

Australian Forest History Society

Newsletter No. 87
December 2022

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

Frankston State Pine Plantation



A group of forest workers

Weekly Times, Saturday 11 May 1912, p28.
trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/224850027

See pp. 3-7.



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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.

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NEXT ISSUE

The newsletter is normally published three times a year, with the occasional special issue. The next issue should be out in April/May 2023.

Input is always welcome.

Contributions can be sent to
fintan_olaighin@yahoo.com.au.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

By Fintán Ó Laighin

This issue covers a wide range of interests of our contributors, and reflects the diversity that comes under the heading of "forest history".

About half of the newsletter is taken up by two feature articles. The first, from Peter McHugh, is our cover story on the old Frankston State Pine Plantation located in what is now suburban Melbourne. The plantation may be gone, but street names such as Plantation Avenue, Pine Street and Forest Drive reflect its history, as does the Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve which is established on land that was once part of the plantation. The second feature article is by Michael Roche who takes us to New Zealand for his second instalment about the Diggers Sawmill Company. We also have an extensive review of Peter Evans's new book, *Wooden Rails & Green Gold*, written by Ian Bevege and John Dargavel.

Of particular note is the honour bestowed on two of our long-term members – Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths – who have had an annual lecture named after them by the Centre for Environmental History at the Australian National University. The inaugural lecture was held in early December and is available on YouTube for those who were not able to make it. See the article for the details.

In her president's report presented at our recent AGM, Juliana Lazzari encouraged members to get actively involved in the society. She noted that the current committee will probably move on eventually and relying on a small number of people can be a bit fraught.

Often when looking into things for the newsletter, I come across articles published months or even years earlier, as well as television and radio programs. There is a lot of forest history happening, and the newsletter is one small way of documenting it. So let us know, or perhaps write an article yourself, either on your own work or what you come across. We would love to hear about it.

FRANKSTON STATE PINE PLANTATION

By Peter McHugh¹

There are very few native softwoods in Victoria, and those that do exist, like cypress pine, grow too slowly to be suitable for large scale commercial plantations.

From its earliest days in the 1830s, Victoria imported large quantities of softwoods, mostly from North America and Scandinavia.

The need for local sources of softwood for furniture and joinery was apparent.

Monterey Pine, then named *Pinus insignis* and now known as *P. radiata*, is native to the central coast of California and Mexico, was first planted in gardens and windbreaks at Doncaster during the 1860s and grew well.

Seedlings were raised at the Macedon nursery in 1872 by William Ferguson, Victoria's first Inspector of Forests, and planted across the goldfields to rehabilitate land damaged by mining. Planting was extended at Creswick by John La Gerche in 1888 and the You Yangs later in 1899.

Its success partly gave rise to the fallacy that radiata pine could grow anywhere.

Meanwhile, between 1860 and 1885, various Victorian Acts of Parliament led to the sub-division and sale of Crown Land along the Mornington Peninsula near Frankston.

By the early 1900s, most of the best land in Victoria was being selected and alienated for agriculture. The Lands Department was very powerful at the time and had little interest in allocating valuable Crown Land for forestry or plantation purposes.

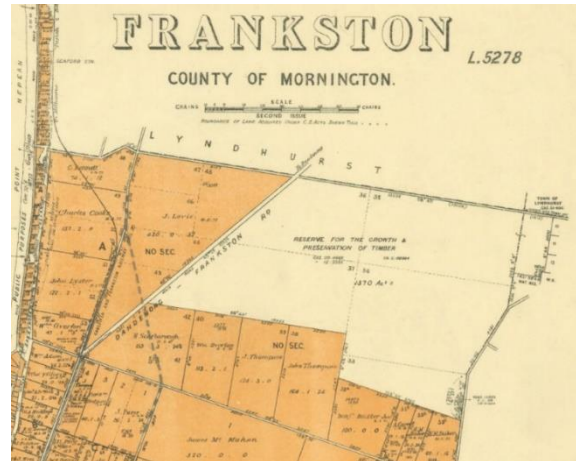
There were however large areas of coastal heathlands which were generally unsuitable for farming and considered useless for any other purposes that were made available.

As early as 1876 Crown Land at Frankston had been identified as a site for Melbourne General Cemetery, but Springvale was chosen instead in 1901. One of the reasons Frankston was rejected was because it was a long way for mourners to travel and Catholics and Protestants would need to share the same train.

In October 1909, the Lands Department granted a "Permissive Occupancy" over 1370 acres of the land to the State Forest Department for the "Preservation and Growth of Timber".

The land was primarily on poor quality coastal sand dunes and these so-called maritime "wastelands" included low woodland, heathland and swampland.

They were planted, not only because the Crown Land was available, but also because labour was accessible and costs of roading, clearing, planting and tending were relatively low.



In October 1909, the Lands Department reserved 1370 acres for the "Preservation and Growth of Timber" near Frankston and granted a "Permissive Occupancy" to the State Forests Department.

Map by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey 1938.

Source: [SLV handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/102706](https://slv.handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/102706).

So in 1909, the State Forests Department embarked on its first major coastal plantation project at Frankston.

Other plantations followed at Wilsons Promontory (1911), French Island (1916), Korumburra (1917), Port Campbell/Waarre (1919), Anglesea (1923), Mount Difficult in the Grampians (1925) and Wonthaggi (1927).

A senior officer, Mr W. L. Hartland, transferred from the Forests Commission's Creswick Nursery to take charge of the new plantation at Frankston.

Progress was quick, and by 1909 a 10-acre portion had already been fenced and planted.

By 1914, 300 acres had been planted with Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga douglasii*), Corsican pine (*Pinus laricio* and *P. laricio taurica*), Japanese red pine (*P. densiflora*), Cluster pine (*P. pinaster*), Red pine (*P. resinosa*) and Monterey pine (*P. insignis* var. *radiata*) which proved the most successful of the various species planted.

Labour shortages during the war years slowed the rate of planting so that by 1916-17 the area had increased to only 445 acres.



The Ballarat Courier, Saturday 13 January 1917, p3.
trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/74554415

¹ Peter McHugh administers the Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage website at victoriasforestsandbushfireheritage.com.

On Monday 16 February 1920, there was a vice-regal visit to the state plantations by his Excellency Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Governor-General, accompanied by Captain Duncan Hughes, aide-de-camp, Mr Owen Jones, Chairman of the Forests Commission, Mr A.D. Hardy, President of the Field Naturalists' Club, Mr John Johnstone, Chief Superintendent of Plantations, and Mr P.R.H. St. John, Head Gardener of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens. The vice-regal party was met by the plantation's superintendent, Mr W.L. Hartland. They all agreed the Frankston plantation to be the finest in Australia.

Vice-Regal Visit.
TO THE STATE PLANTATIONS, FRANKSTON.
On Monday, the 16th inst., his Excellency Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Governor-General, accompanied by the following gentlemen, paid a visit of inspection to the above plantations:—Capt. Duncan Hughes, aide-de-camp; Mr. Owen Jones, chairman of the Victorian Forest Commission; Mr. A. D. Hardy, president, Field Naturalists' Club; Mr. J. Johnstone, Chief Supt.; and Mr. P. R. H. St. John, head gardener of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens. The vice-regal party was met by the superintendent, Mr. W. L. Hartland, and for three hours worked its way through the thick undergrowth amongst the pines, despite a shade temperature of 106 and fierce sun.
The healthy appearance and wonderful growth of the various pines of the different years' planting was freely commented on by all.
His Excellency during a halt said, "This is very fine; I would not have missed it for anything, and only regret not having seen it years ago; it is the best plantation I've seen yet."
This from a gentleman who is looked on as one of the greatest authorities and keenest foresters of the day, and who has been closely in touch with the best in forestry for 40 years, not only in Europe, but indeed the world over, and hat on his own estates many thousands of acres of fine young plantations, speaks well for the future of our Frankston one.

Mr. Owen Jones, chairman, also expressed his satisfaction with what he saw and the progress made here, and in pointing out the grave danger from fire, said, "The people will have to realise the fact that these plantations and forests are very valuable ones, and that they are the people's property, then I think they will protect them in every way and especially from the great danger of fire."
Regret was expressed at the unavoidable absence of the other two members of the Commission, Messrs. H. Mackay and J. Coad.
The party then had lunch, kindly provided in the most liberal manner by his Excellency at the "Depot," after which the work of inspection was proceeded with, the party visiting the nursery, where nearly all the trees have been raised in past years, but which is not now fully used owing to the plantation area being nearly all planted up, accounting for nearly a million trees, the first plantings having been made in 1910.
On the return journey the party were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Emma at their beautiful home, "Cherburn," where afternoon tea was served on the lawn under a canopy of green, and the good things and surroundings greatly enjoyed by all, and was a fitting finish to a most interesting and instructive day.
We have had visits in the past few years from authorities in other States, and all agree that the Frankston plantation bids to be the finest in Australia.

Mornington Standard, Friday 20 February 1920, p2.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/65853520

Then in 1922, on Easter Monday, a bushfire burnt some 350 acres of the plantation when the temperature reached 94 degrees. The fire was started from outside the plantation when a spark blew across from an adjacent property where burning off had been in progress in the windy weather. But the damage was not as severe as first thought, and not all the trees died. They were later salvaged.

FRANKSTON FOREST FIRE
REVISED ESTIMATE OF DAMAGE
Close examination by an expert officer of the Forestry Commissioners has revealed that the damage done to the State pine plantation at Frankston was not so extensive as was estimated when the fire was smouldering a week ago after the blaze on Easter Monday. Many of the trees can be saved.
At first it was thought that 200,000 pines in various stages of growth up to 10 years would be destroyed. While the actual loss will be many thousands less than that number, the area over which the fire travelled is greater by 50 acres (250 instead of 200) than was announced a week ago.
Settlers in the neighborhood will be enjoined in the future to exercise more care when burning off and not to burn on such a day in April as Easter Monday, when the temperature was 94 in the shade.

The Herald (Melbourne), Tuesday 25 April 1922, p5.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/246765642

During the mid-1920s, Mr James Brown was appointed as the second forest officer to take charge. I have read that a house was built on Dandenong Road for him and his daughter by the Forests Commission and that this house still exists.

During the 1920s and '30s, the Frankston plantation often hosted "Arbor Day" festivities on the last Friday of July where local school children came and planted trees.

FRANKSTON DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL
ARBOR DAY
A most enjoyable outing was spent at the Pine Plantation on Wednesday afternoon. The students who were not taking part in matches walked out during the lunch hour. The Portsea bus brought a group of ladies of the Welfare League and their friends later. Each of the visitors planted a tree, and while the students continued the work an inspection was made of the pines and the wattles, all of which are doing well. Some of the wattles are now 20 ft. high.
When the work of planting fresh trees and clearing away the growth of scrub from amongst last year's trees was completed, the head master spoke to the students on the value of the work being done.
Mrs. Wastell, secretary of the League, stressed the advantage of the planting from an unselfish aspect as being work for others who would benefit in years to come. Mrs. Wykes (treasurer of the League), Miss Baty, Mr. Moody and Mr. Matheson also spoke.
After the planting many students climbed "The Old Dutch" to enjoy the view.

Frankston and Somerville Standard, Saturday 8 July 1933, p5.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/73268796

Despite all the setbacks, about 20 years after the first plantings, the 1928-29 Forests Commission's annual report records that approximately 300,000 super feet (700 cubic metres) of pine was cut from Frankston plantation and sold for conversion to case material.

In July 1933, during the depression years, it's reported that 30 local men were engaged under the sustenance program to work the plantations.

On 2 January 1955, there was another serious bushfire in the plantation. On a very hot day of 105 degrees, a fire which was believed to have started in a nearby paddock around midday, very quickly grew into a 4-mile front. Holiday makers around Frankston became volunteer firemen to boost the firefighting force to nearly 1,000 people, teaming with firemen from six CFA brigades. The fire was stopped 3 miles from the centre of Frankston.

A total of 630 acres, or £200,000 worth of pines, were killed in the blaze and the trees were salvaged over the next 18 months.

This bushfire effectively spelled the end of the commission's interest and investment in the Frankston plantation, and by 1958, it relinquished its Permissive Occupancy back to the Lands Department. However, fire protection responsibilities remained with the commission.



This second major bushfire spelled the end to the Forest Commission's interest in the Frankston plantation.
Argus, Monday 3 January 1955, p7.
trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71687593

From 1946, the State Pine Plantation had been run by Mr Harry Firth who stayed long enough to wind up the commission's operations in 1956, and then chose to retire.

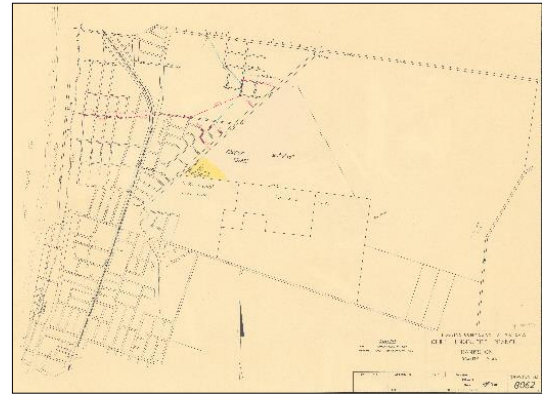
Then in 1956, a large wedge of some 296 acres was excised from the western side for the Victorian Housing Commission to build homes for low-income families. And by 1957 the first stage was completed with the Pines Forest Post Office being opened on 12 October 1959.

The Housing Commission planned neighbourhood units of about 500 houses for each primary school and designed access roads for pedestrian safety. They had grand plans for the entire area to be subdivided for housing.

Many of the new streets were given names reflecting the species planted in the previous plantation. For example, the first street constructed was Pine Street, leading to Plantation Street and Forest Drive. Other names included Monterey Boulevard, Radiata Street and Aleppo Court.

Native trees were represented as well, with Stringybark, Candlebark and Manna Courts as well as Longleaf Street.

Many species of flowering eucalyptus were planted on the street verges.



Housing Commission of Victoria dated March 1958, showing parts of the first two original streets, Pine Street and Plantation Avenue, with the service road along Frankston-Dandenong Road. Source: State Library Victoria. handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/170361



It seems the Housing Commission drew up plans in 1958 to subdivide the entire parcel of Crown Land for housing. Source: State Library Victoria. handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/114842



Typical Housing Commission Home at Frankston, 1960.

In 1965, the second wave and eventual completion of the building program began east of Excelsior Drive and extended as far as the proposed Mornington Peninsula Freeway to the east. The freeway zone acted as a buffer between the houses and the Frankston municipal tip.

In June 1959, the Victorian Vegetable Growers' Association approached the Minister of Agriculture, Sir Gilbert Chandler, with a request to establish a vegetable research station in the sands area. As a result, 280 acres of Crown Land in the north-east corner of the former Frankston pine plantation was set aside.

There was also a turf research station on a site now occupied by Flinders Christian School.

A further 189 acres of land on Ballarto Road was set aside in 1966 for the Vermin and Noxious Weeds Destruction Board to establish the Keith Turnbull Research Institute.

A large parcel of 166 acres was also set aside in 1969 as the Centenary Park public golf course, which is managed by the Frankston Shire Council.

There is also a council tip site in the southern part and a freeway and a Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works reserve running right through the middle.



1970 Aerial photo of the north-east section of the Pines. The Keith Turnbull Research Institute buildings, the freeway easement and the new housing can be seen.

During the 1970s, there was proposal to allocate more Crown Land as a sand quarry, but local opposition blocked the move.

In about 1989, following years of community agitation, remaining areas of public land eventually became the Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve managed by Parks Victoria. The 544 acres (220 ha) is one of the last remaining habitats for some species, such as the endangered New Holland Mouse and the Southern Brown Bandicoot.



Remnant bushland at the Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve

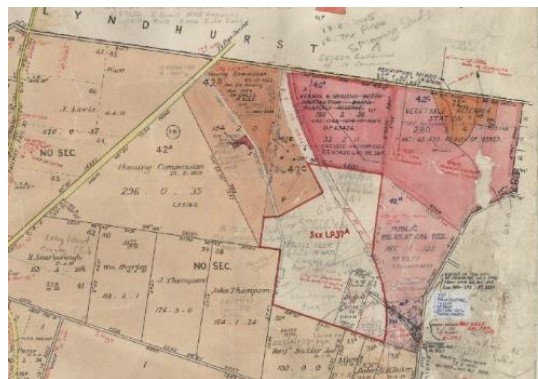
Although the Frankston plantation was not viable in the longer term, it was of value because it provided the platform for developing plantations in other parts of the State. It could be said they kickstarted the highly successful softwood plantation program that eventually made such an important contribution to the regional economy of Victoria.

And despite its chequered history, there is absolutely no doubt that if the land had not been set aside as a timber reserve and used as a softwood plantation that the entire area would have been progressively subdivided for housing and there would be no remnant bushland left at all. There are many other similar examples across the State, such as Sherbrook Forest, the You Yangs and Mount Beckworth.

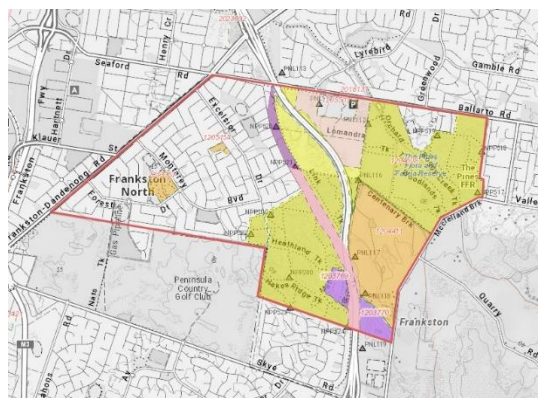
But like many other parcels of remnant bushland on the fringe of major towns and cities there is a perpetual problem of deliberately lit bushfires, anti-social behaviour, and rubbish dumping.



Fires and anti social behaviour have always been a problem on Crown Land and State Forest near major cities and towns.



The parish plan holds a wealth of information.
mapwarper.prov.vic.gov.au/maps/1453



Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning – MapShare mapshare.vic.gov.au/mapsharevic



A foresters' camp



*The seedlings for Frankston came from Creswick nursery.
Students and others digging young trees*



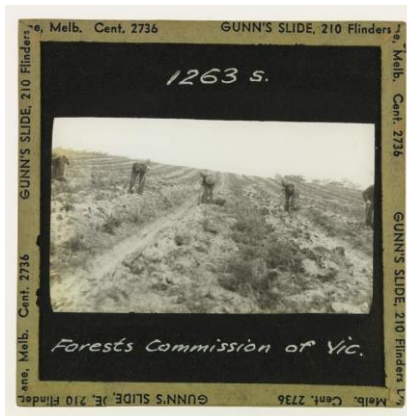
*Coastal sandy beach land:
Planting pine at Frankston state plantation*



*Packing young trees for sending away.
50,000 can be dealt within a few hours' time*

Left column: *Weekly Times*, Saturday 11 May 1912, p28. trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/224850027.

Right column: *Weekly Times*, Saturday 13 July 1912, p30. trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/198120759.



Planting Pinus insignis (now P. radiata)



Pinus insignis



Pinus insignis



*Pinus insignis at Frankston,
showing unhealthy growing conditions*



Planting Pinus insignis

THE DIGGERS SAWMILL COMPANY AND "WHITE PINE" EXPORTS TO AUSTRALIA, 1920 TO 1928, PART 2

By Michael Roche

Introduction

The Diggers Sawmill Company (DSMC) was registered in Westland as a private limited company in 1920, its 13 shareholders all having served in uniform during WWI. The company gained access to 630 acres of forests, containing an estimated 9 to 12 million sp. ft. of kahikatea (then widely sold as "White Pine"). DSMC, along with many other Westland sawmill operations exported its timber to Australia.

In the absence of company accounts, it is still possible to explore DSMC operations through surviving export permits and customs returns. Despite political rhetoric about "New Zealand timber for New Zealanders", overseas sales were never completely prohibited; instead a permit system was introduced in 1919 to allow mills to export specified quantities of sawn timber almost entirely to Australia.

Export permits were required for major timber species such as kauri, rimu, beech, and kahikatea. The allowable volumes were related to quantities exported in previous years, except for kahikatea where it was calculated on the amount of sawn timber in excess of domestic demand. Westland was particularly impacted by the permit system because some much of its production was for export. From 1923 to 1926, Greymouth was the leading port nationally for timber exports. In 1923 this amounted, for all species (except kauri) to 20.2 million sp. ft. or 45% of the national total.¹ There was limited regional demand, Westland was heavily forested and scantily populated and access to Canterbury was still difficult because of the Southern Alps prior to 1923 when the Otira rail tunnel was opened. Shipping services remained the primary means of moving the sawn timber from Westland to other parts of New Zealand and to overseas markets. The additional twist for kahikatea was that there was no significant dairy industry in Canterbury requiring the timber for butter boxes and cheese crates. Much Westland kahikatea of necessity was exported to Australia.

The Permit System in Operation 1918-1928

Issuing of export permits was initially the responsibility of the Board of Trade, part of the Department of Industries and Commerce, but after 1926 passed to the State Forest Service. DSMC applied for its first export permit within days of being registered as a private company (Table 1). This was granted – number 377. Permits were valid for 12 months duration, from 1 April to 31 March. In making this application, DSMC had no qualms about playing the returned soldiers' card – "our mill deserves all concessions considering we are 13 returned soldiers financed by the New Zealand Government".² They reiterated their request for a permit

to export rimu, even though it had earlier been made clear that these would only be allocated to mills already exporting that species. They also demonstrated some of the tensions within the industry by claiming that large enterprises such as the (Melbourne-owned) Kauri Timber Company were obtaining permits easily at the expense of small firms such as themselves.³

From 1923, a year prefix was added to the permit numbering system (e.g. 24/117 for 1924). Throughout the 1920s, DSMC secured 13 export permits, of which 10 were for kahikatea, two rimu, and one for beech, the company having some of these species in its forests. Kahikatea was the main timber tree in the DSMC forest. In this regard they were fortunate in that national demand for the timber was never considered to be in excess of production so that DSMC was always able to export 100% of its output. The kahikatea exports thus also serve as a proxy for total company production. Its requests for rimu and beech export permits were granted only for quite tiny amounts of 23,000 sp. ft. and 6,000 sp. ft., respectively. This situation hints at the difficulties faced by other rimu-dependent Westland sawmillers whose exports in terms of quantities and timing were closely controlled by the government. DSMC was again declined a permit to export rimu in 1925. Also of interest is that the permits specified the location of the mill – in most cases given not as the original Woodstock mill site, but the area of forest secured by the company at Inangahua Junction.

Table 1. Diggers Sawmill Company Export Permits

Permit No.	Duration	Species	Quantity %	Mill Site	Shipments
377	1/4/1920 – 31/3/1921	White Pine	100%	Not given	13
525	1/4/1921 – 31/3/1922	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	15
665	1/4/1921 – 31/3/1922	White Pine	100%	Woodstock	12
818	1/4/1922 – 31/3/1923	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	18
23/116	1/4/1923 – 31/3/1924	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	16
24/117	1/4/1924 – 31/3/1925	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	34
24/281	1/4/1924 – 31/3/1925	Beech	6000 sp. ft.	Inangahua Junction	1
25/70	1/4/1925 – 31/3/1926	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	33
25/235	1/4/1925 – 31/3/1926	Rimu	3000 sp. ft.	Inangahua Junction	2
26/98	1/4/1926 – 31/3/1927	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	24
27/267	1/4/1927 – 31/3/1928	Rimu	20,000 sp. ft.	Inangahua Junction	1
27/98	1/4/1927 – 31/3/1928	White Pine	100%	Inangahua Junction	9

Source: Diggers Sawmill Company F43/293 R 17273198 Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

soldier farm settlement files I have examined where, even in dire circumstances, the ex-soldier farmers in only a handful of cases referred to their war service warranting special consideration.

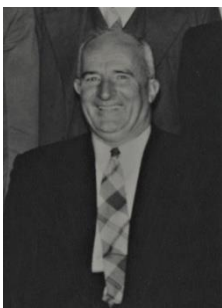
³ Roche, M., Dargavel, J., and Mills, J., 1993. "Tracking the KTC from Kauri to Karri to Chatlee". In Dargavel, J. and Feary, S. (eds), *Australia's Ever-Changing Forests II*. Centre for Research in Environmental Studies, Canberra. pp. 187-206.

¹ Department of Industries and Commerce, 1927. *AJHR* H44.

² E. Stoop, Secretary Diggers Sawmill Company to Secretary Board of Trade, 24 May 1920 (R 17273198). In contrast to the hundreds of

Listing the successive permits in orderly fashion as in Table 1 also obscures the anxiety felt by the company when a permit was approved but was not on hand as they were a necessary condition for export of shipments, which usually occurred on a monthly schedule.⁴ This triggered urgent exchanges of telegrams with Industries and Commerce and later the Forest Service head office in Wellington. Interestingly, a few permits were used beyond the 12 month period for which they were issued, perhaps a sign of local officials showing some flexibility. That said, where kahikatea and rimu were being dispatched in the same consignment, two separate permits were required for the shipment to go ahead. The extra layer of paperwork must have been frustrating and perhaps makes it easier to understand why DSMC made extensive use of commission agents.

Initially the mill exported from its Inangahua plant, then in 1921-1922 switched to output from Woodstock; in 1922-23 combined consignments prevailed before Woodstock supplied most in 1924; Inangahua prevailed in 1925-1926, and Woodstock thereafter. This flipping backwards and forwards was probably a quite deliberate strategy aimed at keeping both plants in operation. Woodstock produced more first than second grade kahikatea, the reverse for Inangahua. Two of the more prominent shareholders, Andrew Wells from 1923 and Edward Stoop, the latter also the company secretary, from 1930, were based at Inangahua Junction which further signals the importance this forest to the overall company operations. Some half dozen of the other shareholders remained employed at the Woodstock mill.



"Eddy" Stoop, company secretary of the Diggers Sawmill Company, in later life as a member of the Westland County Council in 1958.

*Image #14490 Westland County Council. Used by permission of Hokitika Museum.
www.hokitikamuseum.nz*

Commission Agents & Timber Sales in Australia

The Customs Department returns provide additional details about the quantities of timber involved, destinations, and vessels carrying the timber. The latter provides a glimpse into the then still important coastal and trans-Tasman shipping network. Over and above this they also indicate which of the two company mills produced the timber, its grade and how it was being consigned. The shipped sawn timber was exported from Greymouth some 70 miles distant from the mill. The annual pattern of exports can also be discerned. For 30 of its 31 initial shipments up until October 1921, the company consigned "on order", thereafter it increasingly made use of commission agents. Greymouth based firm of Wild and Robertson Ltd handled nearly all

of DSMC's 141 other shipments, mostly for Sydney and Melbourne destinations (and after 1926, Adelaide).

J.M. Bunt & Company, also of Greymouth, oversaw a small consignment of kahikatea to Sydney in 1927 and, as the permit system was phased out in 1928, a miniscule consignment of rimu.⁵

Wild and Robertson was a well established firm dating back to 1916 when accountant Richard Wild (also chair of the Hokitika Harbour Board in the early 1920s) and John S. Robertson, the latter formerly employed by the sawmilling company Stratford and Blair, established a partnership as shipping, timber, insurance, and general commission agents. By 1924, they operated as a private company, Wild and Robertson Ltd, accountants, mill owners, ship owners, importers, and exporters. They also traded under the name of the Westland Shipping Company. Over the course of two decades, the firm was involved in many aspects of the Westland timber industry. From 1921 it acted as commission agents for various local mills exporting timber to Australia and organised for vessels to call at Greymouth to load with timber from other sawmills.

In a few instances in 1921 and 1927, DSMC sold to New Zealand agents of a leading Australian firm of timber merchants Gunnersons and the timber was dispatched under the latter's name. This included in 1921, a comparatively small consignment of 14,660 sp. ft. first grade and 6,336 sp. ft. second grade kahikatea. Fragmentary surviving monthly Customs returns reveal that Gunnersons was purchasing considerable quantities of kahikatea, from other unspecified local Westland mills for shipment from Greymouth to Sydney and Newcastle.⁶

DSMC was operating in a period of change in trans-Tasman shipping. Some of its consignments in the early 1920s went to Australia on the last of the wooden sailing ships such as the schooner *SV Valmarie* owned by Rosenfeld and Company of Sydney. Thereafter sawn timber was dispatched on steam ships, such as the *SS Gabriella* one of a number of coal, timber, and general merchant vessels owned by R.S. Lamb of Sydney, which brought Newcastle coal to New Zealand and returned with timber and general cargo, and on Union Steam Ship vessels such as the *SS Kaponga* which was wrecked on the Greymouth bar in 1932.



*Ships loading timber at Greymouth in 1930.
The SS Gabriella is the fourth in line.*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand License. westcoast.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/29747

⁴ For example, on Wednesday 25 March 1925, Wild and Robertson on the company's behalf, had to telegram Wellington asking for the permit to be "wired" as the *SS Gabriella* was leaving on Monday 30. R 17273198 Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

⁵ In 1921, H. McNeill handled one consignment, perhaps not well for he was never again employed and remains a somewhat anonymous figure.

⁶ There is no evidence that Gunnersons required an export permit.

Grades of Timber

The sawn timber was exported as "first grade", "second grade" or "unassorted" consignments. There were however no national standards for timber gradings at this time, so precisely what DSMC meant by "first" and "second" grade is not certain.⁷ A partial explanation is that even in mature trees, the amount of sapwood could exceed that of heartwood, the former being vulnerable to borer and sapstain.⁸ From 1920 to 1928, the Woodstock mill exported in excess of 3,675,433 sp. ft. of first grade kahikatea and 1,767,589 sp. ft. of second grade with 764,212 sp. ft. being unassorted – in excess because from late 1922 to early 1924, the consignments were a combination of sawn timber from the Woodstock and Inangahua mills. Unassorted shipments from 1920 to 1928 for the Inangahua mill accounted for some 1,020,005 sp. ft., with in excess of 1,256,394 sp. ft. of first grade and 699,365 sp. ft. of second grade kahikatea. Some 628,114 sp. ft. of first grade and 836,399 sp. ft. of second grade timber were sourced from the two mills in unspecified proportions. The volumes involved reinforce the importance of the original kahikatea forest at Woodstock to longer term company operations. Individual consignments typically included first and second grade timber.

Export Markets

In first year of operations, DSMC dispatched nine consignments averaging 31,847 sp. ft. (Table 2). In 1921, these were increased to 25, with the numbers of consignments falling in 1922 and 1923 when the industry slumped. There was a recovery in the following years to a peak of 34 consignments in 1925. Export volumes from DSMC peaked earlier in 1923 at 2.4 million sp. ft.

By destination, Sydney was by far the main point of sale both in terms of numbers of consignments and volumes of sawn timber. Melbourne consignments were only a third of those to Sydney, but the volume of timber was considerably less. The largest consignment was sent to Sydney in 1923 amounting to 1,911,214 sp. ft. Melbourne's largest in comparison was only 565,599 sp. ft. in 1922. The smallest single shipment was sent to Adelaide in 1928, a mere 3,305 sp. ft.

Much larger operations, such as Butler Brothers at Ruatapu, dealt primarily in rimu and were much more constrained by the permit system. Butler Brothers did export some kahikatea, its largest shipments were of 20,176 sp. ft. of first grade and 5,051 sp. ft. second grade in 1924. These were much smaller than the largest of the DSMC individual consignments of 120,500 sp. ft. first grade and 2,244 sp. ft. of second grade kahikatea in 1924 and of 92,440 sp. ft. first grade and 85,276 sp. ft. of second grade kahikatea in 1925.⁹

Table 2: Consignments of White Pine (kahikatea) via Greymouth (YE 31 Dec)

Year	No. of consignments	Destination	Sp. ft.
1920	9	?	313,358
1921	25	Sydney Melbourne Adelaide Gunnerson	1,297,309
1922	19	Melbourne, Sydney Hobart	1,831,259
1923	20	Sydney Newcastle Melbourne Adelaide	2,497,876
1924	29	Sydney Newcastle Melbourne Adelaide	2,129,437
1925	34	Sydney Newcastle Melbourne	2,141,989
1926	30	Sydney Newcastle Melbourne	1,511,506
1927	13	Sydney Newcastle Gunnerson	455,521
1928	4	Sydney Adelaide	35,234

Source: Diggers Sawmill Company F43/293 R 17273198
Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

Focusing more closely on a single year - 1925 (Table 3), the long-term importance of the initial Back Creek, Woodstock, forest block to DSMC operations becomes obvious. This produced some 1.5 million sp. ft. compared to 630,000 sp. ft. from Inangahua or 71% of DSMC kahikatea in 1925. The large quantity of unassorted grades of kahikatea from Inangahua stands out. How to interpret this difference is less certain.

Table 3: Diggers Sawmill Production and Grade for 1925 (YE 31 Dec)

Plant	Species	Grade	No. of consignments	Sp. ft.	Average Sp. ft.
Woodstock	White Pine	1st	16	891,944	55,747
	White Pine	2nd	13	619,638	47,664
	White Pine	Unassorted	1	27,603	27,603
	Rimu	-	3	2,415	805
Inangahua	White Pine	1st	12	172,660	14,388
	White Pine	2nd	6	80,931	13,488
	White Pine	Unassorted	10	378,775	37,876

Source: Customs Returns Diggers Sawmill Company F43/293 R 17273198
Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

⁷ Ward, W.C., 1967. *Dominion Sawmillers' Federation 50 Years: A History*. Dominion Sawmillers' Federation. pp. 106-107.

⁸ Wardle, J., 2003. *Wardle's Native Trees of New Zealand and Their Story*. New Zealand Farm Forestry Association, Wellington, p. 39.

⁹ Compiled from Customs Returns in R 17273198 Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

There is some seasonality in the exports, with more consignments in the last quarter of the year, but this may be as much do with available shipping space as being driven by mill production.



*Diggers Sawmill Company mill at Back Creek, Woodstock in about 1930, three years before the company was wound up.
Image #0100050. Used by permission of Hokitika Museum.
www.hokitikamuseum.nz*

Conclusion

At their peak from 1922 to 1925, DSMC consignments alone from Greymouth constituted 7% to 9 % of the total quantity of all sawn timber exported from the port. This small to average company was one of 42, 45, 56, and 61 in Westland over these four years. In sporting parlance, it managed to "punch above its weight". The key to its success lay in the fact that it was largely processing kahikatea, for which export markets existed in Australia, and that export restrictions were not as constrained as the other main species, such as rimu. What is lacking is financial information. Aggregated provincial data is too coarse to be of much help, but averaged value of sawn timber production figures would suggest that the value of company output amounted to £10,069 in 1921-22 falling over the next two years before returning to £10,218 in 1924-25. It is difficult, however, to imagine that DSMC fared any better than its competitors during the 1920s. The company at various periods closed the Woodstock mill when demand fell. DSMC was voluntarily wound up by its shareholders in November 1933. Its lifespan was greater than the nine years cutting anticipated on its formation in 1920. As a case study, this also hints at the wider possibilities of further study of the surviving export permits for understanding more about the quite complex web of commission agents, shipping companies, and overseas markets for Westland timber during the 1920s.



*Kahikatea
(Dacrydium dacrydioides).
Released to public domain by
Alan Liefing.
[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Kahikatea.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kahikatea.jpg)*

ABC RADIO AND ABC NEWS WEBSITE

Radio National – The History Listen

"Impostors: If it's endangered, we want it"

Broadcast: 4 October 2022

Ecology didn't exist in the nineteenth century. So, when, where, and how did it first begin in Australia? The idea of plants, animals and country being interconnected may be old Indigenous knowledge, but there was a time when it was utterly new for white settlers. The entwined story of the Royal Melbourne Zoo and Wilson's Promontory National Park shows how this growing awareness came about. And it helps explain some of the contractions in the world around us now.

www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/the-history-listen/the-history-listen-impostors-endangered/101481056

Radio National – Earshot

"A Promise Lost | Lost Birds of Tasmania"

Broadcast: 17 October 2022

Susan Lester inadvertently entered a world of political and corporate corruption when she was made the promise of a lifetime by one of Tasmania's most powerful businessmen. When she agreed to paint 200 watercolours of birds for Edmund Rouse, she had no idea it would be a decision that would overwhelm her and her artistic career.

An exhibition of Susan's works is being held at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart until 12 February 2023.

www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/earshot-promise-me-lost-birds/14082222

www.tmag.tas.gov.au/whats_on/exhibitions/current_upcoming/info/susan_lester_birds_of_tasmania

Editor's note: The connection with forest history may not be obvious. Among other things, Edmund Rouse was chairman of timber company Gunns and was convicted of offering a Tasmanian Labor MP \$10,000 to cross the floor and prevent the formation of a Labor/ Greens alliance government in Tasmania in 1989. Rouse was sentenced to three years in gaol. The "lost birds" refers to the 200 paintings that Susan Lester delivered to Rouse shortly before the 1989 election. One painting is missing – the swift parrot. For more info camd.org.au/susan-lesters-199-lost-tas-bird-paintings. There is also a GoFundMe page raising money for the paintings to be published as a book (it has almost reached its target of \$40,000) – www.gofundme.com/f/birds-of-tasmania-by-susan-lester.

ABC News – The Battle for the Otway Ranges

Published: 19 December 2022

By Rhiannon Stevens, ABC Ballarat.

Twenty years ago, a long and bitter campaign to end native forest logging came to an end in Victoria's west. Against all odds, a motley group of conservationists took on power and industry and won.

www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-19/otway-ranges-logging-conservation-battle-for-the-forest/101739484

2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND THE 2023 COMMITTEE

The society's Annual General Meeting was held in Canberra on Monday 28 November 2022. The following committee was elected:

President: Juliana Lazzari
Vice-President: Vacant
Secretary and public officer: Kevin Frawley
Treasurer: Fintán Ó Laighin
Committee: Peter Evans

President's Report

By Juliana Lazzari

I am pleased to present my report that encompasses another year of the Australian Forest History Society, my second as president.

I would like to start by noting with sadness the passing of one of our founding members, Jenny Mills, in April 2022. Jenny was for many years an active member of the society, most notably as an enthusiastic participant (along with her husband David) and presenter at our conferences – including our first, held in Canberra in May 1988, and her remarkable role in making our 2004 conference in Augusta, Western Australia, such a big success. The society would not have been established were it not for the enthusiasm of Jenny and our other founders and she is missed. Vale Jenny.

Things are still a little quiet for our society, although this may change in the coming year as we increasingly get used to living with COVID. Our main activity through 2021-22 was publishing three issues of the newsletter – in August 2021, December 2021 (the special issue on the islands) and April 2022. A further issue was published in September 2022 and another is being prepared for December. I thank all the authors for their contributions and also thank our newsletter editor, Fintán Ó Laighin, for pulling it all together.

While not reflected in the website itself, there has been a bit of work done in the background. I thank Jan Oosthoek, our former web manager, who has completed the website transition to WordPress which is an open-source and more user-friendly system. I am grateful to our member, Robert Onfray, who has volunteered to be a buddy with me to manage the site. Members will be aware of Robert's blogs that are drawn upon for the newsletter – www.robersonfray.com. We will produce some basic instructions on how to use the site so that members who are interested in helping with the website will be able to do so.

Although there are no immediate plans to hold a conference, any proposals are welcome. Stuart Pearson has previously suggested holding a follow-up conference to the Perfumed Pineries conference held in Coonabarabran in November 2000. John Dargavel has suggested linking the AFHS with the Forestry Heritage Museum in Beechworth, and perhaps have a meeting there over a couple of days. If we do have a conference in 2023, Jane Lennon has asked that we avoid the Australian Garden History Society in Ipswich in early September, and the General Assembly of the

International Council on Monuments and Sites in Sydney in the first 10 days of October.

Our membership goes up and down a bit from year to year, but overall is relatively constant. On 30 June 2022, we had 52 members (up from 31 on 30 June 2021), and membership currently stands at 40 compared with 48 at the time of last year's AGM. There are another 25 people who are unfinancial but who are still on our mailing list.

Our committee remains stable, but with significant gaps that I would really love to be filled. While the committee's work ticks along, it could do with a few more hands on deck. However, there are other opportunities to get involved without being on the committee. For example, as public officer (ACT residents only), being a buddy website manager or helping with the newsletter as a guest editor or contributor. Many of our members already contribute to the society without being on the committee. All contributions are very welcome!

I thank John Gray for his role as public officer for the last few years. At last year's AGM, John advised that it would be his last as public officer. Our secretary, Kevin Frawley, has indicated that he can take on the public officer role.

While I welcome this, I do note that there is a risk to the society's continuation when individuals take on multiple roles so, without wanting to labour a point, I urge members to consider nominating for committee positions or taking on other society roles.

And finally, a special mention to our member Derek McIntosh who made a very welcome and very generous donation of \$1001 to the AFHS in May. This was greatly appreciated and, as we'll see in the treasurer's report, a welcome boon for our, at times, struggling finances. For those of you who don't know, Derek is the creator of the "National Register of Big Trees: Australia's Champion Trees". More information on the register can be found on its website at www.nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au.

Treasurer's Report

By Fintán Ó Laighin

The most pleasing thing to report was that the society made a profit for the first time since 2015-16 when we benefited from the proceeds of the conference in Mount Gambier, and perhaps for the first time ever in a year not associated with a conference. From a loss of \$763.30 in 2020-21, our profit in 2021-22 was \$1326.70.

The major reason for this profit was a donation of \$1001 from Derek McIntosh in May. Juliana acknowledges him in her report, but I would also like to state my appreciation.

The other reasons for the turnaround were an increase in income from memberships (from \$750 in 2020-21 to \$1355 in 2021-22), and a reduction in newsletter printing and postage costs arising from the decision to focus mainly on digital editions (from \$1071.30 to \$737.50 – noting that the first two of our three newsletters during 2021-22 were printed and posted).

I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Graeme Wood for reviewing our accounts.

ANU CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: INAUGURAL ROBIN-GRIFFITHS ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY LECTURE

About the Birds and the Trees: Reading Robin and Griffiths and writing environmental history

On 8 December 2022, the Australian National University's Centre for Environmental History convened the inaugural Robin-Griffiths Annual Environmental History Lecture. This lecture honours the centre's founders, Emeritus Professors Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths, who have so generously fostered the field of environmental history and cultivated a community of scholars. It is hoped this annual event will go a small way to recognising their enormous contribution to the field and to share new research in environmental history.

The inaugural lecture was presented by Katie Holmes, Professor of History and co-director of the Centre for the Study of the Inland at La Trobe University. Her work integrates environmental, gender, oral and cultural history and she has a particular interest in the interplay between an individual, their culture and environment. She is currently working on projects researching the cultures of drought in regional Victoria, and water cultures and conflicts around water in the Murray Darling Basin. Her books include *Spaces in Her Day: Women's diaries of the 1920s-1930s* (1995), *Between the Leaves: Stories of women, writing and gardens* (2011), and the co-authored *Mallee Country: land, people, history* (2020). Katie will hold the 2023-24 Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser Visiting Chair in Australian Studies at Harvard University.

In a précis of her lecture, Professor Holmes wrote:

The work of Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths has been foundational to the field of environmental history – nationally and internationally. This paper reflects on their legacies and the ways they have shaped my own work. Gathering together my interests in gender and oral history with environmental history and environmental humanities, I embark on some time-travelling to Victoria's north west. There, at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, I find evidence of deep-time history; campaigns to protect the birds, the trees and the water; and an array of characters whose passionate engagement with this place created a shared sense of wonder and meaning, and a firm belief that this Country was to be cherished and protected.

The lecture is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRfgPseQu8s.

Information on the ANU Centre for Environmental History is at history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/ceh.

Editor's note: Professors Robin and Griffiths are long-standing members of the AFHS.



CREATING A PUBLIC FOREST CONSCIOUSNESS – DR ANTON SVEDING

At a ceremony in Wellington on 8 December 2022, Anton Sveding was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History. His research was supervised by Professor Jim McAloon and Associate Professor James Beattie. His thesis, "Creating a public forest consciousness: Forestry and forest conservation in New Zealand, 1916-1935", is described in the graduation program:

In the early twentieth century, scientific foresters and conservationists feared that New Zealand faced a timber shortage because of large-scale deforestation after British colonisation. Anton Sveding's research examines how, in response, the State Forest Service, together with conservationists, sought to foster a public forest consciousness by educating the public about the dangers of deforestation and the value of forestry. Anton's thesis adds to our understanding of New Zealand's environmental, political, and cultural history by showcasing the importance conservationists and scientific foresters placed on public participation in forest conservation.

www.wgtn.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/20605/70/december-graduation-programme-4.pdf

Thanks to Michael Roche for bringing this to our attention.

ROBERT ONFRAY'S FORESTRY AND SURREY HILLS BLOGS

By Fintán Ó Laighin

Since the September issue of the newsletter, Robert Onfray's weblog has grown by seven articles related to forest history – four in the "Forestry" section and another three in "Surrey Hills". There are also three articles in the "Travel" section, although these don't discuss forest history (which is not to say they're not worth reading ☺).

Many of the blogs on the "Surrey Hills" site build on Robert's book, *Fires, Farms and Forests: A Human History of Surrey Hills, north-west Tasmania*. The articles in the "Forestry" and "Surrey Hills" pages are listed below. The blog can be found at www.robertonfray.com.

On a website-related note, Robert has also become the administrator of the AFHS website – www.foresthistory.org.au.

Forestry

September: [Helm's aboretum](#)

October: [Squeezing yield from rain – the Wheatbelt story](#)

November: [Converting the sandy wastelands](#)

December: [Rifles, rainforests and rhetorical exuberance](#)

Surrey Hills

October: [Living on the buttongrass plain – a history of Bulgobac](#)

November: [AFH's rough diamond](#)

December: [From theodolite and chain to GPS – A surveyor's journey with AFH, APPM & NFP \(part 1\) by Mike O'Shea](#)

CHARLIE MILEY, WORLD CHAMPION AXEMAN

By Fintán Ó Laighin and Juliana Lazzeri

During a recent visit to Harrietville, Victoria, we chanced upon the Charlie Miley Reserve beside the West Branch of the Ovens River. The reserve is also the start of a short walking track which is also named after Charlie Miley, a world champion axeman from 1905 to 1932.

Charlie Miley – This walking track network is named for Charlie Miley, a local world champion axeman on the standing log, 12-inch in diameter event. Born at Smoko in 1882 he always loved axework. He first started cutting bracken on his father's farm, then went cutting timber for the mines and dredges around Harrietville. Practicing completion chopping every spare moment he had, he was Champion axeman from 1905 to 1932. Died at 84 in 1966.

A search of Trove on the website of the National Library of Australia returns quite a few results over the decades, from 1907 to 1945. A 1907 article in *The Maitland Weekly Mercury* – "The Wood-Chopper: How He Works" – discuss Miley's technique and skill, while an article in *The Murray and Ovens Advertiser*, also from 1907, says that the popularity of "the champion woodchopper of the State, being a resident of this district" has led to the popularity of the sport among male attendants at the local Hospital for the Insane. In 1911, *The Bendigo Advertiser* referred to him as the "champion axeman" in an article about that day's Bendigo Easter Fair.

His fame was nation-wide – in 1920, *The West Australian* called him "the Commonwealth champion" and said that he would be appearing at the next day's Pinjarra agricultural show where he would "attempt to lower all previous records". Still in Western Australia, he appeared at the Ugliers' Pantomime City carnival in early 1921 where he secured "the most popular win" of the day.

A 1924 advertisement in *The Argus* for a "Monster Programme (of) Boxing, Wood-chopping, Weightlifting, Vaudeville" includes a Great Challenge Match at the Stadium between Charlie Miley "Unbeaten Champion since 1906" and challenger Jerry Sullivan. They competed for a prize of £25.

In 1931, the *Weekly Times* praised the stamina of the "Veteran wood-chopper", while a report in the *Sporting Globe* in 1945 – 13 years after his last championship – called him the "Star of Australian Axemen", and noted that he had won the championship of every state of Australia and of New Zealand.



Miley is buried with his wife Mary in nearby Bright Cemetery.



Source: Find a Grave, photo by R and J.

www.findagrave.com/memorial/159500142/charles-miley.

The member profile at www.findagrave.com/user/profile/48362636 advises that "Anyone is free to use any of my headstone or cemetery photographs".

Harrietville has an active historical society which runs a small museum; however, the museum was closed during our visit. The society's Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/harrietvillehistoricalsociety and its page on the Alpine Shire Heritage Network website is at www.alpinehistory.com.au/harrietville.html.

Trove references

The Murray and Ovens Advertiser (Beechworth), 9 February 1907, p2, col. 5.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/200197232/21826718

The Maitland Weekly Mercury, 14 September 1907, p10, col. 6.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126780631

The Bendigo Advertiser, 19 April 1911, p5, col. 4.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/89842503

The West Australian (Perth), 9 November 1920, p6, col. 6.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/27790936

The West Australian (Perth), 2 April 1921, p8, col. 8.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/27960334

The Argus (Melbourne), 24 November 1924, p14, col. 4.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126780631

Weekly Times (Melbourne), 17 January 1931, p32, col. 1.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/223192821/23875406

Sporting Globe (Melbourne), 1 September 1945, p4, col. 1.

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/20670184



Charlie Miley – detail from the interpretative sign at Charlie Miley Reserve, Harrietville. Photo by Fintán Ó Laighin.

FORESTRY HERITAGE MUSEUM, BEECHWORTH

By Fintán Ó Laighin

The historic town of Beechworth in north-eastern Victoria is the location of the Forestry Heritage Museum, maintained by volunteers from the Forests Commission Retired Personnel Association (FCRPA) and hosted by Indigo Shire Council in the Beechworth Historic Precinct. It occupies two rooms in the Gold Warden's Office, built in 1860; from 1920 until about 1985, the building was used as the Forests Commission office.

While a small museum, it contains an impressive array of exhibits showing various facets of forestry in Victoria.

One room covers the history of forestry in Victoria, including the School of Forestry at Creswick, and is a combination of narrative, historic photos, signs, uniforms and equipment, including saws, adzes, and axes, as well as more obscure items such as a railway sleeper turning hook. One panel discusses the research that underpins forest management – tree breeding, genetics, insects and regeneration.

One display covers four generations of the one family who were all involved in forestry, starting with James Stewart Ritchie (b. 1865), followed by William Ritchie (b. 1895), Russell James Ritchie (b. 1924) and the fourth generation of Trevor William Ritchie (b. 1950) and Edward Ian Stubb (whose year of birth is not given).

Also on display is a Roll of Honour listing the names of the 20 Men of the Forests Service of Victoria who enlisted and went to the Great War, 1914-1919. One of these men is Albert Jacka who served at Gallipoli and was the first Australian to be decorated with the Victoria Cross during the First World War, a medal he was awarded for "most conspicuous bravery". Jacka's image was used as a recruiting tool, and a copy of a poster from the Darwin Military Museum forms part of the exhibit.



Left: Monument Australia, monumentaustalia.org.au/themes/conflict/ww1/display/106070-forest-service-of-victoria-roll-of-honour. Photo by Tim Fitzgerald.

Right: Australian War Memorial, www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTV00026.

The newsletter has previously reported on the Australian forestry companies that were established during the two world wars.¹ A display at the museum mentions that the

Allies established 80 such companies and that following WWII, from 1947 to the mid-1980s, the Forests Commission sponsored Australia's only military sawmilling unit, the 91 Forestry Squadron which was a special reserve unit of the Royal Australian Engineers.

A more recent exhibit honours Ross Penny (1950-2011) who, in November 1992, was awarded the National Medal in recognition of 25 years of service and, in June 1993, the Australian Fire Service Medal. Both medals are on display.²

The second room is dedicated to fires and firefighting and, like the first room, contains narrative, historic photos, signs, uniforms and equipment, as well as scale models of firetowers and fire trucks. One ingenious piece of equipment was the Remote Fire Delivery Box which allowed food and water to be dropped from a plane to firefighters in remote locations.

The museum is open from 10AM to 4:30PM, seven days a week. It is in Ford Street, Beechworth, just across the road from the Visitor Information Centre.



Forestry Heritage Museum, Beechworth. Photo by Juliana Lazzari. (Our dog Shadow is standing between the two posts.)

The FCRPA's YouTube channel is at www.youtube.com/@forestheritagevideos8266 and website is at www.victoriasforestryheritage.org.au. Both complement Peter McHugh's site at victoriasforestsfireheritage.com.

Postscript: Indigo Shire Council has announced that the Beechworth Historic Precinct will be refocused solely on the region's gold mining history. This means that the Forestry Heritage Museum will be relocated. Council's decision arises from the *Beechworth Historic Precinct Experience Master Plan* which council adopted in December 2021. Council's resolution says it will work with existing tenants to identify new premises, and that a minimum of 12 months notice will be provided. Council considered submissions on the draft master plan from a number of respondents, including the FCRPA.

Council minutes: www.indigoshire.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Council-Meetings/Agendas-and-minutes

Master plan: www.indigoshire.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Planning-for-our-Future/Plans-Strategies-and-Master-Plans/Beechworth-Historic-Precinct-Experience-Master-Plan

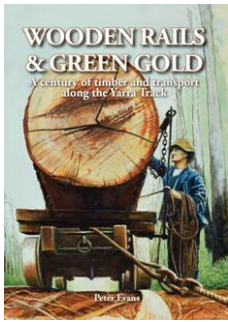
Peter McHugh on the draft master plan:

m.facebook.com/groups/forestcommissionheritage/posts/6988879371138353

¹ See issue nos. 65 (April 2015), 66 (September 2015), 67 (December 2015), 70 (December 2016), 71 (June 2017) and 86 (September 2022). Archived issues are available at www.foresthistory.org.au/newsletter-archive-1988-2020.

² An obituary of Ross is published on the Obituaries Australia website: oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/penny-ross-18458.

NEW BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS



Peter Evans, 2022. *Wooden Rails & Green Gold: A century of timber and transport along the Yarra Track*. Hard cover, A4 size, 288pp, 335 photographs, 54 maps and diagrams, glossary, bibliography, references, and index. Published by the Light Railway Research Society of Australia. ISBN 9780909340599. \$77 (\$57.75 for LRRSA members)

+ \$16.90 postage. Online orders shop.lrrsa.org.au/product/wooden-rails-green-gold or by mail: LRRSA Sales PO Box 21, SURREY HILLS VIC 3127.

Review by Ian Bevege and John Dargavel.

The mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) forest in Victoria's Central Highlands is one of the world's greatest. It has drawn many to wonder at its beauty, study its ecology, recount its history of use and abuse, and fear its ravaging bushfires. It has been the subject to a century of controversy which makes any new factual study welcome, and this very detailed one from Peter Evans is particularly so. AFHS readers may well know of his 1994 book, *Rails to Rubicon* (2nd edn, 2022) that covers an adjacent area to that considered here, and his contributions to our conferences.¹ His work epitomises the wealth of insights that industrial archaeology brings to Australian forest history.

Wooden Rails & Green Gold covers a large area that stretches roughly between Healesville, Woods Point and Powelltown in the headwaters and watersheds of the Yarra, Acheron and Thompson Rivers. It includes major catchments now kept solely for Melbourne's water and large areas protected in national parks, with more mooted to follow. The forest is dotted with sites of old gold mines, sawmills, tram lines, roads, small settlements and tourist spots. Evans tells their story over the century 1864-1964, through the archaeology he has uncovered in thirty years of research, and through interviews and archival research into many of the people and businesses involved.

Wooden Rails & Green Gold is a large book in format and intent, structured into fifteen chapters. There is a useful introduction of 10 pages that briefly describes the nature of the forests and their early human history, their bushfire history and role as water catchments. The land-use tensions between timber getting and water catchment management have been a recurring theme throughout the history of this region, and the book comprehensively provides an insight into the issues involved. Land-use issues have extended in the last few decades to encompass biodiversity conservation and wildfire control, particularly since the disastrous Black Saturday fires of February 2009, but these remain outside the purview of this book. This introductory scene setting flows naturally into the two chapters that describe over 47 pages how transport routes, first tracks and logging

tramways, were contrived across the mountains – the Yarra Track of the title – were followed by roads and railways up to and across the Great Divide.

The body of the book takes up some 180 pages in the next nine chapters describing the history of logging and development of eight individual mill settlements, most of which – apart from Marysville – will be unfamiliar to members of AFHS and indeed most people outside Victoria. Readers should not be daunted by this unfamiliarity; there is a wealth of historical detail not only of bush operations but also of forest management by the Forests Commission of Victoria, ably presented in a very readable form, accompanied by classic old photographs of the bush, mill towns, mills, tramways, logging operations and people – importantly many of whom are named – that provide a context that is nothing if not a visual feast. Living and working in these small mill towns was no picnic for either the men or their families enduring spartan, often primitive, isolated conditions in a region noted for inclement weather ranging from snow to fire. We reproduce here Evans' photo (p183) from the State Library of Victoria of the Cambarville mill settlement (1945) to illustrate the point.



Evans' century of hardwood sawmilling had a marked periodisation before the era of "forest wars", corporate takeovers, centralisation, privatisation and shift to pine plantations. He distinguishes: the opening-up period of making tracks and roads primarily for the gold mines; the period of sawmilling before the 1939 fires when tram and rail lines were the main transport infrastructure; the hiatus of the depression and WWII; and the subsequent period when the surviving sawmills were gradually moved out of the bush and roads and log trucks took over transport.

The colonial and state statistical registers can also provide a context within which Evans' detail can be seen. For example, the century was one of small mills run *on average* by small engines of 15-20 hp at the start that were only increased to 100-200 hp in the 1950s. Employment *on average* started at 15-20 for each mill, fell drastically during the depression and stayed at 10-15. Evans' detail provides many insights into the nature of the businesses involved. The forest mills were mostly individually-owned with a few being incorporated. Their assets largely consisted of the milling machinery which could be moved from site to site when areas had been

cut out. Ownership often changed, so it seems that their survival was often precarious; perhaps their bush skills were stronger than their business ones. The post-1939 shift of the mills out of the forests facilitated mechanisation and larger enterprises. As Evans observes, by the 1960s small country sawmills could no longer "pay their way" (p205).

Chapter 11 is titled "Foresters and Sawmillers" and while this is apt, it is also a potted history of the Forests Commission of Victoria from its foundation in 1919 and of the training of foresters at the Victorian School of Forestry Creswick, established in 1910. For a more detailed history of forestry training at Creswick, see Youl *et al* 2010 and Peter Evans' article in the AFHS Newsletter.^{2,3} In this chapter and several other places, Evans discusses the relationship between sawmillers and the Forests Commission over the issuing of licences and the level of royalties payable. The extent to which individual decisions were influenced politically is difficult to research, but two points can be made. First, although it had to facilitate the industry, it was much easier for the commission to exercise its control over individual small forest mills, than it was later over larger town-based enterprises. Second, how it administered the licences created an expectation of almost automatic renewal.

This chapter also discusses a little-known aspect of forest management and administration during WWII: the establishment of "Enemy Alien" internment and Prisoner of War camps to cut firewood for Melbourne. Evans documents these with photographs (pp.200-201). This provides a welcome addition to the research reported in the AFHS Newsletter of forestry involvement with WWII internment camps.^{4,5} We hope that further examples of these generally poorly documented and difficult to access activities may come to light.

Management of this large area of heavily timbered rough country was not aided by the general lack of adequate mapping. Early access put in largely by millers and timber-getters was rough and ready, and poorly documented let alone mapped. Chapters 2 and 3 on "opening-up" the region with the Yarra Track and crossing the Great Divide was accomplished when geodetic surveying had only just got underway. Without much in the way of maps and surveys, the task of finding routes for tracks and tramlines was far from easy and must have relied to a considerable extent on bush experience. As one of us (JD) remembers with embarrassment how a road line he once put in with a hairpin bend proved to be too tight for log trucks, we wonder how many such were put in the wrong place? A feature of the extensive forest resource surveys undertaken by the Forests Commission from the 1920s was the rough mapping of the region's confusing ridge and streamline network. Despite their limitations, the commission maps were the best available before the preparation of national one inch to the mile contour maps by the Australian Section Imperial General Staff (later Australian Survey Corps) from the mid-1920s. Norman Houghton provides a picture of the travails of

these early forest surveys in the Otways, not dissimilar to the area subject of the present work.⁶

The book concludes with an interesting chapter on the role of the forests and mills in providing timber and firewood for the voracious wood appetite of the burgeoning goldfields that emerged mainly in the Woods Point area in the 1860s. Pages 248-249 provide a masterly detailed map of the Woods Point area of the upper Goulburn River showing topography, tramways, mills and mines of this era; little of this endeavour remains today. Finally, a short Epilogue looks to the problematic future of the forest, in a period of social uncertainty post the 2009 fires and with competing claims on the forest by interest groups.

One mark of a good history is that it prompts our curiosity with questions for further investigation. Evans' detailed focus on places will enable overall trends in the Central Highlands to be extracted and compared to those elsewhere. A book so rich in closely researched detail will help future historians weave their tales with quite different themes for different times. They will be grateful for some 30 pages devoted to end notes, records of interviews, a bibliography and a useful glossary for those unfamiliar with forestry terminology. Evans is to be congratulated for the high quality of the maps he produced from a multiplicity of source material – in this they are unique. Illustrations grace every page of the book and are superb, being reproduced in colour and sepia (an excellent choice for such historical photographs and wood cuts) at high resolution; the use of bright coated paper optimises reproductive quality.

Wooden Rails & Green Gold is highly recommended to forest historians as well as those with a more specialised interest in early timber-getting and sawmilling in Victoria's high forests.

References

1. Peter S Evans, 1994 (2nd edition 2022). *Rails to Rubicon*. Light Railway Research Society of Australia, noted in *AFHS Newsletter* No. 78, 2019.
2. Rob Youl, Brian Fry and Ron Hateley, 2010. *Circumspice: One Hundred Years of Forestry Education Centred on Creswick, Victoria*. Melbourne: Forestry Centenary Education Committee.
3. Peter Evans, 2019. The life and work of a forester in Victoria's upper Acheron Valley. *AFHS Newsletter* No. 77: 3-6.
4. Ian Bevege, 2022. Review of John Huth, 2022. *As Things Were: Trees and Snippets from Queensland's Forest History*. *AFHS Newsletter* No 85: 15-16.
5. Ian Bevege, 2022. Review of Christine M. Turner, 2022. *The Western Creek Internment Camps of World War II*. *AFHS Newsletter* No. 86: 15-17.
6. Norman Houghton, 1997. East Otway odyssey of rugged field work. In John Dargavel (ed). *Australia's Ever-Changing Forests III. Proceedings of the Third National Conference on Australian Forest History*: 353-360. Canberra: CRES/ANU.



Peter McHugh, 2022. *The 1982-83 Victorian Bushfire Season: Including Ash Wednesday – 16 February 1983. A forester's perspective.* 254pp. Sale, Victoria.

ISBN 9780645063134. Available for free download from nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3112961556.

Preface

This e-book provides a detailed account of the 1982-83 bushfire season from a Victorian forester's perspective.

And while the bushfire season is best remembered for those on Ash Wednesday on 16 February 1983, where 47 people died in Victoria and a further 28 in South Australia, significant bushfires occurred right across Victoria from August 1982 until April 1983.

It was a long and hectic fire season for the Forests Commission Victoria (FCV) which attended 878 fires on state forests and national parks totalling 486,030 ha, which was well above the 11-year average of 141,000 ha.

Over the 1982-83 fire season, 22 Total Fire Ban (TFB) days were declared. Close co-operation was maintained with the Victoria Police and Country Fire Authority (CFA) which attended nearly 3,200 fires during the summer fire danger period.

A large part of this document outlines the accumulated wisdom, achievements, planning and preparations undertaken by the Forests Commission to build an effective firefighting organisation in the decades following the catastrophic 1939 bushfires leading up to 1982-83.

There were many "firsts"... and a lot to be proud of...

Major campaign bushfires at Cann River together with a forensic analysis of the bushfire at Greendale on 8 January 1983 which killed two Forests Commission machine operators, Des Collins and Alan Lynch, is included.

The role of the commission in major bushfires on Ash Wednesday is also described in some detail.

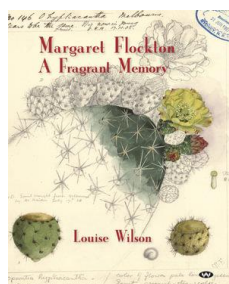
The aftermath of the bushfires is outlined as well as the major organisational changes introduced by the new Cain Labor State Government from mid-1983.

This story of the 1982-83 fire season was assembled nearly 40 years after the momentous events using internet searches, newspaper accounts, coroner's reports, FCV files held in the Public Record Office, witness statements, police reports, personal recollections and some limited interviews.

There remain significant gaps and sadly many of the key FCV staff are no longer alive or available to give their version of events.

My main hope is to tell some of the rich story of the Forests Commission during the 1982-83 fire season and place it on the public record.

Editor's note: The cover illustration, "Forest firefighting", is by Robert McHugh (then aged 9) for World Forestry Day 1999.



Louise Wilson, 2021. *Margaret Flockton: A Fragrant Memory.* 324pp, illustrated. Wakefield Press. ISBN 9781743058459. RRP \$65.

www.wakefieldpress.com.au/product.php?productid=1731

From the publisher's notes.

In 1894, a shy young Englishwoman dazzled the art world with her first exhibited work in New South Wales.

Her name was Margaret Flockton, and she would go on to become Australia's first and most celebrated professional botanical artist. Her illustrations were admired for both their scientific accuracy and their exquisite beauty.

Flockton was a self-effacing artist with extraordinary output. Her paintings of Australia's wild flowers led onwards to the eucalypts, acacias and more, culminating in the creation of the international award that honours her work.

With hundreds of full-colour illustrations, including many of her beautiful plates, this biography captures the essence of a remarkable woman, illustrating a life of deeds, not words.

Editor's note: The hardback edition was published in 2016 and was winner of the 2016 Don Grant Award for the best Australian family historical biography with a family history focus. More info at www.louisewilson.com.au/margaret_flockton.html.



Sean Winter, 2022. Sawpits in the forest: A case study of a failed timber-getting operation during the nineteenth century. *Australian Archaeology*, 88:3, 228-244.

www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03122417.2022.2138103

Abstract

The nineteenth century timber industry in Western Australia relied on traditional British technologies and struggled to deal with massive old-growth jarrah trees, and the subsequent transportation of milled timber to market. Mason's Mill, situated in the Darling Range to the east of Perth, had access to a vast amount of high quality timber, yet was economically unviable for most of its 20 year history, ultimately failing in the mid-1870s. Archaeological survey of the mill site and associated primary extractive sites demonstrate that a significant corpus of evidence of timber-getting activities remains in the forest. While ephemeral, this evidence allows a greater understanding of difficulties encountered by early timber-getting operations, and how reliance on obsolete technologies, and inadequate transport options, ultimately undermined Mason's Mill's ability to succeed.

Thanks to Sue Feary for bringing this article to our attention.



Bee Dawson, 2022. *Otari. Two hundred Years of Otari-Wilton's bush.* 228pp. The Cuba Press, Wellington, NZ.
ISBN 9781988595610.
RRP NZ\$80.
thecubapress.nz/shop/otari

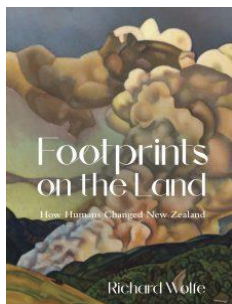
From the publisher's notes.

Otari tells the story of

Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, the only botanic garden dedicated solely to the collection and conservation of the plants unique to Aotearoa New Zealand and a native bush reserve with over a hundred hectares of regenerating forest, including some of Wellington's oldest trees.

It begins with the Ngāti Tama gardens in the area from the 1820s, and settler family the Wiltons, who protected acres of native bush for the community to enjoy, and then follows the evolution of the land into a plant museum under leading plant ecologist Leonard Cockayne and Wellington's first Director of Parks and Reserves, John Gretton MacKenzie.

Botanical descriptions and archival research are enlivened by the colourful stories of the curators who created and managed the collections, starting with Walter Brockie in 1947, and the many gardeners, botanists and volunteers who have worked on the internationally renowned garden and reserve. Ōtari-Wilton's Bush is a taonga that sustains both the people who visit it and the country whose plant life it protects.



Richard Wolfe, 2022. *Footprints on the Land.* 180pp. The Cuba Press, Wellington, NZ.
ISBN 9781990042201.
RRP NZ\$45.
www.oratia.co.nz/nz-history/footprints-on-the-land

From the publisher's notes.

It must have been a hell of a

shock. After millions of years of isolation, New Zealand's unique flora and fauna suddenly felt the stir of human footprints just over 800 years ago. In the blink of an eye in terms of the Earth's history, the last large landmass to be settled by humans changed in ways impossible to reverse.

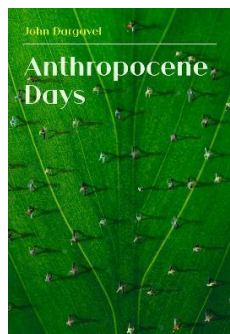
Footprints on the Land narrates those changes, taking in the destruction of forests, draining and flooding land, building railways and roads, farming and mining, and the inexorable spread of towns and cities. Some of the more dramatic changes, carried out in the name of progress, appear very differently through a modern lens.

Richard Wolfe accompanies his even-handed account of the effects of human settlement with an astute selection of paintings and photography befitting a curator and art writer. He also charts the growth of the environmental

movement, with a number of high-profile national campaigns.

That heightened awareness has helped to avoid repeating mistakes of the past, but Wolfe shows compellingly that we are not yet – as it were – out of the woods.

Habitat destruction, pollution, species introductions and (above all) climate change threaten the short history of people on these islands. When will the shock be absorbed?



John Dargavel, 2023. *Anthropocene Days.* 180pp. White Horse Press, Knapwell, UK.
ISBN 9781912186686.
RRP \$62.52.

www.bookdepository.com/Anthropocene-Days-John-Dargavel/9781912186686

From the publisher's notes.

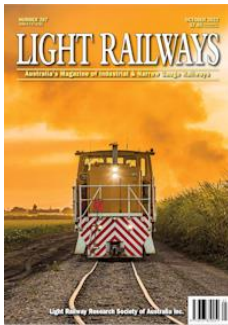
Is that the nub of the world's environmental crisis: that in the business of everyday, we pass by with our connections unacknowledged?

Anthropocene Days gathers 27 easy-to-read short essays about the environment and climate change in everyday life. While the world and governments are beset by the great woes of changing climate, deforestation, species extinction, air pollution, fouling oceans and so on, we go about individually and locally as best we can from day to day. *Anthropocene Days* contends that these two domains, so apparently separate, are essentially connected.

The book looks at the diverse and mundane activities of daily life to show how the environment is experienced, and does this very personally by drawing its observations from the author's life. It is part memoir, part recent history – a medley of short essays with themes of landscape change, forests, trees, war, fire, pestilence and the domestic life of housing, dusting and clutter. Motivated by present concerns, some reach back to the 1940s. They are set in Australia, Britain, India, Singapore and America.

Anthropocene Days is a deceptively easy read. It does not hector readers on what to do, but its ruminations, drawn from long engagement with environments, encourage reflection on how we pass our everyday lives while the planet changes.

Light Railways: Australia's Magazine of Industrial & Narrow Gauge Railways, October 2022 (LR287) and December 2022 (LR288). Light Railway Research Society of Australia. ISSN 0727 8101. www.lrrsa.org.au and www.facebook.com/groups/LightRailwaysAustralia.

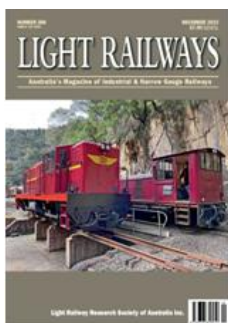


LR287 gets the timber stories underway with a 5-page article by Nick Anchen titled "Stories from The Otways". Illustrated with six photographs, it is a continuation of the magazine's recognition that it was 60 years since the closure of the Colac to Beech Forest line. This story prints interviews that Nick conducted in 2011 with several old time Otway district

personalities, including sawmiller Jack Eaton whose first sawmilling job was in 1952. He went on to work for various companies, before setting up his own mill in the early 1960s on his property at Ferguson. He makes an interesting comment on family and social life of the area:

"Alice and I raised six kids, all of whom went to the consolidated school in Lavers Hill. Originally there were schools at all the little settlements along the ridge, such as Ferguson, Weeaprounah, Wyelangta and so on, but as the population declined they joined them all together and just had schools at Lavers Hill and Beech Forest. The social life on the ridge was good, and we rarely left the district, except maybe at Christmas holidays. There were always the dances and the tennis clubs and the football clubs and so on, and it was a good life for the kids. By today's standards you could say they may have been deprived of some things, but growing up in the country never did them any harm."

The letters page includes a request for help from Kevin Burt who is researching the postal history of the Warburton/Powelltown sawmills. He is particularly intrigued by the Quongup mill run by GW Knott until he sold it in 1928 and which closed in 1938. If any readers can help with the queries on Quongup, Keith can be contacted via editor@lrrsa.org.au. Keith also mentions that he has registered covers (envelopes) from Big Pat's Creek and Richard's Mill in the 1930s.



The December 2022 issue (LR288) also includes articles of interest to forest history, with Jim Longworth's 6-page "Bundanoon Sawmills and Inclines" in which he looks at a couple of the early sawmillers who used tramways.

The first of these was A&R Amos (brothers Alexander and Robert)

which, in the mid-1870s, had a contract to supply timber for the Great Southern line being built by NSW Government Railways. Amos' Siding and sawmill was located at beside the line, a couple of kilometres on the Sydney side of Bundanoon. The mill also produced

boards, battens and scantlings for sale to the general public.

The next sawmill discussed by Longworth was established by Samuel Tooth in 1880 about half a kilometre from Bundanoon. A tragedy in July 1881 that resulted in the death of a child seemed to be the end of this operation, but in 1885 Tooth opened a new mill not far from the earlier location. The new mill was not a success, and seemed to have closed by late 1888, but not before a tramway had been constructed down a steep rocky cliff. Locals referred to it as "Tooth's Folly". Construction of the tramway unearthed a fossil bed which had "fine specimens of all sorts of shells". After the mill closed, visitors would go exploring along the track, including "Mr W Thorpe from the Sydney Museum (who) visited the bed to collect some of the fossils" in 1908. Tooth had another go at restarting operations in 1892 and continued to at least 1895. In 1902, Samuel's sons Joseph and Edward, were operating the Federal Saw-mill at Goulburn which was relocated to Bundanoon in mid-1903 as the River View Steam Sawmill.

Longworth's article is amply illustrated with photos, maps, advertisements and even a line drawing from a September 1905 issue of *The World's News* (trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/16084753).

The "Looking Back" section in LR288 is a 2-page spread on a logging railway which operated in the Camden Haven River Valley of the mid-north coast of NSW. Coincidentally, this railway was owned by Longworth's (Laurieton) Ltd. The accompanying photos – the second a full page shot – were taken in May 1922.

The field report in this issue is by AFHS member Ian Barnes who writes on the Great Northern Timber Company Bridge site in Woolgoolga in northern NSW. Ian reports undertaking a kayak-based search for evidence of bridges that crossed three creeks. He was successful in finding the remains of one crossing. He also found evidence of a possible tramway easement which aligns with the location of the bridge. The field report includes photographs and a map. His search is a follow-up to an article by Ian McNeil in LR242 (April 2015).

Forest history coverage in LR288 is completed by Frank Stamford's full page review of Peter Evans's new book, *Wooden Rails & Green Gold*, a letter from Phil Rickard in response to Nick Anchen's article in the previous issue on the Otways, and a brief report by Ross Mainwaring of an LRSSA visit to the Burruga copper mine and firewood tramway.

