Australian Forest History Society

Newsletter No. 77
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"... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments."

Forester Murray Thompson feeding his pony Kitty at Narbethong in 1938

Photograph courtesy Murray Thompson, Peter Evans collection.

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NEXT ISSUE

The newsletter is published three times a year and the next issue should be out in August 2019.

Input is always welcome.

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

IN THIS ISSUE

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

By Peter Evans and Fintán Ó Laighin

As south-eastern Australia recovers from the hottest summer since European records commenced, the fire season was bad enough, but it could have been much, much worse. As we slide into the cooler months, it may be worthwhile to consider what past fire experiences can contribute to our knowledge.

Accordingly, the first half of the newsletter has a strong focus on fire. Two articles raise the issue, either in whole or in part. Peter Evans's account of a forester's life in Victoria's Upper Acheron Valley in the 1930s includes a discussion of fire-fighting, while Daniel May writes about the Black Friday fires in Victoria in 1939 and what it means for Australian retailers 80 years later.

And finally, an apology. This issue was scheduled for April and Peter Evans provided a draft in time, but competing duties prevented it being finalised until May. We hope to be on time for the August issue.

IN BRIEF

By Jan Oosthoek

The AFHS is now on Twitter!

The Australian Forest History Society has recently expanded its online presence into the social media sphere by opening a Twitter account @AustralianFHS. Follow us to stay up-to-date with our latest news, developments and events. Visit our Twitter page at: https://twitter.com/AustralianFHS.

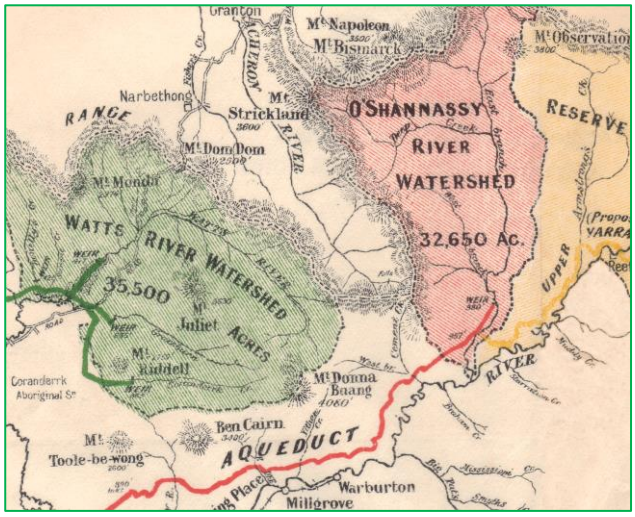
The Augusta Conference Proceedings now on AFHS Website

The proceedings of the Augusta conference in 2004 are now available from the AFHS website and can be accessed at www.foresthistory.org.au/2004_conference.html.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF A FORESTER IN VICTORIA'S UPPER ACHERON VALLEY

By Peter Evans

The Upper Acheron Valley formed the southern end of the Victorian Forests Commission's Niagaroon Forest District. The Acheron River is tributary of the Goulburn River with the major settlements along the Acheron being Narbethong, Buxton, Taggerty and Alexandra. The valley is bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the south, the Poley and Blue ranges to the east, and the Black Range to the west. The heights of the ranges are clothed in Mountain and Alpine Ash, two of the most commercially significant tree species in Victoria. Access from the mid-1930s was by an improved road over the Black Spur providing access to the railway terminus at Healesville. The improved road was made possible by "sustenance" schemes during the Great Depression. Without a railway connection in the Acheron Valley, this road was the only means of getting sawn timber to Melbourne.



The Upper Acheron Valley, sandwiched between the Watts and O'Shannassy catchments.

The forests along the ranges bordering the Acheron Valley were within the Forests Commission's Central Forest Division, and were included in the Upper Yarra Forest District from 1919. In 1927, the Niagaroon Forest District was created to control the northern portion of the Upper Yarra Forest District, with a head office at Taggerty. The first professional forester appointed to administer the district was Fenton George Gerraty. Gerraty was succeeded at the Taggerty office by A. C. Ure, in charge from 17 August 1936 to 11 June 1946; H. R. Parke, from 12 June 1946 to 2 August 1951; and J. H. Cosstick, from 3 August 1951 to 23 June 1958. (FCV District Administration Records.)

In 1937, the Niagaroon district was subdivided into five separate "Foreman's Charges": Taggerty (Foreman K. Andrews); Rubicon (Foreman H. C. Simmons); Murrindindi (Foreman J. Hauser); Marysville (Foreman J. Gill); and Narbethong. Due to the importance of the latter and the amount of timber traffic traversing the main road to the Black Spur, the Narbethong "Charge" was under the control of Cadet Forester W. F. Caplehorn instead of a foreman. Each foreman was to be paid £3 15s 0d per week on commencement, rising to £4 4s 0d per week on completion of his third year of service in the position. Each would be eligible for nine public holidays and, after twelve months of service, six days of sick leave on full pay and six days on half pay; three days of annual leave increasing by two days for each year's service, with a maximum of fourteen days annual leave per year. A forage allowance of £32 per annum was also available to cater to the needs of the foreman's horse. (FCV file 37/740.) At the same time, District Foresters could claim a maximum allowance of £195 for the departmental use of their personal motor vehicle or for vehicle hire where necessary. (FCV file 37/1115.) Cadet Forester Caplehorn was succeeded at Narbethong by Assistant Forester Alan B. Coldicutt. The work of supervising falling operations was dangerous even for a Forester. Coldicutt lost a foot and part of his calf when he was clipped by a falling tree knocked over by another tree felled by paling splitters. He was some 400 feet from the paling splitters at the time and probably considered himself to be at a safe distance. As a result of the accident, he had to retire from active forestry work and later became an engineer. He was replaced by Assistant Forester Donald Murray Thompson late in 1937. Murray Thompson's experiences were probably typical of most Foresters in the mountain forests of Victoria, so it may be instructive to pause and consider the life of a Forester through his eyes.

The hours were long and the work hard. A typical day started at 6:00 AM when he rose to feed and groom his pony Kitty. While the pony breakfasted on bran, oats and chaff, Murray would eat his own breakfast and dress for his working day. No uniform was provided for Forests Commission staff and his only means of exerting his authority was his personality and the known backing of the Commission. It did not hurt, however, to be dressed in smart riding breeches and polished boots. Riding breeches were obtained from the Commonwealth Clothing Factory and cost their owner 30s per pair. Boots were also specially made in Melbourne and cost £4 per pair. The young Forester was responsible for the provision of feed for his horse, although, by 1939, the annual allowance for this item had risen to £40. The allowance was not very generous and, with chaff at £1 per bag, did not go very far. Not covered by the allowance was the cost of shoeing. Horse shoes cost 7s per set and the shoes had to be renewed every four weeks. The Forester also had to provide his own harness, and a good saddle alone could cost £8.

At 7:00 AM the young Forester would set out on his working day, and might visit two or three mills each day depending on the distances to be ridden to reach them. For lunch he took a packet of sandwiches stuffed inside his shirt and an old lemonade bottle filled with cold tea. If he could arrange to be out with the fallers at lunchtime, he could be assured of a hot cup of tea fresh from the billy. Slung over his saddle was a snack of bran and oats for the pony's lunch. It was important to take good care of his primary mode of transport as she was working hard and carrying a fair weight over rough

country. If it was raining, the Forester would wear a long coat with flaps front and rear to cover his knees and prevent the rain from reaching the saddle and getting his seat wet.

The Forester's official badge of office was his branding hammer. When issued it had to be signed for and, thereafter, it was carefully guarded to prevent its misuse should it fall into the hands of an unscrupulous sawmill employee. One end of the hammer had a broad arrow cast in relief and, on the other end, was an official crown and the Forester's individual number. In Murray Thompson's case, this was 188. If the broad arrow was hammered into one end of the log this indicated that it was government property and the log was not to be moved. If marked with the crown and number, this meant the log had been measured and the volume calculated for royalty purposes. In addition, a hand-held "scribe" was issued to Foresters to mark the dimensions of the log into its end next to the mark made by the branding hammer. This scribe had a straight line in relief on one end and a semi-circle on the other. By careful use of both ends of the scribe it was possible to hammer into the end of the log any letter or number which would be required to identify the log and its measured volume. This was commonly done with the larger and more valuable Ash logs which could be two metres in diameter and up to five metres long. These logs contained a large amount of very valuable timber, and the branding of each log with its volume was an added precaution against attempted fraud. Once branded, a log could be taken to the mill and, as each log entered the mill, its brand would be noted and the volume tallied for royalty payment "in the round".

Few sawmillers attempted to tamper with this branding system for, even if the end of the log with the brand on it was cut-off, the Forester had recourse to a method to reveal the fraud. Should a sawmill suddenly show an increase in output or suddenly have a larger than normal number of logs in the log yard, the miller might attempt to explain this by saying that unbranded logs had been obtained from private property. However, if a piece of brown paper covered in butter was placed on the end of a log and rubbed with the back of an axe heated in a fire, the outline of any brand removed would be revealed as the butter was absorbed into the end of the log. Although each brand was only one-eighth of an inch deep on the surface of the log, the action of placing the brand would compress the fibres into the log for up to three feet longitudinally. The compressed fibres would not absorb the butter as well as the uncompressed fibres and the fraud would be revealed. Because of this, few sawmillers attempted to remove the brands from measured logs. The ruse was sometimes attempted by furniture makers obtaining a few high-value logs of timber such as Blackwood from isolated areas such as river frontages. The system of branding logs was to continue until the removal of mills from forests after the 1939 fires meant loads of logs could be checked at log-checking stations instead of individually on the forest floor.

The log yard of an Upper Acheron Sawmill
(from the topography probably Feiglin No. 2).
Photograph courtesy Murray Thompson, Peter Evans collection.

Relationships between the sawmillers and the Forest Officers were generally cordial. If the young Forester was fresh out of the School of Forestry at Creswick and a bit "green", he would be fair game and open to deception by the sawmiller if the latter attempted it. If easily deceived, he was generally welcomed with open arms. If not, the reception was generally a little cooler. Relationships with the mill hands were generally also cordial, and work seldom intruded into the consumption of a few cleansing ales at the pub on a Saturday afternoon when the Forest Officer and the mill hands were likely to meet side by side at the bar.

Murray Thompson would generally arrive back from his daily duties around 5:30 PM. His pony would be fed before he partook of his own evening meal, and the animal would receive a further small feed before he retired to bed around 10:00 PM. The Assistant Forester at Narbethong was normally quartered at the Black Spur Inn at Narbethong (formerly Fishers Creek). Board with meals cost £1 10s per week, a large outlay from his fortnightly pay of £5 5s 5d. In the late 1930s, the licensee of the Black Spur Inn was Mrs M. A. Slater. With her lived an extended family: her brother "Old Bill" Pleitner, a daughter, Doris Paton, along with her husband Alan Paton and children Alan junior and Willa; and a second daughter Louise, who later married sawmiller Ernie Peak. Staff at the inn included Ethel the cook, a waitress who shared the laundry work, Jimmy the roustabout and Charlie Andrews the barman who also worked part-time at "The Little Wonder" mill at Narbethong. Charlie, who had lost an eye in an accident, had also at one time been a coach driver over the old Black Spur road. The hotel had a large ballroom and a "Panatrope" - a gramophone with an amplifier, and was a great place for parties. Murray Thompson, along with Mrs Slater's daughters Doris and Louise and the local school teacher Ian Loutit, often had a game of auction bridge by the fireplace on a cold winter's evening.

Although it was their task to supervise the felling of trees, most Foresters saw themselves as practical "conservationists". It was their job to prevent unauthorised destruction of timber and to supervise the management of forests in an organised way so that their regeneration was guaranteed. In this way they saw

themselves as continuing the tradition embodied in the title "Conservator of Forests", first applied in Victoria in 1888. Most Forest Officers would argue convincingly that the forests were better managed for their supervision and that, in helping to protect them from fire, they were safeguarding the forests from destruction in the interests of all Victorians. All Foresters were expected to work at any time the forest was threatened by fire, no matter what the hours that might need to be worked. No overtime was paid to cover such emergencies, although fighting fires was usually an exhausting task for both the Forests Commission and sawmill employees involved.

The Black Spur Hotel in the inter-war years, a favourite stopping place for travellers, and home to many Forests Commission foresters over the years the Niagaroon District was in operation. Hanson (photographer), State Library Victoria image H2010.169/2.

While fighting a fire, it was common to be out in the bush for several days. Those chosen to do the work would be dropped off as close as they could be taken to the fire by road. They would then walk in to the fire carrying only a few tools: rakes, slashers and axes. Fires generally occurred on hot days with strong winds and, once a reconnaissance of the fire had been carried out, there was generally little that could be done until nightfall when the day cooled and the wind dropped. Once the progress of the fire was slowed, the hard work of putting out the fire by hand could then begin in earnest.

Fires in thick bush, where the litter on the forest floor could range from five to ten tons per acre, were generally too hot to beat out directly. Instead, the fire was attacked on its flank. The first man in the gang moved along the running flank of the fire and marked trees along the line of which a narrow trail was to be cleared. The second man, following the marked trail, cut through small logs and saplings with an axe. He was followed by a man with a slasher who cut down the heavy scrub. Up to three men followed the clearing as it progressed and raked the debris off the narrow trail. It was better to rake in towards the fire if possible, but this depended on how hot and close they were to the fire. If the heat grew too unbearable, they would have to rake the debris away from the fire, but this was generally considered to be a dangerous option for, if a spark jumped the trail, the fire could get away fast. The "tail-end Charlie", generally the most experienced man in the behaviour of fires, followed along the cleared trail back-burning towards the main fire. The number of men involved in fighting the fire depended on the number available and, sometimes, several tasks would have to be combined by one person. If all went well, the fire front would be gradually narrowed. The work was hot, fast-moving and dangerous. Complacency in inexperienced men was soon replaced with disbelief, fright, numbing terror, helplessness and often despair. Many had lucky escapes from death or serious injury. It took a great deal of courage and determination to survive the heat, sweat, noise and physical exhaustion entailed in fighting a fire in this way.

As the night progressed and dew formed, the progress of the fire would be further slowed. With luck and skill the fire might be turned into a wet gully where it would go out of its own accord. This process often took several days. When daylight came, the exhausted men would seek the coolest place to drop and catch a few hours of sleep. In steep country, it was common practice to find a fallen log to lie down against to prevent the weary sleeper from rolling downhill. The District Forester would make regular checks to see how his men were progressing and, usually, carried a tin of peaches, some cold potatoes and a few pieces of fruit to re-fuel the weary fire-fighters.

Bush fire near Yallourn in 1939. A young Forester, "me 'an me 'orse and me rake", could do little to stop this. Unknown photographer, State Library Victoria image H2002.199/1475.

A small party, including Murray Thompson, battled a fire on the steep slopes of Mount Margaret for five days. During that time there was no rain and not even a dew in the evening to assist with the task. As soon as the fire at the top was under control it would flare up again at the bottom and the exercise would have to be repeated all over again. District Forester Arthur Ure was reluctant to suspend operations at the Vic Oak mill to gain additional man power, and the small group of Forests Commission personnel battled on. On the fifth day, when Warren and

"Pop" Howell brought some corned beef and pickle sandwiches up to the exhausted men, they were too tired to eat them. Howell sneaked a flask of whisky into the billy of tea and, after the first cup, their appetites picked up remarkably. The sandwiches soon disappeared and, after a quick dip in the icy cold creek, the men were a little refreshed and ready to return to the fire. Whisky may have been a special treat, but it was a common practice to boil a little Sassafras bark in the billy when making tea. This tended to compensate for the lack of vegetables in the diet when on an extended stay in the bush.

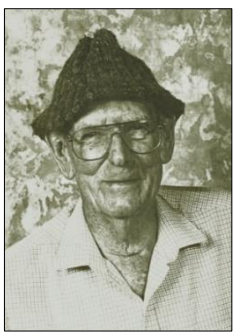
Howell's "Vic Oak" sawmill at Marysville.
Peter Evans collection.

Some fires, however, were too big to control. On the morning of Sunday 8 January 1939, Murray Thompson was playing tennis at Narbethong. A fresh south-west breeze was blowing, carrying overhead the smoke from the fire that had just raced out of control at Toolangi. After lunch, Thompson was telephoned by Forester Frank Byrne to come and help protect the pine plantation at Stoney Creek. Saddling his pony, he rode over to the unemployment relief camp where "Red" Mahoney's gang were extending a track up towards the summit of the Black Range. Ted Carson and Jim McDonald, who were in charge of the camp, had walked up to the top of the range to reconnoitre. They could see smoke but no flames. They had no sooner returned to camp and taken their boots off when the fire started "spotting" all around them. To cover this distance, the fire would have to have travelled over ten miles in thirty minutes.

Murray Thompson rode off to play his part in fighting the fire. His equipment was not much different to that available to most Forest Officers in 1939: a rake head in a saddle bag with a nail to fasten it to a handy stick when he reached the fire. For his pony, he had a small bag of oats thrown over the saddle and, for himself, the usual packet of sandwiches and bottle of cold tea. Although in other areas there was more equipment and more men, in this instance it was just a confident twenty-four year old Assistant Forester: "me 'an me 'orse and me rake"! He and "Red" Mahoney's gang certainly had to earn their money in the next few hours but, in such a fire storm, there was little to be achieved. The fire raced down the Buxton Spur, over John and Eileen Burchalls' property "The Mohican", over the Cathedral Range and on to the flanks of the Blue Range in the Rubicon Forest. On Sunday evening, Murray Thompson went over to Rubicon with Forester Arthur Ure in a utility, but was so dazed with weariness that he remembered little of what he saw.

Sunday's fire front paused when the wind died at midnight. Monday remained calm. The morning of Tuesday 10 January dawned hot and still but, in the early afternoon, the wind rose into a blistering north-westerly. This was at right-angles to the path of the fire on Sunday and, in minutes, the whole of the quiescent fire front along the thirty miles from Toolangi to Rubicon leapt back into life. Flames that had previously been only a few inches in height were suddenly leaping several feet. Driven by the savage wind, the fire roared up the Acheron Valley. Carnage was wrought at the sawmill sites in its path, and nineteen people died on that Tuesday. Also in the fire's path was the small hamlet of Narbethong. Mrs Slater, the licensee of the Black Spur Inn, was a devout woman. When the hotel was threatened by flames that afternoon, she placed Holy pictures facing the fire, and ran around the hotel sprinkling Holy Water from a bottle (still carrying a "Gilbeys" label), at the same time chasing Ethel the cook (not so devout) to sprinkle her with the protective fluid and save her too! Across the road, brave Olive Oxlee stood by her post in the local telephone exchange with her husband Harry until it was devoured by the flames and they were forced to flee. The hotel had a good supply of water on a high tank stand, but was being attacked from several sides by changes in the direction of the wind. Much effort was put into keeping the tank-stand from catching alight to preserve the precious supply of water. A lull around 6:00 PM raised the spirits of the hotel's small number of defenders, but the fire returned with renewed vigour. By later that evening the worst of the fire had passed and the hotel was saved. When an exhausted Murray Thompson went to bed that evening, he could see the whole of Mount Dom Dom ablaze in a mass of flame just like a huge bonfire. The heat could be plainly felt through the window of his room at the hotel. The trauma and physical exhaustion caused by the fire took such a toll that, when he arrived home in Melbourne several days later, it took his own mother some time to recognise him. (Interview with Murray Thompson, 30 November 1996.)

Worse was to come for forest workers and foresters all over Victoria .....



Murray Thompson in later life.
Peter Evans collection.

WHY AUSTRALIAN RETAILERS SHOULD RESPECT THE PAST AND RENAME THEIR "BLACK FRIDAY" SALES

By Daniel May, PhD Candidate,
Australian National University

Australians familiar with "Black Friday" sales might associate them with images of Americans clambering over each other to battle for iPhones and TVs. Yet this term - used here by companies such as Amazon, Kogan, Bonds, and The Good Guys to promote their sales - is inappropriate for Australia given its association with devastating bushfires.

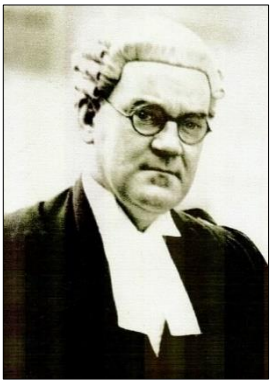
Traditionally the Friday after the Thanksgiving holiday, "Black Friday" is known in the United States as a commercial bonanza where shoppers can gain large discounts. The term, it seems, was invented in the 1960s by Philadelphian police to wryly describe the traffic chaos caused by hordes of post-Thanksgiving shoppers. It became widespread from the 1980s onwards.

Australians shopping online have taken advantage of US-based Black Friday sales for years. But since the 2017 launch here of American retail giant Amazon, other local brands have followed its lead in advertising Black Friday sales. They are doing so this week, with "Black Friday" this year falling on November 23.

But in Australia, the term Black Friday has a very different history. The 1939 Black Friday bushfires in Victoria were Australia's worst environmental disaster at the time. Seventy one people were killed and over 1,000 houses were destroyed in the week leading up to 13 January 1939, by fires driven by extreme winds and severe drought.

In the wake of the bushfires, the Victorian government created a Royal Commission led by Judge Leonard Stretton, which collected over 2,500 pages of testimony. At just 34 pages long and rich with beautiful language, for many years it was required reading for Victorian school students, helping Australians to understand the calamity. Indeed, in 2003, then Victorian Premier Steve Bracks took the report home for his weekend reading, seeking a frame of reference to explain his state's 2002-3 bushfire season.

Sims, P., 1939. Burnt Country between Ada River & Fitzpatrick's, near VHC No. 2. Mill. State Library Victoria, image H90.114/45.



In a particularly apt passage, Judge Stretton lamented the lack of environmental knowledge of the victims. These words chill my spine every time I read them:

Men who had lived their lives in the bush went their ways in the shadow of dread expectancy. But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine. They had not lived long enough. The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen.

Despite Stretton's eloquence and the policy changes that followed 1939, Australia has continued to experience bushfire disasters. The 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in particular affected many of the same areas and were described by environmental historian Tom Griffiths as "a recurrent nightmare ..... 1939 all over again".

Many of the victims of Black Saturday had no personal memory of 1939, and had not taken steps to prepare for bushfires, by building the shelter bunkers or dugouts that were once common in these regions. The *Eucalyptus regnans* mountain ash ecosystems and "fire flume" climate dynamics of this region mean that it will blaze again.

Sims, P., 1939. No. 1. Ada (Timber Mill, Powelltown, Victoria) State Library Victoria image H90.114/46.

I'm not suggesting here that Australian businesses should avoid competing in a global shopping bonanza - but I would like to constructively suggest an alternative name for their sales.

As with many so-called "historical traditions" that actually have a very recent origin, the "Black Friday" name was itself largely a construction of the media. While Philadelphia police coined the term, it was spread by local journalists and eventually adopted by national television stations.

Given this, and the fact that many of these sales increasingly run for longer than 24 hours, it does not seem too radical to suggest an alternative Australian name.

My own suggestions are "Big Friday" (the name originally preferred by Philadelphians), "Friday Frenzy" or even the "Holey Dollar Holiday". I would be interested to hear ideas from others. †

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* *This article was provided by the author. It was first published in The Conversation in November 2018 under a Creative Commons licence. The original article is at https://theconversation.com/why-australian-retailers-should-respect-the-past-and-rename-their-black-friday-sales-107015.*

† *Daniel can be contacted at daniel.may@anu.edu.au.*

More than simply changing the name of a sale, this is an opportunity for us to reflect upon the slow Americanisation of Australian culture. It also raises questions about how we as a society can best commemorate and remember past disasters so as to avoid future ones.

[Summer 2019 was] the 80th anniversary of Black Friday and the 10th anniversary of Black Saturday. Memories and local histories can guide us to prepare for future disasters, but the rhythms of fire ecology can run longer than human generations.

With more Australians building houses in bushfire-prone areas and climate change predicted to modify the climatic drivers of fire, Australians need to learn to live with fire. This can even involve re-learning about fire. This process must include studying environmental histories - and protecting the legacies of past disasters.

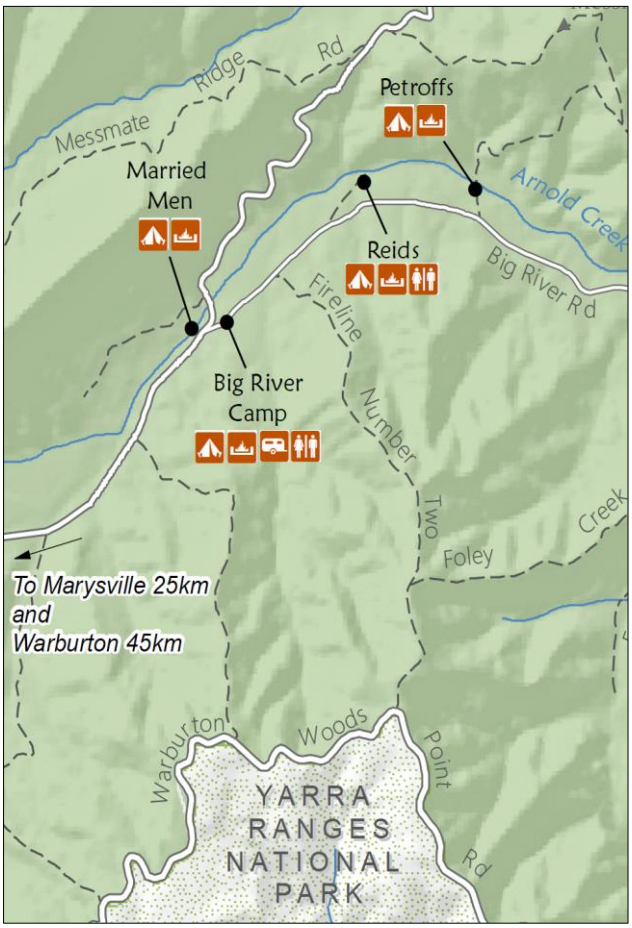
FORESTS COMMISSION OF VICTORIA "BIG RIVER" CAMP

By Peter Evans

Before the 1939 fires, the Big River Valley north of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria was extremely isolated and visited only by gold prospectors and forest graziers. Access from the north was via an old mining track from Enochs Point. Consideration was given to improving this route in 1937 but, as the Forests Commission, the Mines Department and the State Rivers & Water Supply Commission could not agree on a method of sharing the cost, the plan lapsed. (FCV file 37/1339.) Access from the south was via an old mining track up the Reefton Spur connecting with the Yarra Track (Marysville to Woods Point Road). Neither of these routes was suitable for motor transport. The only other access was the Yarra Track itself. The 1939 fires and the need to salvage the fire-killed timber made improved access routes to the Big River Valley imperative. By 1942 there were already six Forests Commission employees and twenty men engaged on contract logging around nearby Cambarville. (FCV file 42/1928.) Four sawmills had already been established on the ridge to the south and west of the valley, and plans were formed to provide improved access to the Big River Valley itself.

There were no accurate maps of the topography in the Big River Basin. In the spring of 1944, survey parties were dispatched from Snobs Creek in the north and from the Yarra Track in the south to begin mapping the area and assessing the timber in the basin. Temporary camps were established at Snobs Gap, Koala Creek, Federation Range, Stockmans Reward and Dutch Joes. The survey parties were under-strength, under-equipped and working in an isolated area where medical help was often a day or more away. If a suitable vehicle could not be found or no formed track was available, the men had to pack food supplies into the camps on their own backs.

Suitable labourers to assist with the work were hard to find, and even harder to hold once they had experienced the arduous nature of the work. Despite numerous setbacks, most of the basin had been traversed, mapped and assessed by the end of 1947. Little or no evidence was found of past timber utilisation except for a few trees felled for palings. Damage to the butts of trees from past grazier's fires was widespread, and large areas had been burnt in the 1939 bushfires. Nevertheless, there was a huge volume of timber available. (FCV file 45/1311.)



While the survey work was proceeding, two bulldozers were employed to start widening the old track down to Stockmans Reward to form the first section of the Big River Road. A site for a permanent camp was chosen beside Arnold Creek and, by December 1944, the camp site had been cleared and work had started on excavating a fire-refuge dugout. (FCV file 45/2386.)

Construction of the Big River Camp began in early 1945. Accommodation was provided for one hundred men including Forests Commission employees, contractors' employees and a party of Country Roads Board surveyors working on the improvement of the Yarra Track. A kitchen, mess hall, ablution block and a workshop were provided to complement the rows of 12 ft by 8 ft sleeping huts, each with its "backwoodsman" stove for warmth at night.

Water was pumped from Arnold Creek, and a drainage system was installed to carry waste away from the camp. (FCV file 48/2046.) By the beginning of 1946, the camp was nearly complete but still without a supply of electricity.

On 22 March 1946, a serious fire occurred at the camp. While C. Godfrey was refuelling a truck, petrol was accidentally sprayed in the direction of a hurricane lamp providing light for the operation. This caused a flashback to the drum, and the resulting explosion set the distillate

dump alight. A hose was hurriedly brought into play but burst as soon as water pressure was applied. The fire quickly spread to adjoining huts. Plant operator McLean started his bulldozer and pushed the burning huts away from the rest of the camp at some risk to himself. Despite his quick action, three small offices, three accommodation huts and two small store huts were destroyed. No one was seriously hurt. (FCV file 45/2368.) Partly as a result of the fire, electricity was supplied to the major buildings at the camp in 1947. This was generated using a small petrol-engined plant built adjacent to the workshop. The plant was upgraded in 1952 when the petrol engine powering the generator was replaced by a twin-cylinder Petter diesel, allowing lighting to be installed in the sleeping huts as well. Five fitters were employed to repair and maintain the four logging tractors, five bulldozers, one grader, one roller, two compressors, four loading winches, two stationary logging winches, two stationary engines and all the motor transport required for Forests Commission operations in the Big River Valley. (FCV file 48/2046.)

The Big River camp circa 1949.
Photograph by Brian Williams, Peter Evans collection.

Once the Big River Camp was completed, work on the Big River Road pushed ahead, although hampered by a lack of machinery. Many of the men were working thirteen days out of fourteen and extra overtime every day to maximise both the number of productive hours of daylight and the number of hours of work that could be extracted from every machine. As autumn arrived in 1946, efforts were redoubled to get the road surface metalled before the winter set in. Road metal was obtained from J. Reid and R. Buller's quarries on the Big River. The road between the Yarra Track turn-off and the Big River Camp was opened as an all-weather road on 5 July 1946, allowing the camp to be supplied all year round. (FCV file 45/2836.) At the same time, the Country Roads Board completed a new road up the Reefton Spur to replace the old road via McVeighs which would eventually be submerged by the Upper Yarra Dam. The new road was well-metalled, and was designed specifically to take heavy timber traffic. It linked up with the new Forests Commission Big River Road, providing all-weather access to timber supplies for the anticipated post-war housing boom. When feeder roads were completed by the Forests Commission, the new road network was expected to provide access to 500 million super feet of log timber. (FCV file 44/224 and *The Herald*, 6/12/1945.)

Constructing the Big River Road circa 1949.
Photograph by Brian Williams, Peter Evans collection.

The Big River Camp continued to provide accommodation for crews extending the Big River Road to link up with the Dry Creek Road near Eildon, and remained a populous settlement in the now not-so isolated valley. A three-roomed hut for the use of Probationary Foreman D. Fry and his wife was transferred from the Snobs Creek road camp to Big River in 1948. A combined wash-house and bathroom were included, the total value of the accommodation being £400. Five shillings per week was deducted from Fry's pay as rental on the quarters. He vacated the building in 1952, the new tenant being bulldozer driver E. H. Henderson from the Matlock district. (FCV file 48/89.)

On 22 March 1955, a fire was noticed in the generator shed at the camp at about 9:10 PM, almost exactly nine years to the hour after the first fire at the camp. This second fire quickly spread to the adjacent workshop and tool room, which were destroyed. Commission operations were due to be cut-back over the next two logging seasons, so the workshop was not rebuilt and a pre-fabricated shed was erected at a cost of £2000 to provide shelter for mechanical repairs. By this time, only seventeen employees were left at the site and the camp in general was in poor condition. Threatened complaints to the Australian Workers' Union led to three of the huts being removed and the remaining sixteen still occupied being lined with masonite in 1957. (FCV file 48/2046.)

As the roads in the area continued to be improved, it was no longer necessary to maintain such a large camp because many men preferred to live in the relative comfort of Marysville or Warburton. (FCV file 65/2793.) Today, all that remains of the Big River Camp is a series of grassy clearings which are popular with campers. One building still stands, and is used as a school camp.

START OF A GIANT - AKD SOFTWOODS

By Norman Houghton

The present operation known as AKD Softwoods, based in Colac, is one of the largest softwood processors in the country, currently turning out a million cube a year from five plants in three states and employing 600. Its start was modest and it operated in native hardwood for several years until this resource became scarce so switched to softwoods and has never looked back.

The Otway forest to the south of Colac has been used for timber winning since the 1840s. From the earliest days the sawmill outputs were primarily rough cut timbers for the housing and construction industries, railway sleepers, case timbers for food packaging (butter, cheese, fruit, hay and tallow) and shorts for fencing.

There was little or no value adding at bush mills because of limited capitalisation at most mills, because of the times and because select timbers such as mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) naturally dried very poorly and could not be re-worked in this state to produce a quality board.

There were only a handful of Colac and district mills that value-added. A couple of hardware and timber yard businesses in Colac from the 1880s bought certain species rough cut Otway timbers for processing into picture frames, door and window architraves and mouldings to be used in local housing. Sanderson's mill at Barramunga (1897 to 1923) ran a planing operation for weatherboards and mouldings. The War Service Homes Commission installed a weatherboard planing mill at Gellibrand in the early 1920s and Hayden Bros set up a seasoning kiln and planing mill at Barwon Downs in 1933 and ran it to 1944 when it accidentally burnt down. In 1954, Les Strahan opened a small plant at Colac East, subsidiary to his main mill at Gellibrand, to machine air-dried timbers for joinery and furniture.

That was the limit for value-adding at Colac prior to the formation of AKD.

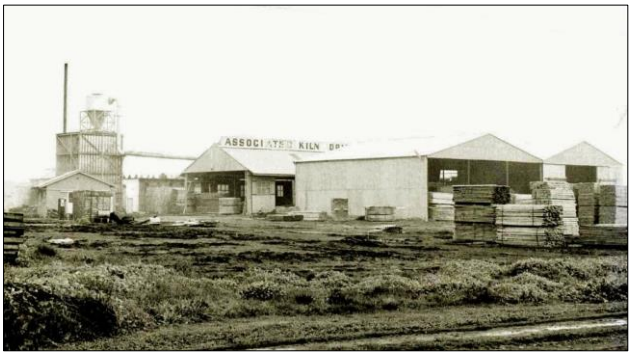
After the Second World War ended, some Colac and district sawmillers became concerned at a potential market loss for them when their rough-cut timbers left the area for Geelong or Melbourne where they were kiln seasoned and turned into finer products before coming back to Colac and being sold at a profit by others. As well, Gippsland millers were ahead of the Otways in seasoning and this afforded them a market lever for their scantlings with offerings of seasoned boards, so Otway millers were at a marketing disadvantage.

In 1948, the notion of value-adding select kiln dried timbers at a local level to retain this trade was tossed around by sawmillers George Bennett and Stan Inglis and timber merchant Harry Stephens. The technology was now available at reasonable cost to season and recondition the problem woods such as mountain ash so a start could be made down this path. None of the Colac milling businesses were big enough to set up a seasoning works in their own right, so such a venture had to be a joint venture or co-operative, which was acknowledged by the proponents.

Nothing came of this idea for a while, but it hovered in the background until early 1954 when Forests Commission Victoria (FCV) commenced making suitable noises about drying Otway-grown select timbers at Colac. This was in response to protests from Colac millers about Melbourne timber interests who had recently pushed at the political level for the FCV to grant them allocations of Otway select timbers and for these timbers to be seasoned in Melbourne. Colac now had a chance. The Victorian Sawmillers Association (VSA) - South Western Branch responded to this cue and, at its 1954 annual meeting on 9 August 1954, established a sub-committee to look at the possibility of a co-operative seasoning works in Colac.

At that time the principal accountancy firm, broker and financier used by many Colac and Otway millers was that run by Norm Paddle. The VSA branch meetings were held at his premises situated in the former Bayer dentistry suite and residence at the corner of Gellibrand and Hesse Streets (the Legacy building at the time of writing).

The VSA canvassed Otway millers and invited expressions of interest from many of them, including Norm Gordon, George Bennett, Stan Inglis, Tom Prosser, Frank Moore, Joe Hayden, Les Strahan, Fred Squire, George Chamberlain, Alf Frizon, Don Kincaid, Jack Haigh, Tom Shelton and Keith King. Four of these, namely Moore, Strahan, King and Squire, were Melbourne-based businesses who came to the Otways to obtain supply for their metropolitan market but, nevertheless, they saw advantage in local value-adding. Squire ran a large hardware, sawmilling and seasoning business at Briar Hill, so was familiar with kiln drying and its requirements. W. R. Henry and John Sharp, both big millers at Forrest, showed no interest because these firms each operated their own seasoning and moulding mills in Geelong and Melbourne respectively.



The AKD set up as originally formed. Kilns on the left, machine shop next and storage to the right. This was a hardwood operation. Photograph courtesy Norman Houghton.

After initial considerations over September and October, several millers declined to continue and the sub-committee was then run by George Bennett (W. H. Bennett & Sons) and Stan Inglis (HP Sawmills) who turned up to every meeting and showed considerable enthusiasm for the project. The sub-committee considered many preliminaries. The CSIRO Division of Forest Products was engaged to undertake the feasibility and planning for the kiln and its

modus operandi, and the FCV began working on how to make the select timbers available to the kiln via a co-operative method.

It was all positive so that, on Melbourne Cup Day, 2 November 1954, at a meeting in Paddle's office, it was resolved by the three in attendance, namely Bennett, Inglis and Tom Prosser (the Calco boss before Jack Colless), that a company be formed to carry out kiln seasoning of local hardwoods, that the kilns be erected in Colac, that the kilns be the conventional drier type, and that the company be proprietary with a nominal capital of £150,000 in £1 shares. Further tidy-up motions were that the proposed new business seek finance from the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission, the registered office be situated at Paddle's premises and the working name of the business be the Colac Seasoning Company.

That was the start of AKD.

There were further formalities to go through with the full South Western Branch of the VSA in order to make the business a reality. This included drafting the Articles of Association, scoping the works and application for finance, and these were progressed in the coming months.

Sample names for the business were put forward, such as Co-operative Timbers (Colac) Ltd, but this particular one was denied registration and the name Associated Kiln Driers Ltd came to be the preferred title. The company was incorporated on 19 July 1955 and its trademark was to be Cotway KD, a contraction of the terms Colac Otway, a mnemonic devised by Doug Cowan, the accountant who had recently taken over Paddle's practice.

Membership of the co-operative was open to any registered VSA sawmiller in the South Western Branch who agreed to contribute timber to the kiln for seasoning. Unstated, but obvious, was that a shareholder member needed to possess a degree of surplus capital to invest in AKD and a reasonable size log allocation, so this whittled away some prospects.

There were seven sawmill companies that formally entered the co-operative at a foundation Board meeting held on 5 August 1955. These foundation shareholder companies were represented by their principals in George Bennett (W. H. Bennett & Sons), Jack Colless (Calco), Joe Hayden (Hayden Bros), George Chamberlain (Caspett Towers & Co), Frank Moore (Blue Moon Fruit Co-operative), Stan Inglis (HP Sawmilling) and Fred Squire (Ocean View Sawmills).

George Bennett was voted inaugural Chairman of the Board. The company secretary/accountant/business manager and a non-sawmilling shareholder was Doug Cowan, whose practice continued Paddle's sawmill company bookwork and financing.

AKD was initially underwritten by its seven shareholders contributing £63,000 worth of timber on a quota of £9,000 each and classed as fully paid up £1 shares. This provided the stock for the kiln. A little later, each shareholder was called on to contribute £2,000 cash towards a loan of £14,000 to assist in buying the land and setting up the works. Doug Cowan also entered the business as a minor shareholder. More capital funding was required so the VSA approached the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission on behalf of AKD to secure an advance of £15,000 under its policy to aid decentralised industries. The commission supplied the funds and was given a charge over the assets.

On the operating side, funds were required to pay for the stock in the yard (after the initial fill), hold it for up to a year as dead money, process it and then merchandise it, anticipating payment in 30 days from sale. Co-financiers were brought in to handle this side of the business. The Commonwealth Trading Bank supplied overdraft funding.

The issue of stock and sales was tackled through W. M. Haughton & Co., a Melbourne-based buying and selling agent for all sorts of rural products, including timber. Haughton had a Victoria-wide reach, so was given exclusive sale rights in exchange for mortgage finance and a charge over all the stock in the yard, kiln and sales pad. This represented around £40,000. As soon as the works opened, Haughton bought all the timber in the yard at 86 shillings and sixpence per 100 ft.

There were to be changes in the financing arrangements and advance levels between the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission, the bank and Haughton from time to time, but the essential nature did not vary over the formative years - AKD was running on finance provided by others and acquitting its obligations from sales monies.

Shareholders were asked for more capital from time to time after 1957, but not in great amounts, and purchases of vehicles and equipment was mostly done on hire purchase.

Dividends for shareholders in the establishment years of the company were mere dreams.

The AKD complex at Colac in 2016. The original works were in the triangular area at the foot of the photograph from 1956 to 1999 before a new mill, machine shop, log yard and extra kilns were installed over the road. The old site was turned over to storage, dispatch and a timber treatment plant. Photograph courtesy Norman Houghton.

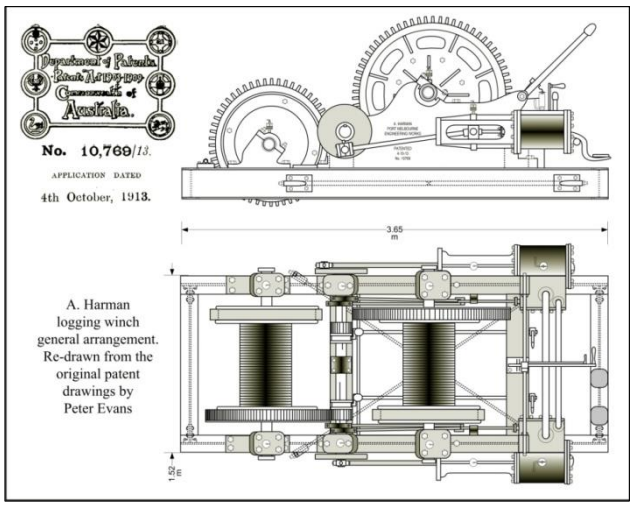
THE HARMAN STEAM LOGGING WINCH

By Peter Evans

Early logging winches were many and varied, and mostly adapted from existing marine winches and pile drivers to suit an individual sawmiller's requirements. However, in 1913, a winch specifically designed for logging was registered with the Australian Patents Office. It was very widely used in Victoria, and made its way to a number of other Australian states. That winch was built by Alfred Harman in Port Melbourne.

Alfred Thomas Harman was born on 2 January 1864 in Peckham, south London. He was the son of Alfred Hugh Harman, pioneering photographer and founder of the famous firm of Ilford Limited, and Amelia Harman, neé Taylor. He emigrated to Australia in 1882, possibly following an argument with his father, and intended to take up farming at Kinglake. In 1888, at the age of 24 and by now giving his occupation as "Engineer", he married Margaret Mary Chrimes at St John's Church, Melbourne. The couple went on to have five children, Alfred Henry (born 1889), Margaret Amelia (born 1892), Clara Violet (born 1898), Hazel Doris (born 1901) and Harold Rowland (born 1905).

Sometime prior to 1893, Alfred Thomas Harman had begun business in Victoria Street, Carlton. By 1894, he was trading out of Farrell Street West, Port Melbourne, possibly only dealing in second-hand machinery at this stage. By 1915, the firm had moved a few hundred yards away to 72 Derham Street, Port Melbourne, and advertised new and second-hand boilers, engines, pumps, woodworking machinery, shafting, pulleys and Plummer blocks. In addition, second-hand machinery was taken in for thorough overhaul. This product range was quickly expanded to include mining winches, hoisting plants, portable cranes, steam hammers and slotting machines. This must have meant a major extension to the works, and the firm's office was located at 55 Derham Street, Port Melbourne for the next fifty years.



A. Harman logging winch general arrangement. Re-drawn from the original patent drawings by Peter Evans

One of the firm's most notable products was the widely accepted logging winch patented in October 1913 in the name of Alfred Henry Harman, who would have been only 24 at the time. Many of the winches used in Victorian logging were cobbled together from whatever equipment the sawmiller could purchase cheaply.

However, the "Harman" winch was of such quality and produced in such volumes that it was never surpassed by any other locally-made variety. A second-motion winch, it featured cylindrical trunk guides, "D" slide valves, Stephenson's link reversing gear, a cast steel frame and twin cast steel drums. Either drum could be engaged as required by pinions sliding on the intermediate shaft. The higher of the two drums carried the main rope for hauling the log from the bush, while the lower drum carried the lighter "straw line" for returning the main rope to the bush. The whole assembly was mounted on a well-braced frame of rolled steel. The winch was available as "a pair of eights" or a "pair of tens" depending on the cylinder diameter. It became the almost universal winch of Victorian logging. Five of these winches survive in the bush in varying states of completeness. Another two are complete and situated in museums, while examples of single-drum marine winches survive at the Lake Goldsmith Steam Preservation Society in Victoria and Pearn's Steam World in Tasmania. There may well be others out there.

Alfred Thomas Harman died of heart failure at the age of 73 on 21 May 1937. He was buried in the Box Hill cemetery, and his estate passed to his wife Margaret, who remained in the family home "Grayswood" at 154 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury. Up until this point the firm seems to have traded under the direct ownership of Alfred Thomas Harman but, now, some new arrangements were required. Alfred T. Harman & Sons Pty Ltd was registered on 28 April 1938. The capital was to be £40,000 in shares of £1, of which only two were issued. The directors were Margaret Mary Harman, Alfred Henry Harman and Harold Rowland Harman, the latter two holding one share each. Margaret Harman was to be paid a minimum of £200 per annum for life, and Alfred Henry Harman was appointed Chairman for life or until he resigned. The registered office was to remain at 55 Derham Street, Port Melbourne.

A Harman winch under repair in the forests around Powelltown circa 1914. The pinions on the intermediate shaft were the Achilles heel of these winches - note the pinion on the wooden beam to the left. Several teeth have been broken off, and the pinion has been temporarily repaired by drilling holes and inserting wedge-shaped pegs. The new pinion has already been fitted. When the intermediate shaft is complete, it will be refitted between the two drums. State Library of Western Australia, Battye Library, image BA948/54.

The introduction of crawler tractors to Victorian forests in the late 1930s appears to have forced Harman & Sons to enter the internal combustion age in regard to the

winches it sold. By 1941, the firm was offering to recondition sawmillers' tractor engines for fitting to winches. A long-standing problem with steam winches was that they tended to be placed on spurs and ridge-lines where water was scarce. The new Harman "Diesel 80" winch promised to do away with this problem.

Harman "Diesel 80" winch in the Otways. Photograph by Peter Evans.

In low gear, the main rope moved at a speed of up to one mile per hour and could exert a pull of between 10,000 and 30,000 lbs. In high gear, the speed could be as high as 4¼ miles per hour and exert a pull of between 8,000 and 15,000 lbs. When hauling the main rope back to the bush, the return drum was capable of speeds up to six miles per hour. All gears were of high-quality steel and the main drive was housed in an oil-tight steel casing. Clutches were of the double-cone type and all except the main drum bearings were of the roller or ball-bearing type. The main drum retained the plain bearings used on the steam winches. The drum brakes were foot operated and had "Ferrodo" linings. A winch complete with a McCormick-Deering VD18 diesel engine cost £2,400 in 1941. This winch was the "last word" in logging winches and, despite competition from crawler tractors, at least one survived in use until the 1970s.

Extant Harman steam winch near Starlings Gap (between Warburton and Powelltown). This winch, last used in the 1950s in conjunction with road transport, survived relatively intact (complete with spar tree and cabling) until burnt in the Ash Wednesday fire of 1983. Photograph by Peter Evans.

AFHS Member Michael Bleby Recognised in Australia Day Honours 2019

By Fintán Ó Laighin

Congratulations to AFHS member **Michael Bleby** for being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day Honours 2019. The citation notes his extensive service to the community, including his contribution to forestry and natural resource management:

- South East Asia and Pacific Coordinator, Commonwealth Forestry Association, approximately 15 years.
- Admitted as Fellow, Institute of Foresters of Australia, 2007.
- Acting President and Community Representative, South East Natural Resources Management Board, current.
- President, Friends of Canunda and Beachport National Parks, current.

Another forestry-related recipient was **Edgar Reginald Pfeiffer** who also received an OAM for service to the community of Mount Gambier in South Australia. The citation noted that he was also a Fellow of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, and acknowledged his work as Regional Forester for the South Australian Woods and Forests Department.

In addition, another recipient of the OAM was **Philip Bianchi** who has published histories on the firewood railway lines in WA mines. His publications include:

- *Early Woodlines of the Goldfields: The Untold Story of the Woodlines to World War II* (Western Australia, Hesperian Press, 2006).
- *The Lakewood Woodline 1937-1964: Its Origins, Operations and People* (Western Australia, Hesperian Press, 2007).
- "Woodlines' Facebook Page, since 2016.

The full citations for all recipients are available on the Governor-General's website at www.gg.gov.au/australian-honours-and-awards/australian-honours-lists.

The images (front and back) of the Medal come from the website of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet - www.pmc.gov.au/government/its-honour/medal-order-australia - which includes the following description:

"The design of the Medal of the Order of Australia is a badge with a gold-plated silver insignia of the Order in the centre.

The central insignia is inscribed with the word 'Australia' in gold capital letters. The circle also contains two gold sprigs of mimosa.

The insignia is ensigned with the Crown of St Edward.*

The medal is hung from the ribbon of the Order. It is royal blue with a central band of mimosa blossoms."

* *Named after St Edward the Confessor, the Crown of St Edward has been used to crown English and British monarchs since the 13th century.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Edward%27s_Crown

OAK BEAMS

By Roger Underwood

Is there any more tragic sight than the destruction of a thing of beauty by fire? Whether it is a cathedral of nature like a lovely karri forest decimated by bushfire, or a noble religious and architectural icon like the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, it always brings tears to my eyes.

In the aftermath of the Notre Dame fire, I was even sadder to read that one of the obstacles to the rebuilding of the cathedral was that no oak trees of sufficient size and age are available from which replacement roof beams could be cut. France is one of the foremost countries in Europe when it comes to forestry, and has a large area of exceptionally fine hardwood forest, including oak. But centuries of timber cutting has meant that the forests of today are relatively young, at least by the standards that prevailed at the time when Notre Dame Cathedral was built. The sort of oak beams needed for reconstruction would need to come from trees at least 400 years old, and there would need to be a great many of them. Trees like this do exist in Europe today, but they are a rarity and usually found only in national parks or sacred groves where timber cutting is prohibited.

Strange as it may seem, these melancholy thoughts have actually brought back a happy memory for me. In the late 1970s, I was studying at the Commonwealth Forestry Institute at the University of Oxford in England, and I found time to explore the glorious buildings of this historic and beautiful city. Foremost among these were the university colleges, many of which are hundreds of years old.

One of the finest is New College. The name always makes me smile as it was founded in 1379. There is a walled garden, and a grassed quadrangle overlooked by superb stone buildings, comprising the library, accommodation, dining hall and a glorious high-vaulted chapel. The chapel is about 600 years old, and until this story unfolded, was famous for its massive oak beams.

At the time I was at Oxford, I read that an inspection of the New College chapel roof had disclosed the alarming fact that the old oak beams holding up the roof and spire were infested with wood-boring beetles, and were on the point of collapse. The situation was dire, and the college authorities were at a loss. Where on earth would they find replacement oak beams for the urgent restoration work?

However, the college historian came up with the answer. It turned out that at the time of the building of the college in the late 14th century, the builders anticipated that one day the oak beams in the chapel would need to be replaced. So the college purchased land and arranged for a plantation of oak trees to be planted. A forester was appointed to look after the resulting forest. Over succeeding centuries, the word was passed along from one generation of college foresters to the next: "You don't touch them oaks, they's for the college chapel".

And they were. Cometh the hour, cometh the trees. The oaks were felled, the new beams cut and installed, and the chapel roof was again secure and a thing of wonder. And another grove of oaks was planted, anticipating the need for the next refurbishment of the chapel 600 years hence.

My heart goes out to Parisians for the loss of their cathedral, but I am confident it can be rebuilt. The replacement roof beams may well be made of steel or perhaps laminated timber, but it will be done professionally and the final result will be a source of pride. Nevertheless, I would have loved to have heard that the Notre Dame builders, like those of New College in Oxford, had also made provision for the future by planting and nurturing a plantation of oak trees from which, at some distant time, another set of roof beams could be cut.

THE SOLAR ECLIPSE OF NOVEMBER 1974

By Roger Underwood

In November 1974, I was working as a forester in the Western Australian karri forest, stationed at Pemberton. One day I read in the paper that there was to be a full solar eclipse a few days hence, and that it would cut right across the southern forests. According to the newspaper, the best place to observe this eclipse was on the coast immediately south of the little timber town of Northcliffe. I knew that coast well, having once worked some months surveying a new road in the area, and subsequently spending many a weekend exploring its remote and lonely beaches, cliffs and bays. The lighthouse at Windy Harbour seemed like an ideal spot to view the eclipse.

My Assistant Forester at Northcliffe at the time was Ron Kitson. Checking the date of the upcoming eclipse I sent Ron a message that I would be down that day and that, strictly in the interests of science, we would be visiting the coast.

So, on the appointed day, Ron and I drove down to Point d'Entrecasteaux, where a high limestone cliff looms above the little holiday and fishing settlement of Windy Harbour. A knot of about twenty people had gathered at the lighthouse there, mostly locals, plus a little team of technical types from the city who had set up cameras and astronomical instruments.

It was a lovely day. The gulls were wheeling and crying, swallows and terns were darting about on the cliffs, and the sky was cloudless. From our vantage point on the headland, we could see way out across the Southern Ocean to the southwest ..... and lo! Precisely at the predicted minute, we saw the approaching lunar shadow racing towards us across the ocean, a great arc of darkness.

In a moment we were in gloom, then a moment later in total darkness. The birds fell silent. We all seemed to be holding our breath. Then, a second or two later, with a grunt of surprise like a heavy sleeper who has overslept his alarm clock, the automatic light of the lighthouse came on above us, and the beam began its blinking sweep.

After about five minutes we could see a faint glow away to the south-west, and then the reverse arc of daylight swept towards us, as the far side of the moon's shadow

passed. There was a moment of instant-dawn and then it was midday again. The lighthouse shut down and the birds arose.

Despite the fact that it was expected and that I already knew all about the phenomenon of a solar eclipse, it was an eerie experience. It became easier to understand the alarm and anxiety that these events caused to early human societies.

The eerie darkness of the eclipse had silenced the watchers on the cliff, but the new dawn woke us up and people started to chat with each other, to talk about what they had observed and how they felt about it. The technical types started dismantling and packing up their equipment. Ron and I climbed into his 4WD and we headed off back up the Windy Road to Northcliffe, feeling that it was time to get back to the job we were being paid for. The whole affair had lasted only a few minutes.

But they were minutes never to be forgotten.

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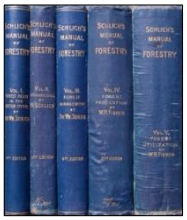
Editor's note: *Roger Underwood's new book, "The World's Tallest Tree - sylvan musings from an old forester", was published in March 2019. To buy a copy, contact Roger on yorkgum@westnet.com.au.*

Sir William Schlich

By Sybil Jack

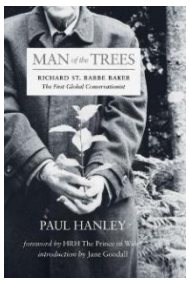
Sir William Schlich (1840-1925), Knight Commander of the Indian Empire, studied at the University of Giessen under Gustav Heyer 1855-1862 and worked in the Hesse forestry service until 1866. He started in the Imperial Forest Service in 1867 and became Inspector-General of Forests in India in 1883, succeeding Dietrich Brandis who was the first Inspector-General, appointed in 1864. In 1885, Schlich went to the UK to organise the Forestry Branch of the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper's Hill, the first such training in the UK. This was transferred to Oxford University in 1905 and he became professor of Forestry. He retired in 1920.

His work, *Schlich's Manual of Forestry,* a five volume study, became the main textbook for forestry students for many years. His role in forestry in the whole of the Commonwealth was inestimable. Although his belief that forestry had not been a matter of state concern before the mid-nineteenth century was historically inaccurate (if it was not narrowly defined), it was a foundation in his argument for state intervention, because the care and maintenance of woodlands had benefits for the community which went beyond the private interests of individuals and, in this, we may see the beginnings of formal ecological interest.



Editor's note: *As an aside, Sybil has suggested that Sir William Schlich's life and work would be a suitable theme for our next conference.*

New Books and Publications



Paul Hanley, 2018. *Man of the Trees Richard St. Barbe Baker, The First Global Conservationist.* University of Regina Press, Regina, Canada, pp. 298. www.uofrpress.ca/Books/M/Man-of-the-Trees

Review by M. M. Roche, Massey University

I stumbled across Richard St. Barbe Baker's *Land of Tane: The Threat of Erosion* (1956) as a PhD student working on early forest management efforts in New Zealand and was sorely unimpressed by the book and quickly categorised him as an unreliable witness to events in New Zealand, both in terms of matters of "fact" and in overstating his own influence on policy developments. Some years later Baker's name came up in conversation with my then Head of Department at Massey University who regaled us with a delightful story about swapping books with Baker and, in return for what was later regarded as a magisterial treatment of tropical rain forests, receiving a short and aged pamphlet on how to build a caravan. (After reading Hanley's book, I now know where the caravans fit in.)

Was I too hasty in dismissing Baker and his work? Yes and no would be my reply today.

"Yes", in the sense that Baker is interesting as one of a small group of Cambridge forestry Diploma graduates (Cooper's Hill in Egham and Oxford for many years had a monopoly on the training of imperial foresters) who served as forester in British colonies in Africa. He was thus part of a group of men who filled forestry positions armed with forestry principles derived largely from German and French forestry - principles that were believed to be universally applicable regardless of forest environment (let alone society and economy). Baker stands apart from other imperial foresters in the manner in which he engaged with local populations, finding bridges between local beliefs and forestry practices and getting off side with his superiors in the process. Hanley also traces Baker's vision and aspirations that saw him leave the colonial forest service and embark on a career as lecturer, author, and founder of the "Men of the Trees". Long before "think global, act local" was devised, Baker was practising this mantra.

But "no", in the sense that as one who was party to some significant developments in forestry on a number of continents, he was always prone to believe it was his opinions that were privileged and decisive. Hanley's biography enriches but ultimately reinforces the divided view I have of Baker.

In *Man of the Trees*, Hanley makes full use of autobiographical material from Baker's many books while acknowledging that there are some difficulties in aligning episodes sequentially and that there are internal contradictions to overcome. Hanley offers a frank appraisal of Baker's claims to have inspired Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corp: "While his stories of involvement in conservation history are not fabricated, they are often inflated. The impact of his involvement

with redwoods conservation also may have been overstated. As a biographer, my confidence in the accuracy of these and several other stories was shaky, but, as we will see at other times seemingly incredible stories are verified" (Hanley, 2018, p135).

In ten chapters, Hanley traverses Baker's English country childhood (including work in his clergyman father's nursery), early experiences in Canada, and service in WWI, all of which provided formative experiences leading to a long life of social activism. Subsequent chapters cover Baker's time as a forester in Kenya and Nigeria and the formation of the Men of the Trees organisation, possibly the best remembered part of career for forest historians, before traversing his time in Palestine, lecturing in the USA, and plans for afforestation in the Sahara.

For Australian and New Zealand readers, Baker's time in both countries is of interest. New Zealand receives comparatively more attention. Baker visited in May and June of 1931. He immediately saw similarities between Kikuyu and Māori rituals prior to felling forest trees and restrictions on their harvesting. He recognised that much forest had been felled to make way for pasture and involved himself in local campaigns to preserve the remaining Kauri (*Agathis australis*) forests as well as promoting afforestation efforts. Baker's arrival also coincided with Depression-era economy proposals to slash government expenditure, which would have seen the State Forest Service (founded in 1920) returned to the control of the Lands Department, the government agency concerned with the development and sale of Crown lands for agriculture. Serendipitously, Baker had served in WWI with the son of a former Commissioner (i.e. Minister) of State Forests, Sir Francis Bell. In that capacity, Bell had taken the lead in Parliament in the creation of the forest service in 1920 and was still a member of the Legislative Council in 1931; Baker thus gained an entree to forestry issues in New Zealand at a high level political. Hanley reports that Baker responded with a series of newspaper articles making the various cases for forest preservation, regeneration, afforestation, and wood pulp development. Recourse to Papers Past (the New Zealand equivalent of Trove), shows the extent of his efforts, but my own view is that it was within government circles that the efforts of A. D. McGavock (Director of Forests, 1932-1938) were ultimately decisive in keeping the State Forest Service separate from Lands (though at some financial cost). This reinforces Hanley's evaluation of Baker quoted above. Baker returned to New Zealand in 1954 where he met Catriona Burnett, whom he married in 1959 and the country became the base from which he continued to travel worldwide lecturing and promoting his vision for people in nature until his death in 1982.

Baker departed from New Zealand for Australia at a time when the Australian Forestry School in Canberra seemed under threat of closure, though he seems to have stopped short of claiming he saved it. Baker was warmly welcomed in Sydney and Melbourne. His impressions of Australia were recounted in his *Dance of the Trees* (1956). With an Australian Branch of Men of the Trees being established in 1980 (Brennan, 1983), there was more to his Australian connections than Hanley is able to reveal.

Perhaps the best way to read Baker is not through the utilitarian and realist lens that I have applied to his work - "artful self-promoter" was the phrase I used - but rather through what Fitzwilliams (1987) terms his "bioethical spirit". After all, Baker persuaded many people in many lands over many decades of the veracity of his ideas and how to translate them into actions.

References

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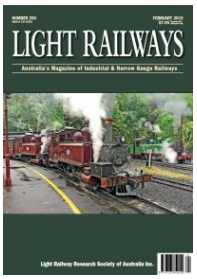
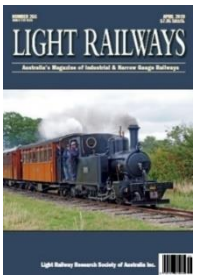


LR265 has an article by Peter Evans titled *Does Away with Tramways!* which relates the history of an early logging skyline in the Rubicon Forest, Victoria, a technology that seems to have come to Victoria via Charming Creek on the West Coast of the South Island, New Zealand. It was ultimately short-lived, and the technology would take more than a decade to become established as standard practice. There is also a field report by Norman Houghton on Condon's Yahoo Creek tramway at Kawarren in the Victorian Otway Forest. In the Heritage & Tourist section, there is a rather fine photo of the restored TACL rail tractor used by the Victorian Forests Commission on the Tyers Valley Tramway in Gippsland.



LR266 has an article titled *Tom's Job*, a first-person account of a trip over a Victorian timber tramway, first published in *The Australasian* in 1907 under the pseudonym C. C. Hutbush and reprinted verbatim. It is accompanied by two very fine photographs of Rubicon timber tramways from the Lindsay Cumming collection, remarkable not only for the subject matter but the technical ability of the photographer. In the Tourist & Heritage section are photographs of the restoration of a Shay locomotive used north of Toowoomba by sawmiller A. & D. Munro. The restoration incorporates the parts of two partially scrapped locomotives abandoned at Palm Tree, and now displayed under cover at Ravensbourne.