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

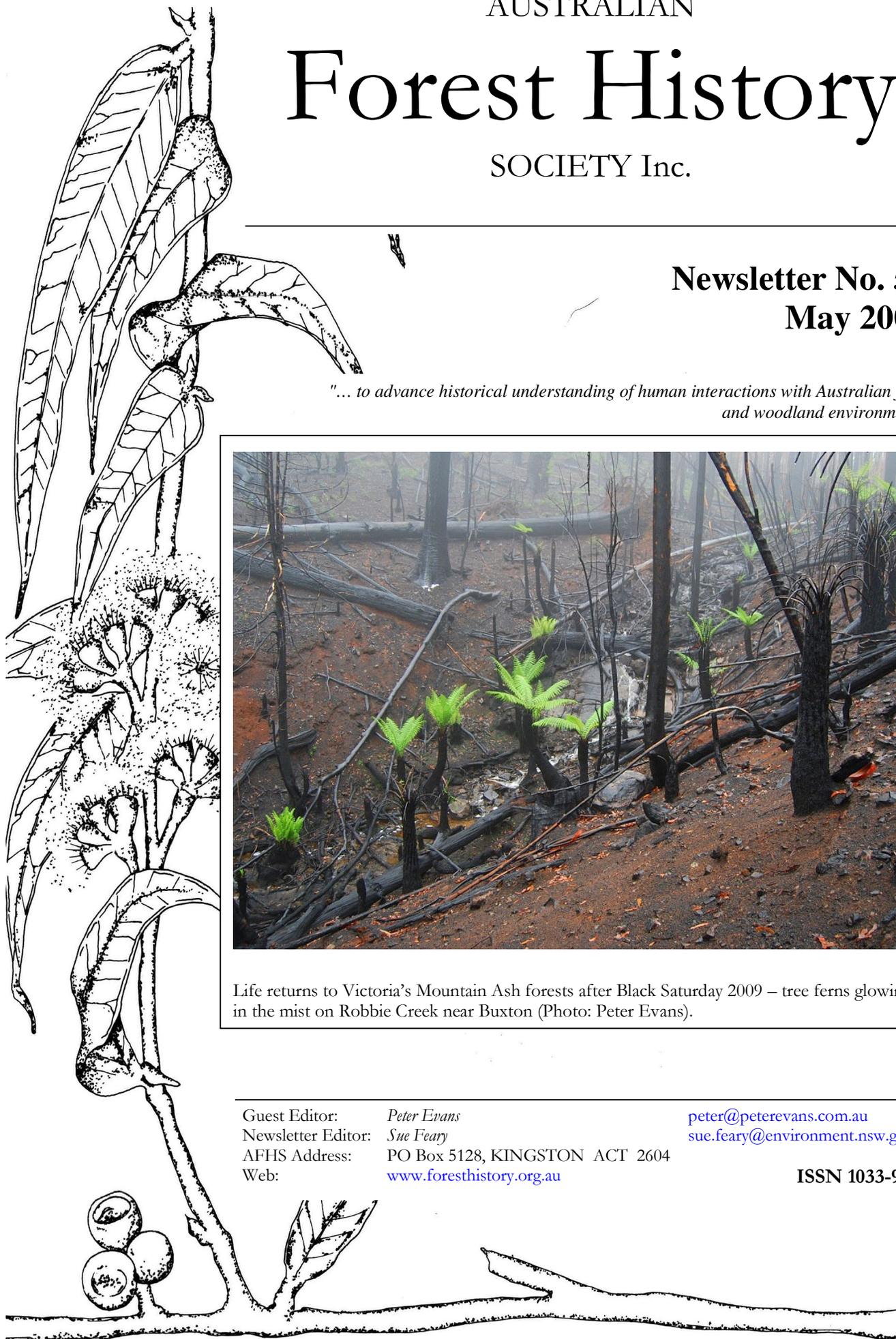


Life returns to Victoria's Mountain Ash forests after Black Saturday 2009 – tree ferns glowing in the mist on Robbie Creek near Buxton (Photo: Peter Evans).

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BLACK SATURDAY

The history of Australia's forests is inextricably intertwined with their fire history. This is nowhere more true than in the south-eastern corner of the continent. The events leading up to, during and following 7 February 2009 in Victoria were tragic, but there were precedents: Black Thursday (1851), Red Tuesday (1898), Black Sunday (1926), Black Friday (1939) and Ash Wednesday (1983). To these must now be added Black Saturday (2009). Past deaths in Victorian bushfires were largely because people were working in the forests: the bush was industrialised. With today's urbanisation of the forests, the consequences were even more disastrous in terms of loss of life and property. There will also be consequences for the age and ecology of the forests and the timber industry which still depends on them. The tourism industry, including eco-tourism, is already severely affected. The first part of this issue of the AFHS newsletter therefore concentrates on some aspects of the recent Victorian bushfires.

WE HAVE STILL NOT LIVED LONG ENOUGH FROM TOM GRIFFITHS

We should have seen this coming. We *did* see this coming. Yet we failed to save lives. We have still not lived long enough.

They had not lived long enough were the words that Judge Leonard Stretton used to describe the people who lived and worked in the forests of south-eastern Australia when they were engulfed by a holocaust wildfire on 'Black Friday', 1939. The judge, who conducted an immediate Royal Commission into the causes of the fires, was not commenting on the youthfulness of the dead: he was lamenting the environmental knowledge of both victims and survivors. He was pitying the innocence of European immigrants in a land whose natural rhythms they did not yet understand. He was depicting the fragility and brevity of a human lifetime in forests where life cycles and fire regimes had the periodicity and ferocity of centuries. He was indicting a whole society.

In 1939 Australians were deeply shocked by what had happened in their own backyard. Rampant flame had scourged a country that considered itself civilised. As well as shock, people sensed something sinister about the tragedy and its causes. Judge Stretton tried to find the words for it in his fearless report. Of the loss of life at one sawmill settlement, he wrote: 'The full story of the killing of this small community is one of unpreparedness, because of apathy and ignorance and perhaps of something worse.' The 'something worse' that he tried to define was an active, half-conscious denial of the danger of fire, and a kind of community complicity in the deferral of responsibility.

There is something sinister also about this dreadful tragedy of 2009, although the character of it is different. Those of us who know and love these forests and the

people who live in or near them are especially haunted. In 1939, some of the ignorance and innocence was forgivable, perhaps. 'Black Friday' was a late, rude awakening from the colonial era of forest exploitation and careless fire use, and it demanded that people confront and reform their whole relationship with the bush. When the 1939 fires raged through the forests of valuable mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), settlers did not even know how such a dominant and important tree regenerated. In the seventy years since 1939, we have lived through a revolution in scientific research and environmental understanding and we have come to a clearer understanding of the peculiar history and fire ecology of these forests. We have fewer excuses for innocence. We knew this terrible day would come. Why, then, was there such an appalling loss of life?

Victorians live entirely within what the international fire historian Stephen Pyne calls 'the fire flume'. It is the most distinctive fire region of Australia and the most dangerous in the world. When a high pressure system stalls in the Tasman Sea, hot northerly winds flow relentlessly down from central Australia across the densely vegetated south-east of the continent. This fiery 'flume' brews a deadly chemistry of air and fuel. The mountain topography of steep slopes, ridges and valleys channel the hot air, temperatures climb to searing extremes, and humidity evaporates such that the air crackles. Lightning attacks the land ahead of the delayed cold front and a dramatic southerly change turns the raging fires suddenly upon its victims.

There is a further ingredient to the chemistry of the fire flume. Across Australia, eucalypts are highly adapted to fire. Over millions of years these trees have turned this fragment of Gondwana into the fire continent. But in the south-eastern corner – especially in the forests of the Victorian ranges – a distinctive type of eucalypt has evolved. Ash-type eucalypts (the mountain and alpine ash) have developed a different means of regeneration. They do not develop lignotubers under the ground like other eucalypts and they rarely coppice. They are unusually dependent on their seed supply – and, to crack open those seeds high in the crowns of the trees and to cultivate the saplings successfully, they need a massive wildfire. Ash-type eucalypts generally grow in even-aged stands. They renew themselves *en masse*. These particularly grand and magnificent trees have evolved to commit mass suicide once every few hundred years – and in European times, more frequently. Not all the communities that were incinerated in 1939 and 2009 were in or near the forests of ash, but many were, and the peculiar fire ecology of the trees is another deadly dimension of this distinctive fire environment. These are wet mountain forests that only burn on rare days at the end of long droughts, after prolonged heatwaves, and when the flume is in full gear. And when they do burn, they do so with atomic power.

The 2009 fires were 'unprecedented', as many commentators have said. They erupted at the end of a



record heatwave and there seems little doubt that this was a fire exacerbated by climate change. But it is the recurrent realities that are more striking. For those of us who know the history, the most haunting aspect of this tragedy is its familiarity. The 2009 bushfires were 1939 all over again, laced with 1983. The same images, the same stories, the same words and phrases, and the same frightening and awesome natural force that we find so hard to remember and perhaps unconsciously strive to forget. It is a recurrent nightmare. We know this phenomenon, we know the specific contours of the event, and we even know how people live and how people die. The climate change scenario is frightening. But even worse is the knowledge that we still have not come to terms with what we have already experienced.

The Bureau of Meteorology predicted the conditions superbly. The Victorian Premier, John Brumby, issued a warning. Fire experts knew that people would die that day. History repeated itself with uncanny precision. Yet the shock was, and still is, immense. It is the death-toll, and not the weather, which makes the event truly unprecedented.

The recommended survival strategy of 'leave early or stay and defend your home' was a death sentence in these Victorian mountain communities on a forty-something degree day of high winds after a prolonged heatwave and a long drought. There is no identifiable 'early' in this fire region on the fatal days. We understand why this policy has evolved and it has much to recommend it. It is libertarian; it recognises the reality that people prefer to stay in their own homes and defend them if they can; it seeks to minimise late evacuation which is so often fatal; it encourages sensible planning and preparation; and it has demonstrably saved lives and homes. It will continue to guide people well in most areas of Australia. But I fear that it has misled people in this distinctively deadly fire region to believe that they could defend an ordinary home in the face of an unimaginable force.

We need to abandon the idea of a *national* fire plan and develop ecologically sensitive, bioregional fire survival strategies. We need to move beyond an undifferentiated, colonial sense of 'the bush' as an amorphous sameness with which we do battle, and instead empower local residents and their knowledge of local ecologies. The quest for national guidelines was fatal for the residents of these Victorian mountain communities on such a day; it worked insidiously to blunt their sense of local history and ecological distinctiveness. Clearing the backyard, cleaning the gutters and installing a better water pump cannot save an ordinary home in the path of a surging torrent of explosive gas in the fire flume.

A 'stay and defend' option is only realistic in such places and conditions if every property has a secure fire refuge or bunker. A bunker at the shire hall or at the end of the street is not good enough – people will die getting to it. I welcome the Prime Minister's promise to rebuild these communities 'brick by brick' – and I would like him to

add: 'and bunker by bunker'. Many people built bunkers in their backyards in the Second World War and most, thankfully, were not used. But we know for certain that any secure bunkers built in these Victorian forest towns *will* be used in the next generation, and they will save lives. This is an appropriate challenge to the design and construction industries of the fire continent. Fires inflame blame. Arsonists will be rightly condemned, but they will also distract us from addressing the reality of fires mostly caused by lightning. There were arsonists in 1939 and 2009 and there will be again in 2069; they are a sickening factor mostly beyond our predictive control. Water-bombing helicopters will again be promoted and in some areas they will be effective. The environmental and protective impacts of systematic control burning of our forests will be debated even more vociferously. Climate change will be correctly identified as a new factor in fire behaviour. But none of these policies or issues will ultimately save lives in these Victorian mountain communities on a holocaust day. Deep in the forests on Black Friday, 1939, with flames leaping kilometres ahead of the fire front, there was only one way to go – down. Well-built dugouts saved lives.

There was another meaning to Judge Stretton's declaration that *they had not lived long enough*. He was saying that lived experience alone, however vivid and traumatic, was never going to be enough to guide people in such circumstances. They also needed history. They needed – and we need it too – the distilled wisdom of past, inherited, learned experience. And not just of the recent human past, but of the ancient human past, and also of the deep biological past of the communities of trees. For in those histories lie the intractable patterns of our future. There is a dangerous mismatch between the cyclic nature of fire and the short-term memory of communities. These bushfire towns – where the material legacy of the past can never survive for long – need to work harder than most to renew their local historical consciousness. The greatest challenge in fire research is cultural.

There is a perennial question in human affairs that is given real edge and urgency by fire: *do we learn from history?* Testimony from the 1939 and 2009 fires suggests that there is one thing that we never seem to learn from history. That is, that nature can overwhelm culture. That some of the fires that roar out of the Australian bush are unstoppable. As one fire manager puts it, 'there are times when you have to step out of the way and acknowledge that nature has got the steering wheel at the moment.' It seems to go against the grain of our humanity to admit that fact, no matter how severe are the lessons of history.

Tom Griffiths is Professor of History in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University and the author of Forests of Ash: An Environmental History (Cambridge University Press, 2001).



**A PERSONAL STORY FROM BLACK FRIDAY 1939
FROM PETER EVANS**

Some years ago I was shown an original letter from a woman who survived the 1939 fire at Narbethong. Published eyewitness accounts of this fire from a woman's viewpoint are rare. Men outnumbered women at sawmills, the Royal Commission took evidence from only one woman, and few women were called as witnesses at the inquests. Newspaper reports tended to concentrate on the heroic efforts of the men fighting the fire and, except for one or two instances, did not feature stories of women who had survived the flames. I feel that the letter is important in demonstrating the strong ties women developed to their homes at sawmills and, despite this woman's courage in the face of adversity, there is a strong sense of loss and dislocation caused by the fire. The letter was written by Eileen Maxwell to her sister-in-law Mary [May] Berry, and describes not only Eileen's own survival story but her reaction to the deaths of the entire Kerslake family as they fled from the fire along the Acheron Way.

My darling sister

You just don't know how thrilled I was to get your always welcome letter and to hear that you were all well, as this leaves us all not too bad. Well my dear, we have lost everything, even my engagement ring. There is not a thing left standing at Feiglin's [mill] and we are lucky to be alive. May, the 1932 fire was nothing. I never want to see another. [My husband] Bill's feet and eyes have been very bad. His poor feet were a mass of blisters. I have a house here [in Healesville]. I had a table, [meat] safe and two chairs given [to me], so dear, I am not overladen with furniture. There are six caravans in the park, we lived in one of them till we got the house.

Poor Mrs Kerslake used to come and see me. She was a dear little woman and little Ruth was a lovely little pet. Well dear, the smoke was thick. For three days we never saw the sun and on the Tuesday [10 January 1939] at dinner time it came over very dark and I said I think we are in for a storm. Mr Turner came down about two o'clock and said I have to get you women out. I said I am not going, I am going to have a fight for our home. You know May, it is hard to run and leave fifteen years hard scratching and scraping to burn. So Mrs Turner said she was not going, so we hosed the houses and fences and soaked as far around as we could. Judah and Teddy Feiglin went out to see where the fire was. They were gone no time and back they came and said to Bill get the women out as quick as you can. They said no-one on earth will stand up to this. So there was six of us on our little [car] us and the dog and the cat and we made a dash for five miles. The men at the mill said we never got away five minutes too soon. Three fires met at the mill, it

came over the hill three miles away and lit the mill. Anyway, we got to the end of the Acheron Way and there was about five [parties] of us there and cars and trucks, all on the width of the road. There was a little shop there and that is all that saved us. The men fought it at that shop until they could hardly stand, because if it had caught alight we would have all gone. No matter which way we looked was flame and it came down on us like a pitch dark night. After it had passed in the early hours of the morning, six of the men walked back to the mill with torches and Bill nearly walked on little Ruth [Kerslake]. He picked her up and she had her dad's tobacco in her little hand. One hand was burnt and her legs. She still had her ribbon in her fair curls. Further on was her dad, then her mum, and then the brother with no flesh left on him. It has nearly killed Bill. When Ruth was down home she would always crawl up on his knee. When they were coming out next morning they brought bags to cover the bodies. They found a Greek [from the quarry]. He had taken his pants off and put them around his head. When Bill unwrapped them to see who it was, skin and all lifted.

My God, May, I will never forget it. I said to Bill I am not going without you. I said we will all go together. So he knew it was no good trying to send me out without him. A tree fell in front of Kerslakes' [car], the same could of easy happened to us. So dear, we are jolly lucky to be here. Bill has gone back to work. I will be glad when they build us a house. I hate being here, it is that lonely and it will be worse next week when the kiddies go to school. My garden [at the mill] was a picture, the dahlias were all coming out and we were picking beans and peas and the potatoes were all ready to dig. Bill says you would not know there had been a garden there. Poor old mum, I have not heard from her. ... The damn world is upside down. I think I am one of the unlucky ones. I have had enough worry and trouble to put me in the mad house. ... I wish you were nearer love so I could go to you. You seem to understand more than my own. I will shut up now and heaps of love and kisses to you all from us all.

Your ever true and loving sister, Eilly. Do write soon love, I thought you had forgotten me.

This letter echoes very closely the raw emotion of the personal stories told on our evening news broadcasts throughout February 2009. Perhaps not so much has changed in our modern world as we think it has. The dilemma of the "leave early or stay and defend" policy is evident even in 1939. The site is familiar – the store in Narbethong where Eileen Maxwell and her group sheltered was one of the sites razed on Black Saturday. And the fire came from the very same direction ...



A PERSONAL STORY FROM BLACK SATURDAY 2009 FROM PETER EVANS

On the afternoon of 7 February I was in Taggerty in north east Victoria when a convoy of refugees from Marysville, Narbethong and Buxton emerged from the thickening smoke as the CFA prepared to defend a line drawn in the paddocks south of Taggerty. By early evening, nearby Alexandra was like a war zone – cars strung out along the side of the road while the local high school and community sports hall were rapidly being transformed into emergency centres. Most Australians became very familiar with such scenes over the next few weeks but, in a setting with which I was comfortable, it came as something of a shock.

Alexandra was warned to stand by for ember attack due to an anticipated wind change. At this stage most people were still unaware of the scale of the disaster that had unfolded in Marysville that afternoon, but as stories spread, the seriousness of the situation began to sink in. With a colleague, I prepared to defend a small museum of sawmilling history on the outskirts of the town. Knapsack sprays were prepared, hoses positioned, valuable equipment removed from sheds we knew we had not enough water to defend, and fire-fighting clothing prepared. While we waited nervously, we heard rather than saw a convoy of bulldozers on the back of trucks rumble past on the way to create a firebreak south of the town. I am just thankful that the wind change never eventuated and we suffered nothing worse than a sleepless night and stinging eyes.

The point of this story is that I have studied Victorian fire history for the best part of twenty-five years. However, none of what I knew prepared me for the actual experience of that night (and yes, we were relatively safe and luckily never came under direct threat from the fire). I never want to come any closer than that. I can only imagine the experiences of those who faced far, far worse.

I was out in the bush after Ash Wednesday. I have been out in the bush after Black Saturday too. It has been interesting to observe the effects of this fire – whole swathes of mature pine plantation near Narbethong snapped-off halfway up like twigs and the remaining trees bent through ninety degrees. Logging machines burnt to already rusting hulks with not a shred of rubber left on their wheels. Huge post-1926 Mountain Ash regrowth, even in the gullies, completely torn out by the root balls. Younger, post-1939 Ash twisted off halfway up. The forest essentially bare down to the mineral earth. After the Ash Wednesday fires there was nothing like this level of damage to the forest, and it resembles photographs from the 1939 fire and Stretton's description in the preamble to his 1939 Royal Commission report. It just reinforces the magnitude of the tragic events of 7 February 2009.

POST-FIRE FOREST HERITAGE SURVEY FROM PETER EVANS

The Light Railway Research Society of Australia <http://www.lrrsa.org.au> has, for many decades, been the de facto publisher of Victorian sawmilling history. This grew out of a study of timber tramways and the role they served in the timber industry. A feature of the Society has been its preparedness to “get its boots dirty” in carrying out field work. Sawmills were often seen as temporary, but while they and their export tramways required licences from land managers and were often well-mapped as a consequence, logging tramway systems were unlicensed and were often poorly mapped. After the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, members of the Society surveyed a large number of sawmill sites and many kilometres of tramway revealed by the fires, the information obtained being used to enhance the quality of the mapping in Society publications.

The LRRSA has decided to repeat such a survey after the fires of February 2009. Since 1983, the ground rules for carrying out this type of activity have changed. Accordingly, the Society has sought and been granted a permit under the *Victorian Heritage Act 1995* from Heritage Victoria to carry out a post-fire heritage survey. The Society has the full support of Heritage Victoria, the Victorian Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria.

Priorities will begin with obtaining accurate mapping data for known gaps in knowledge, followed by field-checking known sites and assessing heritage listed sites known to have been burnt by these fires. This will add to and extend work being carried out by DSE and Parks Victoria, and close cooperation will hopefully avoid sites being surveyed twice. By closely involving the land managers it is hoped to enhance the protection available from good heritage management practices.

The LRRSA already has teams working at Mount Disappointment near Kilmore and the Black Range north of Toolangi. Hopefully, one of the outcomes of this survey will be the training of a younger generation to replace those who carried out the extensive post 1983 survey, and who are now feeling the age of their knees!

It is hoped to extend this work to the forests around Marysville, Boolarra and near Daylesford. Experience after Ash Wednesday showed that the optimal time for such a survey is as close as possible after the fires, but improved access and visibility due to the fire can persist for up to two years. At the conclusion of the project a report will be provided to Heritage Victoria outlining the results of the survey in line with the requirements of the Heritage Act.

If you would like further information regarding this survey or would like to participate, please contact Peter Evans peter@peter-evans.com.au



THE OBITUARY OF A GREAT EXPERIMENT FROM JOHN DARGAVEL

James W. Shirley 2008. *A history of Australian Capital Territory arboreta 1928-2003 (managed by Forestry and Timber Bureau and CSIRO)*. Forest and Wood Products Australia Ltd, World Trade Centre, Victoria. pp. 140 + CD of report and data files. ISBN 978-1-920883-42-3. Also at: http://www.fwpa.com.au/Resources/RD/Reports/PRO7.4031_Arboretum.pdf

This is the obituary of a great experiment that was started to see how introduced trees would grow across a wide range of altitudes in the ACT, and by extension in much of southern Australia. It was the largest of such experiments in the country. Its father was Charles Lane Poole, the Commonwealth's Inspector-General of Forests and head of its Forestry Bureau. It was born in 1928 and lived for 75 years until 2003 when bushfires swept the Brindabella Hills south of Canberra and destroyed 32 of the 33 arboreta that had been planted there. This report arose phoenix-like from their ashes and is more substantial and more widely available than anything produced in their lifetime. Although it is a detailed and essentially scientific record, it is also a celebration of their lives and of the many foresters, scientists and others who established and maintained them. Like the species trials in the various States, they eventually confirmed *Pinus radiata* as the prime plantation conifer for southern Australia, but it was not until 242 species, varieties and crosses in 39 genera had been tried before this could be known without doubt.

The report covers the 36 arboreta established by the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau and its successors. Thirty-three of them were planted in the ACT, two at Jervis Bay and one at Jerilderie in NSW. There were other losses before the 2003 fires: those at Jervis Bay were burnt in 1972, the Jerilderie arboretum and some in the ACT were abandoned, so that only 23 were left by 2002. Only the arboretum at Bendora, high in the Brindabella Hills has survived till now. An appendix notes other interesting plantings in the ACT such as Westbourne Woods planted by Charles Weston mainly between 1914 and 1918, and the Canberra International Arboretum that has only just commenced to plant 100 rare and endangered species from around the world.

The impetus for this study came from a small community organization, the Friends of the ACT Arboreta (FACTA), led by two AFHS members Kim Wells and Tony Fearnside. FACTA joined forces with the Southern Tablelands Farm Forestry Network to persuade the Forest and Wood Products Australia to fund the preparation and publication of the report. Jim Shirley, a New Zealand forester now resident in Australia drew on Alan Brown, members of the two groups and others in putting the report together.

After briefly introducing the ACT's arboreta, the report provides biographical sketches of eleven 'movers and shakers' from Lane Poole (1885-1970) to John Turnbull (1940-) who were involved in establishing and

managing the arboreta. Graphs clearly illustrate the natural environment of the arboreta and show the range of altitudes, from near sea level at Jervis Bay to nearly 1700m at Mt Ginini, with the corresponding ranges of temperature and rainfall.

The Forestry Bureau (Forestry and Timber Bureau from 1946) included comments on the arboreta in many of its annual reports. A.F. Rout and J.C. Doran, made a thorough review in 1974 when the oldest plots were 56 years old. They concluded that:

...it is obvious that *P. radiata* will remain the preferred species for commercial plantations. The arboreta have largely fulfilled their role as species trials and there are no plans for the introduction of new species.

It was their scientific death-knell.

Retired from science, the arboreta began a new phase of their life in the 1980s as educational and recreational resources for the public. One suggestion was to nominate selected arboreta for listing on the Register of the National Estate for their heritage value. A useful information booklet was produced, but little interpretation was provided on the ground. In 1991, when the oldest plots were 63 years old, they were again reviewed, this time by Tony Fearnside and D. Lea, to see what condition they were in and what values they still held. Seven were considered valuable enough to be worth managing. Whether anything much was done is not reported.

The section on arboretum establishment and management is fascinating. It was only possible because the cards recording the origins of most of the seed lots from which the plants were grown have survived. The quality of these records improved from the 1940s as the importance of recognizing the provenance of the seeds was increasingly realised. Excellent charts and maps enable the reader to grasp the essentials quickly: 94 percent of the plantings were conifers, 68 percent were pines, 35 percent came from the USA and Mexico, and most were planted in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Each arboretum was planted in one square chain (405 m²) blocks for each species set one-half chain (10m) apart. They varied in size from 10 to 86 plots. The report provides a detailed description of each arboretum.

The Forestry Bureau and its successors measured the arboreta every three years until 1972-73 when their scientific life was ending. A data base of all the measurements was never assembled and is probably not possible given inconsistencies in the paper records. Moreover, statistical analysis was never possible because the plots were not replicated systematically and there were problems with edge effects, consistency of treatment and measurement, and so forth. The most remarkable measurements were made, not while the arboreta were alive, but when they were dead. In what must have been horrible, dirty work, FACTA members and other volunteers measured 280 of the burnt plots in

2003 and 2004. A great strength of this report is that Shirley managed to prepare two large data bases (contained on the attached CD); one with at least two measurements for most plots and the other with details of their seed lots and establishment. These data enabled eight graphs to be prepared that compared the height growth of *P. radiata* with that of other pines. The primacy *P. radiata* was due not only to its undoubted success, but also to the greater susceptibility of some other possible alternative species to insects and diseases. At the highest altitude, *P. radiata* suffered considerably from snow damage in the early years. However, snow fall has been much lighter over recent decades – a sign of climate change perhaps – so that it is preminent there as well.

The report is primarily available as an electronic document. Fortunately FACTA was able to print a limited number of copies for distribution with the CD to libraries so that the knowledge of this great experiment can survive.

NEW SOUTH WALES TIMBER INDUSTRY HISTORY

Doug Campbell of Kyogle is seeking the assistance of readers for a project on the history of the timber industry in northern New South Wales. He is compiling material for a book to be called 'The Ramblings of the Timber Industry', to be published in September 2010 by the Kyogle Historical Society. The geographical scope of the project is from Dorrigo in the south to the Queensland border in the north, and east of the New England tableland. Doug is seeking pictures of, and information about sawmills in this area, for inclusion in the book. He would especially like to hear from anyone who has knowledge of Forestry Commission records of licences and annual quotas for sawmills (i.e. knowledge of the whereabouts of such records, and how to obtain access to them). If you can contribute to this worthy project, contact Doug Campbell at P.O. Box 182, Kyogle, NSW, 2474, or dougs.place@bigpond.com.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS SERVICE.

FROM JOHN DARGAVEL

The National Library of Australia has made available a service that provides free online access to digital versions of Australian newspapers published between 1803 and 1954. The service is currently in beta phase but users can already search across 26 newspaper titles including *The Sydney Gazette*, *The Brisbane Courier*, and the *Northern Territory Times*. Currently over 360,000 newspaper pages and over 3.3 million individual articles are available, with more content to be added over the next three years.

The free-to-use service supports full text searching across every page of every newspaper in the service, including advertising, cartoons, birth, death and marriage notices, as well as the news articles. Users can browse the collection by state of publication, title and date or undertake keyword searching. They can then view the digital version of each article in the context of the entire

page and newspaper issue. The service also provides a range of interactive features. The National Library has also received a \$1 million grant from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation to digitise *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Digitisation of this title is underway and users can expect to see the first issues in the second half of 2009.

To access the Australia Newspapers service go to: <http://ndpbeta.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>
For more information about the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program go to: www.nla.gov.au/ndp

So if you were interested in climate change, here's what you might find: (from *The Brisbane Courier*, Wednesday 13 August 1890, page 7).

CHANGE OF CLIMATE IN CHINA.

The gradual cooling of the Asiatic climate may be supported by the existence of the bones of the mammoth in Northern Siberia. This hairy elephant lived in that country when the air was temperate and when abundant forests supplied it with the young twigs on which it lived. Since that time Northern Siberia has become an intolerably cold desert. The ground there is constantly frozen to a depth of more than 2ft. below the surface, and produces only moss with a few modest-looking flowers. The mammoth very early drew the attention of the Chinese. It is first mentioned in the *Er-ya*, and next in Chuang-tse in the third century before Christ. The enormous quantities of valuable ivory which the remains of the mammoth in Siberia furnish, made known to the ancient Chinese the existence of the animal through their trade with Tartary. On account of its being found in very many localities embedded in the soil and in rocks, old books always speak of it as a monstrous mole living underground. It was found, they tell us, in China and in Tartary. Chuang-tse wrote as a poet and pictures it (*yen shu*) as drinking a river of water before its thirst was satisfied. He had been told of the fossil bones or seen them and filled up the picture by the aid of imagination, either his own or that of those from whom he heard the story. Seven centuries afterwards a medical writer, Tao Hung-king, says, "it is found in forests, and is as large as a water buffalo. It is in form something like a pig. Its colour is a greyish red, its feet are like those of the elephant. Its breast and upper tail are white, and blunt though powerful. Its flesh is eaten and is like that of the cow. It is known by the name "King of the Shu tribe. In calamitous years this animal often appears."



**LEARNING TO THINK LIKE A SAWMILLER
FROM PETER EVANS**

Doug Campbell seeks information on northern NSW sawmills using the records of the NSW Forestry Commission (*see previous page*) I can't help him with that, being only conversant with the Victorian records but, once someone has a sawmill site roughly mapped, I can perhaps help them to "think like a sawmiller" and find the site on the ground and map it accurately. (The Australian Heritage Commission called this "ground-truthing").

The secret to locating sawmill sites is to learn to think like a sawmiller. You need a good downhill slope to snig or tram logs to the mill. The mill will nearly always be sited at the lowest point of an allocated logging area so, if these are shown in file maps, they are well worth recording even if the actual mill site is not shown. A supply of water is essential, preferably one that does not have to be pumped. Sometimes dams are excavated to supply one day's water and refill overnight. The mill will usually be below the dam but always close by. There needs to be a side slope of about fifteen degrees to assist handling the logs/flitches/finished timber through the mill. There should also be enough flat land for a few houses and gardens, although this is generally a lower priority than the mill requirements being absolutely right. Finally, there needs to be an outlet route for tram of wagon below the mill to get either to a road or railway station. After a while, you should be able to look at a patch of forest and decide on the best place to put a sawmill. Then it's just a case of having a look. Incidentally, the requirement for good forest cover, access to water, not too far from a road and gentle side slopes also suits another, more modern industry. You will find a lot of small marijuana plantations using these criteria!

The mill layout enables you to decide on the scale of the mill and the type of machinery used. What is absolutely necessary is to find the top side of the mill itself (the log yard), for it is here that your search for log tramways will begin. Similarly, from the lower side of the mill you can start your search for an outlet tramway. Following tramways along any appreciable side slope is relatively easy, as the bench in the hillside is usually easy to follow. Disturbance from construction of the line near the creek (cuttings, bridge abutments etc) will be greater than on the gentler slopes on a spur, and a zigzag traverse up and down the creek is sure to pick something up if the line did continue past a point where you lost it. It is worth recording such features as log ramps and winch sites. These often turn out to have quite regular spacing, and are indicators of the stages in which the line was constructed.

This is part of a much larger field manual prepared for the LRRSA post-fire heritage survey. A copy is downloadable from:

http://www.lrrsa.org.au/Lrr_downloads.html

VALE GEOFF PARK

Geoff Park, one of the founding NZ members of ASLE-ANZ and a great environmental historian, died on 17 March 2009 after a short and courageous battle with cancer, discovered last November. He left a great legacy in his work and was working on a book on the early ideas around national parks in the US [in part on John Muir] and NZ, as well as research for Maori in Hawke's Bay progressing their Treaty of Waitangi claims.

**JUNE 2010 LISMORE CONFERENCE
REMINDER**

The organisers of the next Australian Forest History Society conference received an encouraging burst of responses to the call for expressions of interest in the last Newsletter (January), and look forward to receiving many more. If you would like to offer a paper, or wish just to attend, please let us know soon. Forms can be downloaded from the Society's website: www.foresthistory.org.au.

Membership of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) Inc is \$25 a year, or \$15 a year for students and for overseas addresses is \$30 (**in Australian currency please**). These prices do not include GST as the AFHS is not registered for paying or claiming GST. Membership expires on 30th June each year. Payment can be made by cheque or money order, or through Electronic Funds Transfer. Cheques or Money Orders made payable to the AFHS:

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

Electronic Funds Transfer can be paid into:

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