is well-known in Australia, and the account in this newsletter of the concentrated utilization of the forests in the far north of British Columbia during the Yukon gold rush of the 1890s will strike familiar chords. Anybody for comparative studies—in the summer? The Newsletter also notes that a 1977 classic short film, 'Spartree', about a high rigger climbing and topping a spar tree on Vancouver Island has been digitally re-mastered as a video and is available for sale.

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*B.C. Forest History Newsletter* No.69, February 2003

This issue has the first part of a paper on the history of the Society of Consulting Foresters of British Columbia which started in 1969. Perhaps this might stimulate our Australian Society to make a similar record?

*Queensland Review* vol 9(2), November 2002. A special edition 'On the Bunya Trail', pp. 121.

This contains 10 of the contributions to the Bunya Symposium held in April 2002. It draws together historical, cultural and scientific 'intersecting themes' ranging from paleo-botany to literature. When Indigenous values, cooking, forestry, recreation, art and poetry are added, it all makes a rich collection. Interestingly, the Bunya Symposium was hosted as a joint venture of Global Arts Link at the Ipswich Regional Gallery and the Queensland Studies Centre at Griffith University. Anna Haebich will be taking the project further with an exhibition.

*News of Forest History, IUFRO* no 31 July 2002

This includes a valuable synthesis by M Agnoletti of the attempt to establish a productive forest ecosystem in Southern Europe. It considers the changing demand for different species, the role of mining and shipbuilding and increasing number of conifer forests in Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean. It also has an article by Matthias Burgi and Anton Schuler on the spread of conifer forest in Switzerland. In contrast the article by Lars Ostlund on the forest history of boreal Scandinavia shows how geography and climate differences affect the development of managed forests.

### Publications Noted

Donald W. Floyd 2002. *Forest Sustainability: the History, the Challenge, the Promise*. Durham, N.C.: Forest History Society, pp.83. ISBN 0-89030-061-5 (paperback) USD \$7.95+\$3.00 shipping and handling

This is the fifth of the US Forest History Society's informative booklets aimed at making the perspective of forest history widely available to a general readership. The US Society has similar objectives to our own and with this series is able to contribute to its educational objective. This booklet is factual, clearly written and should be accessible to senior high school students. It sets the international scene in terms of forest areas, deforestation, and production, but not in terms of inequity or social justice. Its examples are drawn primarily from North America.

Stephen Dovers and Su Wild River (eds) 2003. *Managing Australia's Environment*. Leichhardt, NSW: Federation Press. ISBN 1-862-87447-6, paperback, pp. 564. \$75.00 (incl GST).

23 substantial chapters cover the major sectors, policy processes, institutions, processes and perspectives of Australian environmental management. A chapter by Catherine Mobbs provides an overview of 'National Forest Policy and Regional Forest Agreements' and one by Clive Hamilton concerns 'The Resource Assessment Commission: Lessons in the Venality of Modern Politics'. Other chapters consider matters such as the National Conservation Strategy, the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, Catchment Management and Landcare.

Michael Williams 2003. *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis*. University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-89926-8. Hardback. pp. 689. \$US 70.00 (\$A 153.00).

This is a weighty work in scope and execution. It tells the story of deforestation from the Ice Ages to the present providing us with a magisterial treatment of matters at the heart of the transformation of the world's forests.

The first part, 'Clearing in the Deep Past', has five chapters covering the earliest hunter-gather societies, the first farmers, the classical world and the medieval world. The second part, 'Reaching out: Europe and the Wider World', covers two periods,

1500-1750 and 1750-1920. Each period has a chapter dealing with 'driving forces and cultural climates' followed by two chapters dealing respectively with clearing in Europe and clearing beyond Europe. The third part, 'The Global Forest', deals with what Williams calls 'the great onslaught' on the world's forests, mostly in the second half of the twentieth century. It is well illustrated with maps, tables, pictures and diagrams.

It provides a masterful survey of a huge literature in agriculture, archaeology, climate, forestry, geography in its many forms, history and technology. Almost 2000 sources are cited and meticulously noted. Williams is well known for *The Making of the South Australian Landscape* and *Americans and their Forests*.

### A tree puzzle.

One of the first Europeans to record a visit to Australia and to carry back to Europe samples of Australian vegetation was William Dampier who spent a fortnight or more of the North West coast. In his best selling account *A New Voyage Round the World* published at the end of the seventeenth century he wrote:

The Land is of a dry sandy soil, destitute of Water, except you make Wells: yet producing divers sorts of Trees: but the Woods are not thick nor the Trees very big. Most of the Trees that we saw are Dragon-trees as we supposed; and these too are the largest Trees of any there. They are about the bigness of our large Apple Trees, and about the same height: and the rind is blackish. And somewhat rough/ The leaves are of a dark colour; the Gum distils out of the knots or cracks that are in the bodies of the Trees. We compared it with some Gum Dragon or Dragons Blood that was aboard; and it was of the same colour and taste. The other sorts of Trees were not known by any of us. There was pretty long grass growing under the Trees; but it was very thin. We saw no Trees that bore Fruit or Berries.

Although there were illustrations of some Australian plants in Dampier's works (one of which is reproduced in Helen Hewson's 1999 work on Australian plants in history, this does not seem to include this trees. What was this dragon tree? It does not appear to be the Paulownia, or any other species currently classified as *Draeco*. Any ideas?

### Miscellaneous

Let us remember the role of the sacred tree in the ancient world. In Egyptian mythology the hieroglyph written to signify tree appears to represent the sycamore. The sycamore carried special mythical significance. According to the *Book of Dead*, twin sycamores stood at the eastern gate of heaven from which the sun god Re emerged each morning. It was also regarded as a manifestation of the goddesses Nut, Isis, and especially of Hathor, who was given the epithet Lady of the Sycamore. Sycamores were often planted near tombs, and burial in coffins made of sycamore wood returned the dead person to the womb of the mother tree goddess.

The willow was sacred to Osiris; it was the willow which sheltered his body after he was killed. The evergreen date palm was a sacred tree, and a palm branch was the symbol of the god Heh, the personification of eternity. It also signified immortality and divine blessings and later was often seen as an attribute of Christian martyrs. In Greek culture the oak tree was sacred to Zeus and Pan, the myrtle-tree to Aphrodite the olive tree to the goddess Athena.

### Some Australian issues of concern

Since the mid 1990s, there has been a noticeable decline in the health of tuart trees south of Mandurah in Western Australia. The State Government's Tuart Response Group seeks to establish a partnership with local communities to plan and manage the conservation and protection of tuart trees and ecosystems, and to investigate the causes of their decline.

Before Europeans arrived there were probably more than 111,600 hectares of tuart woodland. It is estimated that only 35% remains.

### Lost and Found Statistics

Does anybody have access to the *Compendium of Australian Forest Economic Statistics* compiled by A.G. Hanson put out by the Forestry and Timber Bureau about 1964? The National Library does not have a copy. We would like to get a copy deposited in the National Library. We have already put up quite a lot of forest historical statistics on our web page. We might be able to put these up and also those in the *Compendium of Forest Products Statistics, 1935-36 to 1966-67* compiled by

D.Wilson (F&TB 1969) if we could get copyright clearance. If you know where a copy of the economic statistics are and especially if you would like to volunteer to enlarge the statistical data base on our web site, contact John Dargavel

dargavels@ozemail.com.au

### Our Web Site:

<http://cres.anu.edu.au/envirobist/afhssociety.html>

Thanks to Patrick Stein, our web site is now up-to-date. Please check it out and send in material that you think should be added or corrections. The site includes data sets of historical statistics that can be downloaded for you to use in your own research papers. Further sets could be added, if anyone would like to contribute them.

### Forthcoming conferences 2003

#### Local

14-18 July 2003 at The University of Western Australia. *On Water: Cultural, Historical and Environmental Analyses*

A diverse range of speakers will deliver papers (by invitation only). Specific focus areas of the symposium will include: the history of ecology

#### International

The XII World Forestry Congress, Quebec Canada from September 21-28 2003. *Forests, source of life.*

Sub-themes will include 'The forest: a living a habitat'. There will be the usual side events, technical visits and so on. Registration after 1 May will be \$800 Canadian dollars or \$150 for students and retirees. For online registration go to [www.wfc2003](http://www.wfc2003)

European Society for Environmental History, Second International Conference, Prague September 3-7. *Dealing with Diversity.*

[prfdec,natur.cuni.cz/ICESEH2003](mailto:prfdec,natur.cuni.cz/ICESEH2003)

### More distant conferences

The Australasian International Conference on *Innovation In the Forest and Wood Products Industry*, Melbourne, Victoria, 1st to 4th October 2006. This conference is interested in having an exhibition of the history of forest sector technology.

Contact Dr Kwame Asumadu directly on [kasumadu@bigpond.net.au](mailto:kasumadu@bigpond.net.au)

**Best buys!**

Don't forget to buy our new publication, the product of our meeting of in Hobart in February 2002.

*Australia's Ever-changing Forests V. Proceedings of the Fifth National Conference on Australian Forest History.*  
John Dargavel Denise Gaughwin and Brenda Libbis (eds) December 2002

It covers some of Tasmania's rich forest history: its exploration, its parks and conservation reserves, and its wood-using industries. As well as ecological change, struggles for conservation, heritage preservation and much else including international themes in forest history, labour history and the march of the sciences from nineteenth century botany to the recent discovery of the Wollemi pine.

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