
Australian Forest History Society

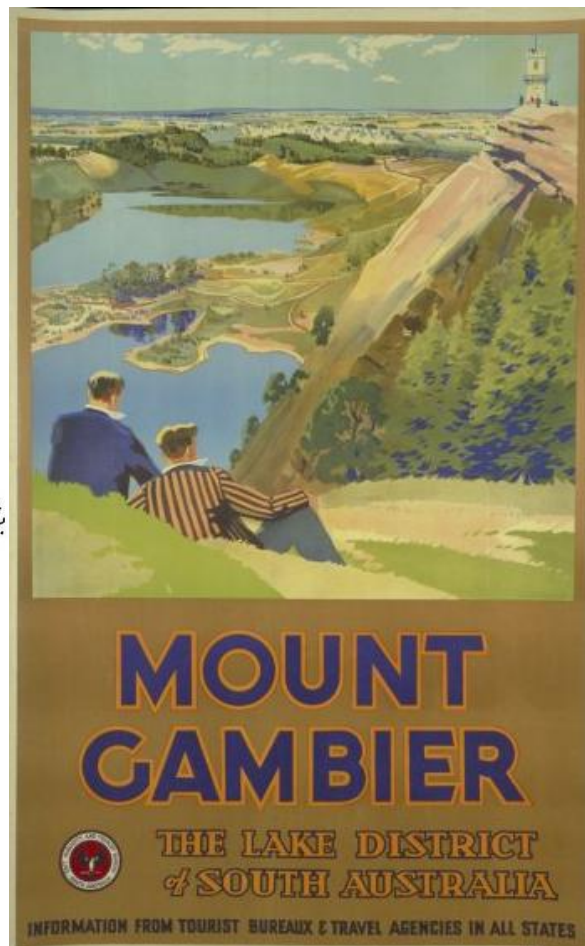
Newsletter No. 65
April 2015

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

**Planted Landscapes:
Ninth National
Conference of the
Australian Forest
History Society**

**21st to 24th October 2015,
Mount Gambier, South Australia**

See pages 2 and 12



*Travel poster by John Charles Goodchild (1898-1980),
Government of South Australia, 1930s.
Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an13659809>.*

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) Inc is A\$25 a year for Australian and New Zealand addressees or A\$15 a year for students. For other overseas addressees, it is A\$30.

These prices do not include GST as the AFHS is not registered for paying or claiming GST. **Membership expires on 30th June each year.**

Payment can be made by cheque or money order, or through Electronic Funds Transfer.

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Australian Forest History Society Inc.
PO Box 5128
KINGSTON ACT 2604

Electronic Funds Transfer can be paid into:

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be published in **August 2015**, and will be edited by the Conference Organising Committee. The issue after that planned for **December**.

Input is always welcome.

Contributions can be sent to the editor at
Fintan.OLaighin@agriculture.gov.au.

CONFERENCE UPDATE



Preparations are well under way for our ninth conference which will be held in Mount Gambier (South Australia) in late October. It will be our first conference since Lismore (New South Wales) in June 2010.

The "Call for Papers", the accompanying "Guide for Preparation of Papers" and the Registration Form are all available from our website at
www.foresthistory.org.au/conferences.html.

Full Registration is \$500 (or \$400 if payment is made by 1st August), Student Registration is \$150/\$100 and Day Registration is also \$150/\$100. There is also provision for Accompanying Guests (\$200/\$150) which will get admission to the Conference Dinner on the evening of Wednesday 21st October as well inclusion on the half day excursions that will be part of the conference. Payment can be made by cheque or direct deposit to the society's bank account.

The registration form also includes some accommodation options.

More details will be posted on the website as they are available. If you have any queries on the conference, please contact the chair of the Conference Organising Committee, Sue Feary, at suefeary@hotmail.net.au.



THE 2014-15 COMMITTEE - UPDATE

In the December issue, we reported that our Vice-President position was vacant. President Feary has since advised that Jane Lennon has agreed to continue in this role. Our committee for 2014-15 is therefore:

President:	Sue Feary
Vice-President:	Jane Lennon
Secretary:	Kevin Frawley
Treasurer:	Fintán Ó Laighin
Committee:	Leith Davis, Peter Evans, Rob Robinson and Ian Barnes
Public Officer:	Juliana Lazzari

A FURTHER NEW ZEALAND ADDITION TO THE "LONE PINE PUZZLE"

By Mike Roche

Roger Underwood's "Lone Pine Puzzle" in the September AFHS Newsletter and the reference to Wilcox and Spencer's article in *New Zealand Journal of Forestry* about various "Lone Pine" claimants in New Zealand prompts me to add another memorial tree to the latter's list. This is the approximately 8m high "Lone Pine" that stands beside a Yew tree in a corner of Baring Square West in Ashburton, a rural town on the Canterbury Plains approximately midway between Christchurch and Timaru. The town's major 15m high obelisk style War Memorial occupies the centre of the square (which is actually oblong shaped) and other trees and plaques mark subsequent conflicts. A stone and plaque under the tree describe it as "a pine descended from the original lone pine at Anzac" and it was planted on 27 July 1957. This date doesn't seem to coincide with any major anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign. The associated stone which was brought from Gallipoli itself was unveiled on 6 February 1960. The local newspaper, the *Ashburton Guardian*, noted that in New Zealand, seed reputedly from the Lone Pine was germinated and grown in Hawkes Bay and that the sapling came from this source, presented to the president of the local Gallipoli Veterans' Association. Frustratingly, I have been unable to unearth any details about the Gallipoli Veterans' Association membership or its activities in Ashburton. I corresponded with Wilcox about this additional tree and emailed some photographs, he considered that it might be *Pinus halepensis* but he couldn't be sure because my pictures were not that good (though he was too polite to say so).

FORESTRY UNITS IN TWO WORLD WARS

By John Dargavel

Very little has been researched about the Forestry Units that operated in WWI and WWII. We do know that they were raised in several states from the forest services and timber industry, and that they served in the United Kingdom and Papua-New Guinea in WWII. And here is an intriguing artifact to stimulate someone's research.



**ANZAC
Forestry Units
Inter-Dominion
Axemen's Cup**
*New Zealand at
Cirencester,
30 August 1941
Australia at Dumfries,
25 September 1942
Presented by the Timber
Supply Division of the
(UK) Ministry of
Supply, August 1941*

LONG GULLY BRIDGE LOST

By Jack Bradshaw

The Long Gully (or Asquith) Bridge, the longest of the many tramway bridges built by the timber industry in Western Australia, was destroyed in a bushfire in February 2015. Built by the WA Railway Department in 1949 to access the forest south of the Murray River some 65 km from its mill at Banksiadale (near Dwellingup), the bridge was 128m long with 28 spans. It was one of the last tramway bridges to be built by the timber industry.

While the 44 tonne G class was the most common locomotive used in the timber industry, they proved to be too slow for this route with such a long haul. They were soon replaced by four much larger C class 72 tonne locomotives. These were ex-WAGR locos converted from coal to wood burning.

To allow for greater speed to provide for two return trips a day, special fixed length log bogies were built that made it possible to use vacuum brakes on the rake, unlike the hand-braked bogies used generally throughout the industry. Another unusual feature of the line was the provision of a turntable at the mill and a triangle in the bush to avoid having to run tender-first to the bush. During periods of high fire hazard when daytime use of locomotives was prohibited, a double load was hauled at night using two locomotives in tandem.

Banksiadale mill, originally built to cut sleepers and other timber for the railway workshop in Midland, was transferred to the State Building Supplies in 1961 and then sold to Hawker Siddeley Building Supplies in 1961. In 1963 the mill burnt down and the line was closed. The rails were subsequently removed and the bridge converted for road haulage, carting logs to the Dwellingup mill into the 1970s. The road was later closed and with side railing added, it became part of the Bibbulmun track walk trail.

The bridge was considered to be one the finest examples of timber industry bridge building and was listed by the WA Heritage Council as being of "Exceptional significance". The loss of the bridge has highlighted the vulnerability of so much of heritage value that exists throughout the forest and the apparent lack of priority for their protection.

More details of the line and the bridge can be found in: Adrian Gunzburg & Jeff Austin, 2008. *Rails through the bush: timber and firewood tramways and railway contractors of Western Australia*. Rail Heritage WA, Bassendean. ISBN 9780980392227.



WOODBURN PLANTATION - ITS DESTINY LAY IN ITS NAME: PART 3 CONCLUSION

By Ian Bevege and Ian Barnes, retired foresters,
Batemans Bay NSW

Ian Barnes traced the early history and demise of the softwood plantation programme established on Woodburn State Forest (SF 755 St Vincent) in his previous two articles in AFHS Newsletters 58 and 59, published December 2011 and June 2012 respectively. To reiterate briefly, Woodburn State Forest, located on the south coast of NSW between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay, and between Burrill Lake and Lake Tabourie immediately to the west of the Princes Highway, was dedicated in 1920 and comprised a low lying depauperate dry sclerophyll forest dominated by blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*), scribbly gum (*E. racemosa*) and red bloodwood (*E. gummifera*).

The NSW Forest Department under Director General of Forests John Ednie Brown had initiated experimental softwood planting in the early 1890s at Gosford and the then Forestry Department under Director Richard Dalrymple Hay made the first commercial plantings at Tuncurry in 1913 (Grant 1990). The plantation programme at Woodburn was initiated by the Forestry Commission of NSW (established 1916 with Dalrymple Hay as Chief Commissioner and Norman Jolly Commissioner) in 1921. This initiative was no doubt stimulated by the upsurge of interest in establishing plantations after the First World War, which saw massive overcutting of forests in Europe, Britain and its Dominions to feed the allied war effort. This interest was channelled via the highly visible activities of the British Empire Forestry Conference, the professional body of senior foresters and forest administrators from Britain, the Dominions and Colonies that held its first meeting in London in 1920; the third meeting was held in Australia in 1928 and provided a major (at the time) political as well as technical forum for promoting professional forest management, including plantation establishment.

Returning to Woodburn, numerous species of *Pinus* were planted between 1921 and 1964, the main species planted being *P. radiata*, *P. muricata*, *P. pinaster* and *P. elliottii*. By 1965 the area of slash pine (*P. elliottii*) had reached some 419 acres (175 hectares) when planting was suspended following a severe fire; yet another fire in 1968 destroyed 75 per cent of the plantation, only the older age classes surviving. This fire finally broke the camel's back. As described previously in Part 2 of this series, fire has been a recurring theme at Woodburn; under its current national park tenure (as Meroo National Park since 2001), fire remains a major management concern as the forest regenerates with a gaggle of eucalypts and associated native species. Throughout this natural regeneration and advance growth from earlier fires are scattered remnant pines from the original plantation (see Figure 1 *P. pinaster* planted 1922-23 amid regrowth) and regeneration of slash pine.



Figure 1: Remnant *P. pinaster* planted March 1922. Photo taken October 2012, aged 90 years. GBHOB 303 cm, MAI 3.4 cm/yr. Note regrowth of *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia* and *Leptospermum*.

An essential element of the fire protection system for the Woodburn plantation was a fire tower located on the highest point in a somewhat subdued landscape. This point was only 65 metres above sea level and is indicated as a spot height on the GDA Tabourie Map Sheet 8927-2S NSW Department of Lands 2007 at Lat 35 deg 23 min 24.8 sec S, Long 150 deg 24 min 31.4 sec E. The tower was located on the north-west boundary of, but just outside, the plantation area and provided observation over the potentially most fire-hazardous country to the west and north-west as well as the plantations to the east. This tower was burnt down in the 1953 fire and has slowly disintegrated since, but during a visit to the site on 30 October 2012 we were able to reconstruct its details to some extent. The tower comprised a single grey ironbark (*E. paniculata*) pole (ex situ) to which was attached by iron collar and spikes a ladder constructed of 10 feet (3m) sections of angle iron and all enclosed in an iron safety mesh. There was no trace of the cabin that originally topped the pole, nor could its height be determined.



Figure 2: Remains of Woodburn Fire Tower 30 October 2012 showing the single pole, ladder, basal collar and safety mesh. Observers left to right - Ian Barnes, Len Mors and Ian Bevege.

Details of establishment silviculture for slash pine were set down in a proposed prescription for an annual programme of 50 acres (20 hectares) dated 26 July 1959 (D.O. 368, file A32), prepared by Senior Forester Dave Holmes under signature of Vince Hervert for the District Forester Batemans Bay. This prescription covered seed procurement (from Woolgoolga) and pre-treatment, nursery procedures for producing 10 month open-root stock (bed preparation, weed and disease control, fertilising, sowing, watering, root-wrenching and lifting). Sowing was in early September, lifting and heeling-in early May and planting June July.

On 30 October 2012 we relocated the 1959 nursery site (see Part 1) adjacent to the southern shore of Burrill Lake at Lat 35 deg 23 min 24.23 sec S, Long 150 deg 25 min 29.74 sec E. The nursery was heavily overgrown with wattles, blady grass and bracken fern. Close by and upslope was an earth dam that provided a gravity feed water supply partly fed by run off from the access road. Some posts of the nursery boundary fence remained, obviously showing the effects of bush fire, and the remains of the nursery beds mounds, approximately 8 feet (2.4m) wide could also be discerned. These beds appeared to be in two sets at right angles to one another and consequently were aligned across and down the slight slope to the lake. Whether these sets were contemporaneous or staged in time was indeterminate.



Figure 3: The heavily overgrown Woodburn nursery site on 30 October 2012 with a surviving burnt fence post. Ian Barnes looking disconsolate at the march of history.

In Part 1 Ian Barnes recorded the planting of a small area of tallowwood (*E. microcorys*). This was apparently planted by 1948 but actual planting date is unknown but would have been post 1945. We managed to locate this plantation a couple of hundred metres upslope from the nursery and it can be discerned on aerial photographs and Google Earth. Health and form is good for such a mediocre site, especially as tallowwood is quite site sensitive. Two of the better trees had GsBHOB (Girths at Breast Height Over Bark) of 62 and 67 cm respectively. Assuming a post war planting date of

1946-47 and therefore an age of 65 years, Mean Annual Increment (MAI) is estimated at around 1cm/year.



Figure 4: The remains of the earth dam that provided the nursery with irrigation water, looking into the old nursery site. Ian Barnes is standing on the earth bank and still looking disconsolate.

Woodburn State Forest was subsumed into Meroo National Park in 2001 under the Southern Regional Forest Agreement. The rationale for this is not clear except that as a plantation project it had failed and its potential for commercial native hardwood production was low, particularly as the better sites had been cleared for plantations - conditions making it an unattractive proposition to continue in state forest tenure as a production forest. As part of the national park estate however, despite its currently sorry silvicultural and ecological state, it helps to consolidate the fragmented Meroo National Park, providing a significant wildlife corridor and biodiversity buffer to adjacent park areas of higher intrinsic conservation value. It also provides useful catchment protection for Burrill and Tabourie Lakes. That said, one would hope that the cultural history of Woodburn State Forest would be recognised by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and taken into account in its management plans for Meroo National Park. Unfortunately there is little indication to date that this is likely in the foreseeable future given the current level of passive management applied to this national park.



Figure 5: Woodburn tallowwood plantation 13 October 2012, approximately 65 years old and showing extensive epicormic growth from recent wildfire. Trees to right and left of Ian Bevege are 62 cm and 67cm GBHOB respectively.

FELLING TREES BY ELECTRICITY

By Roger Underwood

There has been an interesting exchange of correspondence on the old forester network recently concerning historical approaches to, and the evolution of methods of felling trees in Australia. Jack Bradshaw for example, in his wonderful book on the history of logging methods in Australia (*Jinkers, Arches and Whims*) has raised an intriguing question about when crosscut saws were first introduced to Australian felling operations, and suggests this was much more recent than most of us previously thought.

Gary Bacon, whose father was a logging contractor in Queensland but who is also a connoisseur of the fine arts, has produced a confirmation of Jack's suggestion with reference to a painting of axemen "Felling a giant gum tree in the ranges" in 1869 ¹ with no crosscut saw in sight:



This correspondence was in my mind at a time recently when I was glancing through a 19th century edition of my favourite journal, *The Indian Forester*. The edition contained an article originally published in *The Indian Agriculturalist* of March 1877, under the heading "Felling Trees by Electricity". I quote:

A novel and interesting experiment for felling trees with electricity instead of with the axe was recently attempted in the compound of The Stranger's Home, Bombay

..... The plan is simple. The two ends of the copper wires of a galvanic battery are connected with platinum wire which, of course, instantly becomes white hot, and while in this state, it is gently see-sawed across the trunk of the tree to be felled

The attempt was made. The burning wire performed its task very well but continually broke, and at

length there was no wire left. There is no doubt that with a thicker wire the experiment would have been entirely successful.

The process is one worth the attention of all governments engaged in forest clearing; and we hope to hear of it being tried on a wide scale.

The then editor of *The Indian Forester* (William Schlich) could not resist adding a dry footnote to this passage. "First of all it will be interesting to ascertain **on a small scale** what it will cost to fell a tree of a certain girth" using this technique. (My emphasis.)

I have not been able to determine the cost of platinum in 1877, but the current cost is astronomical, and would, I think, justify Schlich's reservations. Also noteworthy, but not surprising for those days, is the lack of any consideration of the dangers to the men working with the white hot wire; nor does it appear that the tree fellers in the experiment had taken the precaution of putting in a scarf before commencing the backing-down. A scarf, of course, is essential for controlling the direction of fall and therefore optimising operator safety.

Modern tree felling has not evolved greatly from historic methods (although here I am deliberately ignoring the use of hydraulic shears in plantation operations), but there is one exception: the axe has virtually disappeared from the Australian bush. In my day, it wasn't just timber cutters who wielded the axe - every farmer's or forester's vehicle carried one; indeed forestry students in 1961 were required to bring an axe with them when reporting to the Australian Forestry School, and we used them, felling pines and cutting out "biscuits" to measure growth rings and thinning research plots on Black Mountain (ACT) and at Pine Creek in northern NSW. I can remember felling a stag-headed old brush box at Pine Creek, with Phil Cheney as my partner, using only our axes, one chopping left- and one right-handed. It was a scene reminiscent of the painting, above, although we were not mounted on spring-boards.

The axe is gone from the bush, but the saw remains and is now the principal tool for tree felling. However, saws are now coupled to a two-stroke or diesel engine instead of well-muscled timber workers. Otherwise any sort of space-age technology, as foreshadowed by those Indian enthusiasts with their galvanic battery and platinum wire, is conspicuously absent from contemporary timber-felling operations.

Mention of the forester's axe leads me a further observation from the annals of *The Indian Forester*. In an article titled "The Forester's Grindstone" in Volume III (1) of 1877, an unnamed correspondent submitted the following:

There is no tool so essential to the forester as a good grindstone; it is therefore necessary that every forester should have one and know how to take proper care of it.

A grindstone should always be kept under cover, as exposure to the sun's rays hardens the grit and injures

¹ Published in *The Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 22nd February 1869, p58 (available at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60449535>).

the frame. The stone should not be allowed to stand in water, as this causes soft places. The water should be allowed to drip from some vessel placed above the stone and the drip should be stopped when the grindstone is not in use.

All greasy and rusty tools should be cleaned before being sharpened, as grease or rust chokes up the grit. The stone should be kept perfectly round and level on the face.

You never see grindstones any more, except perhaps standing derelict by a shed on an abandoned farm or in a pioneer museum, but they were commonplace in the forestry HQs I knew when I first worked in the bush. I can still visualise the grindstone at the back of the old stables at Mundaring Weir, and the men taking it in turns to sharpen their axes when it was "maintenance afternoon", or the field officers touching up their treemarking axes. I am sorry to say it stood in the sun, and I doubt anyone took care of it in the way prescribed above, but it did its job over a period of at least 50 years.



An old grindstone at Woolmers in Tasmania

I suppose the passing of the axe led inevitably to the passing of the grindstone. The same is probably true of the special tools that were used to file and set the teeth of a crosscut saw.

And it is not just the tools that have disappeared, but also the expertise involved in filing and setting a saw or sharpening an axe.

I once watched an old timber cutter sharpening his equipment in the bush. He used his crosscut saw to cut a slot in a jarrah stump, then turned the saw upside down and wedged it firmly into the slot, before taking up a flat file to work up and back on the teeth from each side of the stump and to set the depth of the rakers and touch up the angles on the tips. Then he picked up his axe, and with three neat strokes cut an axe-head sized hole in the bole of a tree, similar to the slots you still occasionally see on an old stump where the fallers had worked on spring-boards. Reversing the axe, he banged it home (swinging right-handed), leaving it fixed as firmly as in a vice. He then used a flat file to touch up the shoulder on the "top" face of the blade; after levering out the axe and driving it in left-handed, he did the same with the other face. The axe was then taken out of its slot, and the old

faller sat down on the stump, tucked the axe handle under one arm and placed the blade on his knee, allowing him to hone the cutting edge with a whetstone, applying liberal doses of saliva in the process. All of this took about 15 minutes.

The same correspondent who wrote on grindstones all those years ago added a note on how to "haft" (put a handle in) an axe. I love the introductory statement:

First get your blacksmith to make an iron wedge to fasten the handle in with. It will cost but a few pence

Like the grindstone, having your own blacksmith to assist with the hafting of your axe is now lost in the mist of time, at least in forestry in Australia. However, like most old foresters, I do still have a very fine axe in my toolshed at Gwambygine. Its an old Hytest head with an imported hickory handle. Regrettably it gets little use, and the handle always shrinks over summer, so that before it can be used I have to soak it in a bucket of water for a couple of hours, and then run a whetstone over the edge. But it's a lovely implement, and a pleasure to use when thinning small trees in my plantation, or form-pruning a champion tree of the future. Swinging a well-balanced and nicely sharpened axe is highly enjoyable especially, I think, in comparison to doing the job with platinum wire heated by electricity.

In writing about axes, I remember a good story told to me by my colleague Ian Bevege years ago. The research forester at some station in Queensland had been mystified by a report from one of his field staff who had been on an inspection tour of trial plots in the district. Referring to one of the plots the report stated that what this trial plot needed was "a good dose of PHK". "What's this PHK?" the research man spluttered, thinking it was some sort of strange fertiliser.

"Plumb, Hytest and Kelly" replied the old field man, who knew about the best way to deal with overstocking and scrub regrowth in a trial plot.

December 2013

VALE OLIVER RACKHAM

Contributed by John Dargavel

Oliver Rackham, botanist, geographer, historian and scholar: born Bungay, Suffolk 17 October 1939; OBE 1998; died Cambridge 12 February 2015. He was one of the world's great forest historians. We were fortunate to have his invaluable contribution to our 1996 conference at a time when the issues of old-growth forests had become an important matter for Australian forest historians to consider. Anyone who was there will never forget him stomping through the heathland forests at Jervis Bay in scarlet shorts and shirt.

His obituary in *The Independent* can be found at www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-oliver-rackham-botanist-and-expert-on-historic-trees-and-ancient-woodland-whose-work-inspired-a-generation-of-conservationists-10076570.html.

BOOK REVIEWS



Peter Holzworth, 2015. *A Tribute to Edward Harold Fulcher Swain*. 108 pp. \$25 (+\$10 postage). Available from the author (contact: p.holzy@bigpond.com / 22 Ukamirra Court, Ferny Hills QLD 4055 / (07) 3851 1936.

Reviewed by Terry Johnston, Former Executive Director, Forestry, Queensland.

Let me say at the outset that this is a historical work that very much needed to be written and placed on the public record.

As a young forester, and indeed throughout my 40+ years of public forest administration in Queensland, I was constantly aware of the heritage bequeathed to us by an early pioneer of public forestry in this country. That pioneer was, of course, the unforgettable EHF Swain. Many of the stories about Swain were handed down verbally, however, and it became difficult to determine what was fact and what was fiction.

This timely work by Peter Holzworth brings together a wealth of information from the public record, and from the prolific writings of Mr Swain himself, to paint a vivid picture of this dynamic and assertive public official. Importantly, it documents his enormous contribution to the protection of a large public forest estate, much of which would have been cleared for dairy farms without his strident input. The extent to which Swain pursued his views on forest protection in the face of strong opposition from politicians and the senior bureaucracy of the day is abundantly clear from the public record outlined in this book. The fact that Mr Swain was eventually sacked for his opposition to the prevailing political climate of forest clearing and agricultural development only adds to the stature of the man outlined in this book.

Holzworth has also brought out the important contribution of Mr Swain in the field of forest management in Australia. Mr Swain's support for forest research and for both an environmental and economic approach to forest management has shaped the thinking of generations of foresters in this country.

His book is easy to read and blends a mix of the passion of Swain's writings with the often difficult to understand machinations of the dour bureaucracy of yesteryear.

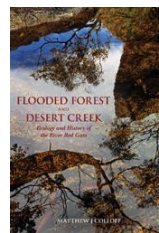
A Tribute to Edward Harold Fulcher Swain is an extremely important work in the historical context of forest management and forest conservation in Australia. I commend it to those who are interested in these fields and also to those who enjoy the story of a man who had an enormous passion for his profession and was prepared to stand up and be counted, no matter what the risk.

Description from the publisher:

This book, *A Tribute to Edward Harold Fulcher Swain* is just that, a tribute to the man, his devotion to forests and the profession of forestry. He was a crusader, a maverick and a rebel with a cause for all things relating to the forests of Queensland and New South Wales. A "one-off" in the days of yore. Born in 1883 in Sydney he worked his way through school, joined the Public Service and in due course became Director of Forests in Queensland, Commissioner of Forests in NSW and spent some time in Ethiopia as adviser to Emperor Haile Selassie. Swain died in Brisbane in 1970, aged 87.

Swain had an ego the size of the Melbourne Cricket Ground; he was his own man and often clashed with those who did not share his views. Indeed he made some enemies for life. But his staff followed wherever he led and they loved him for it.

In the early days of Queensland and New South Wales land was sorely needed for dairying, pastoral pursuits, forest timber, townships and the like. There were clashes between Swain and politicians, the press, landholders and developers. Swain held his ground firmly. He was basically self-taught, but he brought forestry into modernism with his emphasis on economic reality - forestry was a business, it had to pay its way, mostly through its income from plantations and native forests.



Matthew J. Colloff, 2014. *Flooded Forest and Desert Creek: Ecology and History of the River Red Gum*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, VIC. ISBN 9780643109193. 325 pp. \$69.95 (hb).

Reviewed by John Dargavel.

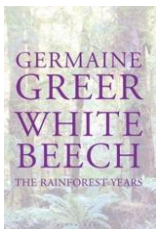
Those great forests growing beside rivers and creeks deserve a good history, and we need one to give us a deeper understanding behind the fraught politics of water allocations or Aboriginal rights. Much has been written and recently we have Daniel Connell's *Water Politics in the Murray-Darling Basin* (Federation Press, Sydney, 2007) and Jessica Weir's *Murray River Country: an Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners* (Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009). But the history also needs to be understood physically - "through your boots", as the German environmental historian, Joachim Radkau once put it - and scientifically if we are to gain a deeper understanding. Colloff is a senior CSIRO ecologist who collates and synthesises the biological and ecological knowledge. Although river red gum is spread across Australia, the book is primarily about the Barmah and Millewa area forests.

Flooded Forest and Desert Creek has three parts. The first covers the deep history of the river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), how it grows, taps water deep in the ground on droughts or and survives floods. The second describes the history and impact of fire, grazing, timber harvesting, floods, drought and the politically contested regulation of the water. In the third part Colloff departs from his historical ecology to considers our

consciousness of the tree through art, the rise of the conservation ideal, and give his thoughts for the future.

Colloff brings a critical ecological science perspective to the historical study. The landscape is defined in parts that function differently from one another - one size does not fit all; several forces at work in change - simplicity is suspect; and empirical rather than archival evidence is essential. Ecologists, he reports, tend to find historical accounts too open to interpretation making debate "unprofitable and contentious" (p.103). He criticises Bill Gammage's *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011) for assuming that fire shaped the whole Australian landscape, whereas Colloff shows flooding was the most important factor in the red gum forests and flood plains, and the evidence of fire shaping these forests was "very slight, circumstantial and elusive" (p.123).

In the first two parts of the book Colloff succeeds in the difficult task of negotiating the mass of scientific papers and making their import clear, although perhaps overly detailed in places. However, plentiful photographs and diagrams help the story along. In parts of his chapters on grazing and the timber industry Colloff includes short historical descriptions which provide the context, but which contrast with his detailed and critical scientific analyses of the effects of changes. The contrast is more marked the third part of the book. Physical evidence was no help in examining how consciousness of the red gums has been formed by painters and writers for example, or how increasing areas of the forests were turned into national parks following inquiries or elections. Colloff recognises the multiplicity of conflicting views and hopes about the forests and his love for the forests pervades the book. He hopes that the river red gum can be a "potent symbol, uniting people, place, time and space" (p.265). This is a fine book, produced to the high standards that we expect from CSIRO Publishing. I hope that it will stimulate a social and political history with the same rigour that Colloff brings to the ecological history.



Germaine Greer, 2013. *White Beech: the rainforest years*. Bloomsbury, London. ISBN 9781408846711. 370 pp. \$39.99 (hb).

Reviewed by Jane Lennon.

"To my Anglophone sensibility the misleading imprecision of the name

'White Beech' conveys something of the mystery that veils my whole crackbrained enterprise, something of the riddle of the rainforest (p.16)."

For those of you who came on the AFHS post Lismore conference tour, this book will have special resonance. It is a masterful (or should I say mistressful for Germaine?) study of the locality in the Border Ranges adjacent to the Natural Arch section of Springbrook National Park, Queensland.

Following in the tradition of Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres*, it has the landscape, and more particularly the white beech (*Gmelina leichhardtii*) and its associated

ecosystem, as the central character in a wide embrace of environmental history. This history covers Gondwanan time and its surviving flora and fauna relics around the Mount Warning or Wollumbin caldera, exploration and dispossession of the Aboriginal inhabitants, using their knowledge and slave labour in timber getting (especially the early cedar cutters), clearing the land, trying to grow crops and forage for stock especially dairy cows, then bananas, other exotic fruit and nuts, land administration, forest regulation, abandonment, amalgamation, flood and cyclone, markets and the development of a local community. It tells the painful story of failed agricultural settlement so familiar along the eastern escarpment of Australia and land clearing and now her endeavour to "rehabilitate" (a carefully chosen word as restoration is impossible) the forest.

Her book is an account of her search for a piece of Australian land to repair ranging from Eden to Central Australia but then her seduction by a Regent Bowerbird dancing in a clearing of a clapped out farm "battered by clearing, by logging, by spraying, and worse". Then in December 2001, Greer bought a property at Cave Creek in south-eastern Queensland, "60 hectares of steep rocky country, most of it impenetrable scrub", and set out to rebuild its original rainforest. Because she felt that no one could ever really own such a place, she named the property Cave Creek Rainforest Rehabilitation Scheme (CCRRS). A comprehensive account follows of unravelling the European impact on the block she purchased and then the arduous work of trial and error in identifying, collecting and raising plants with which to engage in that rehabilitation. Her archival research is admirable, her tussle with the "bloody botanists" over time and their naming and renaming of species is amusing as well as a scholarly tour through botanical exploration of rainforests and the history of nomenclature - essential for her obtaining the original species of this locality and removing weeds. Her sister Jane, a botanist, is essential to Greer's endeavour as are her paid work force to whom the book is dedicated.

Being a linguist assisted her fascinating study of the traditional owners, "the contradictory history of the devastated peoples of the Gold Coast hinterland (p.135)". As a heritage consultant who worked on the Githabul native title claim for part of the area, I can attest to the many name changes and variations in the dialects of the Yugambeh/Bundjalung language which is still spoken today. Greer teases out the Aboriginal names for local plants and places and the varying creation stories and concludes that "the only way I can make sense of my anomalous situation is to tell myself that I don't own the forest, the forest owns me (p.141)". Her battle with weeds and failures in her replanting attests to this vigorous forest regrowth. She also has excellent chapters on furry and non-furry fauna and invertebrates including a comprehensive history of "vermin" control in south-eastern Queensland. These chapters may seem dry and text book-like as Greer shows off her knowledge but for those interested in the region, it is a real treasure trove of information and sources.

Engaged in moral remediation and stewardship of World Heritage listed remnants of Australian rainforest, she has a rather sad epilogue. It considers fragmentation, the now fire-prone sclerophyll forest replacing rainforest, lack of funded protection for public lands and national park budgets spent on public amenities, and realising now that "if conservation is to be done at all, it will have to be done by dedicated individuals and organisations on private land (p.342)". She is leaving her block to the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest but if the expensive and time consuming achievements such as Greer's are to be sustained, some consolidation of the many disparate efforts at restoring our country will be required.

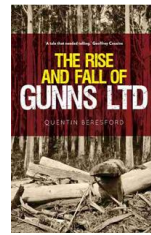
Her aim in writing the book was to "convey the deep joy that rebuilding wild nature can bring. Not that the forest is peaceful, anything but (p.12)". This book brought me joy as it is another icon of Australian environmental history and is essential reading for all forest historians.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Haripriya Rangan, Karen L. Bell, David A. Baum, Rachael Fowler, Patrick McConvell, Thomas Saunders, Stef Spronck, Christian A. Kull & Daniel J. Murphy 2015. "New Genetic and Linguistic Analyses Show Ancient Human Influence on Baobab Evolution and Distribution in Australia". PLoS ONE 10(4): e0119758. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0119758.
(<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0119758>)

Abstract: This study investigates the role of human agency in the gene flow and geographical distribution of the Australian baobab, *Adansonia gregorii*. The genus *Adansonia* is a charismatic tree endemic to Africa, Madagascar, and northwest Australia that has long been valued by humans for its multiple uses. The distribution of genetic variation in baobabs in Africa has been partially attributed to human-mediated dispersal over millennia, but this relationship has never been investigated for the Australian species. We combined genetic and linguistic data to analyse geographic patterns of gene flow and movement of word-forms for *A. gregorii* in the Aboriginal languages of northwest Australia. Comprehensive assessment of genetic diversity showed weak geographic structure and high gene flow. Of potential dispersal vectors, humans were identified as most likely to have enabled gene flow across biogeographic barriers in northwest Australia. Genetic-linguistic analysis demonstrated congruence of gene flow patterns and directional movement of Aboriginal loanwords for *A. gregorii*. These findings, along with previous archaeobotanical evidence from the Late Pleistocene and Holocene, suggest that ancient humans significantly influenced the geographic distribution of *Adansonia* in northwest Australia.

(Thanks to the Australian & New Zealand Environmental History Network for bringing this to the editor's attention. Its website is at <http://environmentalhistory-au-nz.org/>.)



Quentin Beresford, 2015. *The Rise and Fall of Gunns Ltd*. NewSouth, Sydney. ISBN 9781742234199. 448 pp. \$32.99.

Description from the publisher's website at www.newsouthbooks.com.au/books/rise-and-fall-gunns-ltd.

At its peak, Gunns Ltd had a market value of \$1 billion, was listed on the ASX 200, was the largest employer in the state of Tasmania and its largest private landowner. Most of its profits came from woodchipping, mainly from clear-felled old-growth forests. A pulp mill was central to its expansion plans. Its collapse in 2012 was a major national news story, as was the arrest of its CEO for insider trading.

Quentin Beresford illuminates for the first time the dark corners of the Gunns empire. He shows it was built on close relationships with state and federal governments, political donations and use of the law to intimidate and silence its critics. Gunns may have been single-minded in its pursuit of a pulp mill in Tasmania's Tamar Valley, but it was embedded in an anti-democratic and corrupt system of power supported by both main parties, business and unions. Simmering opposition to Gunns and all it stood for ramped up into an environmental campaign not seen since the Franklin Dam protests.

MUSINGS AND AMUSINGS

By John Dargavel

A number of papers from Italy have strayed across my desk recently, their authors all worried about how the forests are spreading back into long-settled agricultural landscapes. They worry about the loss of the aesthetic values; they worry about the loss of the rural society; *and* they worry about the loss of biodiversity, indeed for some the loss of biodiversity is the main concern that led to their making extensive surveys. For them it is all together in the "cultural landscape" package. Their argument for the Italian landscape - remember your Tuscan holiday? - is much the same as that for the alpine landscape in central Europe: it had been farmed for so long in ways that jumbled the forests and fields together, that it was richer in species than the forest would be alone. How far do such arguments apply in Australia, I wonder? Would they get any traction in our seemingly endless "forest wars", I wonder more?

On lighter note was a newspaper cutting sent from Scotland about "re-wilding" boars - not "bores" they are plentiful - that once roamed the Scottish hills landscapes. Both boars and beavers were brought from Europe and breeding colonies have been established. So far they are enclosed, but will fences last? Or will more knights be needed? - could we send a couple? Will wolves be next? They have been reintroduced into parts of France and Germany. Better keep an eye out, before wolves get mine when next I am there.

Watch this column.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - STRAHAN & DAVIES, SAWMILLERS

Susan & Gary Clift have contacted the AFHS asking for help in identifying a series of photos that have been left to them by a late relative. To date the only means of identifying them is from the name painted on the side of a truck - Strahan & Davies, Sawmillers:



A bit blurry, but detail from the door of the truck.

The Clifts are interested if there is any history attached to Strahan & Davies, where the photos might have been taken and in what period. AFHS president Sue Feary suggests that the age of the truck is an indication of the earliest period it could be and the snow in one photo indicates a mountainous region. She thinks the photos were taken at Tanjil Bren (east of Melbourne) in the 1940s to 1950s when Strahan & Davies owned a mill there after the 1939 fires razed the place to the ground (see website at <http://tanjil-bren.blogspot.com.au/2011/06/some-tanjil-bren-history.html>). The company also had mills in other places in Victoria and later became known as Calco.

If anyone has any more information, the Clifts' e-mail address is clift@ihug.com.au (please let the AFHS know as well).



IFA (AND AFHS) MEMBER RECEIVES AUSTRALIA DAY HONOUR

*Contributed by John Dargavel
(sourced from the Institute of Foresters of Australia)*

Congratulations to (IFA) member Tony Fearnside of Stirling ACT on receiving a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to the community of the Australian Capital Territory.

His relevant activities include:

- Member, Coolaman Ridge Park Care Group.
- Member, ACT Bush Fire Council, 2007-12.
- Member, Tree Advisory Panel (appointed under the *Tree Protection Act 2005*), 2006-12.
- Convenor/President, Friends of the ACT Arboreta, 2003-12.
- Founder and Inaugural Chairman, Southern Tablelands Farm Forestry Network, 1996.
- Consultant, Bushfire Protection and Small-scale Forestry, 1989-2013.
- Chief Fire Control Officer, ACT Bush Fire Council, 1967-74.
- Forestry Office, Department of the Capital Territory, 1965-89.

LAUNCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES HUB

By Libby Robin and Thom van Dooren, Convenor

The Environmental History Network has announced the launch of the Australian Environmental Humanities Hub, a central site for the gathering, dissemination and co-ordination of news, events, short courses and other happenings in this emerging field. This is a community project: the site relies on everyone with an interest to add relevant news and event items by filing in the simple forms provided.

To find out what's going on and sign up to be kept up to date via e-mail, Facebook or Twitter, visit the sites at:

www.achhub.org.
twitter.com/achhub.
www.facebook.com/achhub.



PLANTED LANDSCAPES

Registration is now open for the upcoming conference which will be held at City Hall, within the Main Corner Complex in the centre of Mount Gambier. Accommodation is also available at Lakes Resort, not far from the conference venue, where the conference dinner will also be held. Registration/Accommodation and Call for Papers forms can be downloaded from the Society's website (www.foresthistory.org.au/conferences.html). Remember, if you register early you can save \$100 on the full registration cost of \$500.

Please send completed forms to Sue Feary by email suefeary@hotmail.net.au or post to:

AFHS Conference
53 Saumarez Street
VINCENTIA NSW 2540

Preparation of the conference program is well advanced and judging by papers submitted so far, it promises to be interesting and eclectic. We are also working with local members of the Institute of Foresters in organising the field excursions.

From The Conference Organising Committee
(Sue Feary, Leith Davis and Rob Robinson)

