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Lahey's timber tramway, Canungra, Queensland, c.1912

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COMING NORTH

As this year's AFHS conference is to be held in northern New South Wales with a post conference excursion* over the Border Ranges into south-eastern Queensland, it is timely to consider the forest/forestry history of this region, dominated by the Tweed volcanics with their wet sclerophyll and rainforest vegetation.

The region has broad rivers flowing to the coast—the Clarence, Richmond, Brunswick, Tweed, Nerang and Logan—so that initial logging utilised river transport to get logs to mills.

The history of forestry provides six distinct periods:

1. Nineteenth century timber-getting, especially rainforest timbers such as red cedar; at first unregulated and over-cut, then regulations from the 1860s with licensed rights to leased areas.
2. A greater emphasis on conservation and regeneration after the 1870s but, at this stage, without government support despite the first forest reservations in NSW in 1871 and in Queensland in 1870. Also as, red cedar was becoming increasingly scarce, timber-getters switched to hoop pine where they could. Exploitation of this species continued from around 1870 to the 1930s.
3. State intervention in administration and control of forests and subsequent dedication of State Forests and development of a regulated industry (NSW Forestry Acts of 1909, 1916 and 1924, and Queensland State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906). Beginning of experimental plantations of native softwoods, especially hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), hardwoods, and exotic softwoods—*Pinus radiata* in the south and loblolly (*P. taeda*) and slash pine (*P. elliotti*) in the north.
4. Second World War to mid-1960s—escalating exploitation in response to market demand for more timber, especially for house construction.

5. 1960s to the Regional Forest Agreements of 1997—tightening of controls over harvesting practices and quotas, reduction of quotas to ensure sustainability, and increasing environmental awareness; creation of Border Ranges National Park in 1983 from three State Forests and in 1997 most of the moist forest/rainforest to Koreelah, Tooloom, Yabbra, Richmond Range and Toonunbar National Parks.
6. 1997–2010: Conservation reserves with limited public access on former logging tracks, and supply for local mills, consolidated into the big firms at Kyogle and Casino, plus Ford's mills at Urbenville and Woodenbong and Enright's at Beaudesert, mostly from private properties. Large scale hardwood plantations were established across the region.

From the heyday of the 1870s on the lower Richmond, river traffic increased at Lismore with its new sawmill in 1875 and timber poured down Wilson, Terania and Leycester creeks, and in 1877 there were 45 steamers and 224 schooners visiting; the railway was not constructed until 1891. The timber boom on the Richmond was succeeded by the sugar boom in the eighties and nineties and then by the land and dairying boom. The high forested ranges were Crown reserves by the end of the nineteenth century and gazetted State Forests by 1919.

There have been very few comprehensive regional histories but Louise Daley's 1966 *Men and a River, Richmond River District 1826-1895*, is an exception. N. C. Keats's 1988 *Wollumbin, the creation and early habitation of the Tweed, Brunswick and Richmond Rivers of NSW* is a more detailed account. Histories of forestry in NSW and in Queensland respectively were written by T. C. Grant (1988) and Peter Taylor (1994). Additionally, many detailed studies of individual forests were made for the Comprehensive Regional Assessments for the Regional Forest Agreements in the 1990s. Much of this material remains as the 'grey literature' on departmental shelves, long forgotten in agency mergers and amalgamations over the last decade.

Judith Powell's study *Travel Routes, Forest Towns And Settlements* (1998) for the Queensland CRA/RFA steering committee, has 10 case studies and I have prepared an edited version of No.5—Yarraman, a Railway and Company Town, pp. 96–108, for the insights it gives us into forest history in SE Queensland regarding early timber reservations, timber getting as a source of settlers' livelihood, railway access, and development of a timber company town.

Should the Society publish more of these forest histories hidden in the 'grey literature'? Please let the editor have your view on this.

Jane Lennon

* The cover photograph depicts a timber tramway at Canungra, southeastern Queensland. This is one of the many historical sites to be visited during the post-conference study tour in June. The source of the illustration is the State Library of Queensland, image no. APE-026-01-0010.



YARRAMAN—A RAILWAY AND COMPANY TOWN

Early settlement—19th century

As elsewhere in southeastern Queensland, the earliest non-indigenous history of the Yarraman area is a pastoral one. During the 1840s, vast pastoral concerns—squatting stations—were established at Cooyar and Taromeo; the waterhole where stockmen from both stations met ultimately became the town of Yarraman. Settlers arrived in the 1870s but it was not until 1889 that large-scale resumptions of these pastoral stations led to a more regulated and intensive settlement by farmers. Their arrival heralded the beginning of large-scale clearing and ringbarking of the massive trees of the district. Struggling farmers supplemented their income by timber getting and became either sellers or haulers of timber. Early sawmills were Fletcher's near Kooralgin, A & D Munro at Cooyar, and Lars Andersen at Blackbutt in 1903.

Increasing settlement led to township development. Town allotments were sold at Nanango in 1870, schools were established at Upper Yarraman and Yarraman in 1899 and 1901. In 1898 the first meeting of the Blackbutt Progress Association was held and by the turn of the century the South Burnett was becoming increasingly settled and prosperous, with timber one of the factors involved in this prosperity.

Timber and reservations

The timber industry boomed at the start of the twentieth century. Farmers now regretted past wastage of what was proving to be a valuable commodity. South Burnett had cedar, hoop pine, and other softwoods, and Blackbutt and Benarkin had fine ironbark forests as well as highly prized Crow's Ash, popular for dance floors, and yellow-wood used for flooring and wooden tram and railway coach construction.

The government recognised the value of these forests but did little to protect them. As early as 1889, the Under Secretary for Agriculture was calling for reservation of what timber remained on vacant Crown Land. In 1901 30,000 acres near Benarkin was set aside as a reserve and later in the same year a further 43,000 acres were set aside in the Yarraman district. The government policy was to establish reserves near current or proposed railway lines, both to provide the necessary timber for construction of the lines, but also once the railway was connected to ensure that timber rights were sold at prices that reflected their true value, a value greatly increased with adequate transport.

Prior to railways, all transport of logs and sawn timber was by bullock team, difficult in times of drought when feed was scarce and difficult in rainy periods when roads became boggy and impassable. Despite this, profits were enough to attract large timber firms. The Millars Karri and Jarrah Company had been formed in WA in 1902 and by 1908 had a sawmill at Yarraman Creek in addition to milling interests in Kingaroy and Brisbane. In 1909 the Queensland Pine Company acquired the Yarraman assets of Millars Karri and Jarrah Company; William Dearden, one of the vendors in this sale, became managing director of Queensland Pine.



From 1909, Queensland Pine applied to the Minister for Lands for the timber rights to 25,000 acres in the Tarong Reserve, Yarraman Creek, Parish of Cooyar. They undertook to clear the land at the rate of 8 million super feet per annum making it suitable for sale as agricultural land. The Director of Forests, Phillip MacMahon, objected as in fifteen or twenty years it would be of 'far greater national moment to retain this 30,000 acres as forest rather than sell it.' The application was rejected 'until the railway is available for traffic.'

The company took up freehold land for a milling site and agreed not to cut until the railway reached Blackbutt or Yarraman and pledged to spend £70,000, employ 300 men and pay rail freight of £6,000 per annum [It sounds like mining companies today in Queensland, although they build the line as well!] In return they wanted the rights to timber for 10 years at least, and argued that the capital investment justified preferential treatment. The Associated Timber Merchants also argued for greater access by large sawmillers.

The issue was not clear cut. A petition from residents of Cooyar and District called on the government to refuse to throw open the pine reserves of their parish, but the company had already taken up freehold land for a milling site and was 'practically committed to the district.'

Timber and the railway

Improved transportation made the timber industry more profitable. The Brisbane Valley railway had reached Toogoolawah by 1904. Before the arrival of the railway, the closest railhead to the Yarraman district was at Kannangur. It cost £1/15/6 to transport 700 super feet of dressed pine to the railhead; when the railway arrived the freight would only cost 7/6 per ton. The Queensland Pine Company argued for the rail to be extended beyond Blackbutt, closer to the log supply, and arguing that farmers were ringbarking timber because they had no way of selling it. The siting of the terminus was also in dispute.

This uncertainty also affected provision of education. A provisional school had been established at Blackbutt in 1903 and a tent

school for children of railway workers was moved to Benarkin in 1912. However, by then enrolments were predominantly of settlers' children.

In 1909 the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce toured the Moore, Blackbutt, Yarraman Creek and Nanango area investigating the advantages of a rail link. In 1910 the rail opened to Linville and the Chief Engineer proposed a Blackbutt-Yarraman extension:

'...there is now a great demand for timber, nearly all of which will come off the reserves, the proposed extension will be remunerative to the selector as well as the Department.'

The connection between timber, transport and settlement is repeated here as elsewhere throughout southeastern Queensland.

Political debate on the extent of the line raged with allegations about the holdings of Ministers which turned out to be false. The Minister for railways noted that Queensland Pine had a 10 year right to cut timber in the Yarraman reserves as the company had purchased rights to pine timber on the reserves at Tarong at the end of 1909. One parliamentarian asked why it was that when ordinary settlers wanted rail communication they had to wait forever, but when a large timber company lobbied for it, the railway was quickly forthcoming.

One of the arguments that Queensland Pine Company had put to the government was that they would use the pine 'tops', the 35% of the log normally discarded during milling. Despite MacMahon's doubts about the wood distillation process, it was the proposal to produce wood pulp, alcohol and naphtha that the Minister stressed in his support for extending the railway to Yarraman.

In 1912 the mill established by Queensland Pine Company at Yarraman was a pulp mill, the first commercial wood pulping operation in Australia. The following year the railway arrived at Yarraman, with a private siding from the station to the mill provided by Queensland Pine. The mill had 70 employees—not the 300 promised—and the dignitaries at the opening were shown a demonstration by the famous Lynch sisters, four young women who cut timber and worked bullock teams in the



Gympie, Nanango and Kingaroy districts. Yarraman township already had four hotels, the first one built by the company, and a number of businesses. The director of Forests noted that the opening of the railway had 'greatly increased the value of standing timber in the district'.

Normally sawmillers used only 65% of the logs and the remaining 35% of 'tops' were wasted, but by 1914 Forestry was reporting the sale of 'tops' along the Yarraman line, though mostly for the manufacture of packing cases and sold at 3d per 100 super feet. Although use of these 'tops' was one of the features of Queensland Pine Company's application for timber rights, it seems they failed to fulfil their contract as by 1916 the Director of Forests was planning to suspend their licence for failure to remove the 'tops.'

Timber slump and marketing problems

Although the early 1920s saw the closure of a number of small private sawmills in the district, Queensland Pine Company was prospering, in part because of a contract with the War Services Homes Commission, which agreed to take the company's output for three years. The pulp mill at Yarraman, however, had suffered losses. In 1922 the company was re-named Pines and Hardwoods of Australia Limited but as cutting rights in Yarraman district were coming to a close along with the War Service Homes contract, the company became more involved in timber milling at Stroud, NSW, and reduced its involvement in Queensland.

Water problems beset the pulp mill at Yarraman and a proposal to have Queensland Forest Service purchase the plant and equipment was rejected and the mill closed in 1920. In 1924 the Yarraman mill was finding it difficult to obtain logs, due to the method of purchasing logs at auction by the Associated Sawmillers without competition and distributing the logs amongst millers. Consequently city millers were competing with local country mills for timber. As Yarraman was utterly dependent on timber, the prospect of closure of the mill which employed 60 men was shocking. Finally the Queensland Forest Service acquired the band sawing mill in 1926 thus going outside the Associated Sawmillers

cartel and guaranteeing supply to the local mill. Pines and Hardwoods of Australia was voluntarily liquidated and assets including 2,700 acres of freehold property at Yarraman Creek were put up to tender.

State sawmilling (1926-1933) and silviculture

The purchase of the Yarraman band sawmilling plant made Yarraman comparable to Imbil and possibly Fraser Island as at all these settlements, a well-rounded scheme of Forest Service logging, sawmilling and silviculture upon the valuable State Forests was to operate.

As early as 1920 a nursery had been established at Benarkin and hoop pine was the most successful 'crop'; 14% of reforestation expenditure was in Benarkin district by 1922 and a planting program commenced in 1926 using maize as a nurse crop for hoop pine seedlings. The maize was also used as fodder for the large number of horses used in plantation establishment. A nursery was established at Yarraman in 1928.

Bush fires had devastating consequences, in particular on young hoop pine plantations, during 1926 and 1929. Such fires were common along railway lines in the days of coal-fired locomotives. The bandmill at Yarraman was destroyed by fire in 1930.

Pressures on Forestry and the state sawmills accelerated during the 1930s. The building revival of the period saw timber constituting the biggest proportion of freight on the Brisbane Valley line by 1934 and pressures mounted for the alienation of State Forests both for settlement and for timber. Farming associations, Progress Associations, Shire Councils and the general public all pressured for State Forests and Timber Reserves to be thrown open for selection. E.H.F. Swain, Director of Forests, and E.L. Grimstone, local Member of Parliament, resisted this pressure, as did a number of Yarraman citizens, including Mr F. Black, manager of the Yarraman State Sawmills and Mr R. Martin, forest overseer. The group, known as the Yarraman Resources Development League, was formed in 1931 with the object of letting the government know that not all locals favoured increasing alienation of land.



Felling a large hoop pine, 1940

In 1932, after a controversial Royal Commission investigating moves to alienate forested land for settlement in North Queensland and the election of the Labor government, Swain was removed from office and the following year, both Yarraman Band Sawmill and the Taramo mill were sold to Yarraman Pine Pty Ltd.

Postscript

The Yarraman hoop pine plantations are now mature. They form a major resource and are part of the forested landscape of the region. The Brisbane Valley rail line is now a rail trail for cyclists and horse riders.



FOREST TRIVIA, OR THE HISTORY OF NOMENCLATURE

How many trees do you know of which were named after a district forester?

My choice this issue is *Eucalyptus rummeryi* (Steel box) a relatively rare species and one of the few Box trees favouring moist forest conditions, with most of its relatives in northern Australia. It was named after George

Rummery, district forester at Casino. It is a valuable timber species and occurs bordering dry rainforest on Mt Pikapene in the now Richmond Range National Park.



ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VICTORIA'S BUSHFIRES.

Here we bring you an historical perspective from Professor Tom Griffiths.

(For all submissions to date, see www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Submissions.)

In this submission I am drawing on my research into the history of fires in the central Victorian mountain forests. This work is summarised in my book, *Forests of Ash: An environmental history* (Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2001). Here I am applying that historical knowledge, in particular of the Black Friday 1939 fires, to some of the matters before the Commission. I was a historical consultant on the ABC online documentary into the Black Friday fires (produced by Moira Fahy) which remains a useful public resource on fire history, experience and policy (www.abc.net.au/blackfriday). I have also drawn on my brief analysis of the Black Saturday 2009 fires—entitled ‘We have still not lived long enough’—which was published in *Inside Story*: <http://inside.org.au/we-have-still-not-lived-long-enough/> and the *Age*, ‘Insight’ section, Saturday, 21 February 2009.

1. The most haunting aspect of the 2009 tragedy is not that it was ‘unprecedented’, but rather, that it has happened before.

Many commentators have said that the 2009 fires were ‘unprecedented’, and we can understand why they are drawn to this phrase. The fires erupted at the end of a record heatwave and on a day of extraordinary temperatures, and it indeed seems likely that this was an event 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.

2. There is an ecological and geographical distinctiveness about the event that our mourning on a national scale and our aspirations for a national bureaucratic response must not disguise.

Victorians live entirely within what the international fire historian Stephen Pyne calls 'the fire flume' (in his book *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992). 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 southeastern 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 some 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.

3. It is the death-toll, and not the weather or fire behaviour, which makes the event truly unprecedented.

The Bureau of Meteorology predicted the conditions accurately. The Victorian Premier, Mr John Brumby, issued a public warning. Fire experts knew that people would die that day. History repeated itself with uncanny precision. We *did* see this coming. Yet we failed to save lives. For the last twenty-six years since the horrific Ash Wednesday fires, we have been able to tell ourselves a story that even though feral fire seemed to be escalating, we were learning better how to survive it. Black Saturday destroyed that assumption.

4. 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 easily 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 in other places and at other times. 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 but predictable force.

Was the ratio between homes lost and lives lost higher in these fires than any other? In other words, did people stay at home and die? And how many of those who died fleeing, did so at the very last minute when they realised with horror that the fire plan they had carefully nurtured over years had never had the remotest chance of working on such a day in such a place?

5. 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.

6. New, special categories of fire warning should be introduced for this region.

History tells us that there are identifiable and predictable ingredients to particularly dangerous fire seasons and days. The Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) is an effective measure, but it is not adequately translated into unambiguous public warnings.

7. 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.

In the 1939 fires, forest dugouts saved dozens of lives. There were also three deaths underground when one group at a sawmill sheltered in an alternate dugout that was too small and collapsed. The fire refuge dugout was a distinctive cultural response to the history of fire in these tall Victorian forests. Few dugouts were built in other forest regions. It is a clue to the emerging bush wisdom of the inhabitants of these unusually dangerous forests. There are hardly any official dugouts in this region today—many of the old forest refuges have collapsed or decayed and many were deliberately destroyed because they were seen to be unsafe. The original reason for them being put there appeared to have been forgotten. (See Peter Evans, ‘Refuge from Fire: The evolution of the sawmill dugout in Victoria’, in John Dargavel (ed.), *Australia’s Ever-Changing Forests III*, CRES, Canberra, 1997, pp. 216-228).

Fires inflame blame. Arsonists will be rightly condemned, but they will also distract us from addressing the reality of fires that were possibly mostly caused by lightning. There were arsonists in 1939 and 2009 and there will be again in 2069 or 2079; they are a sickening factor mostly beyond our predictive control. Waterbombing helicopters will again be promoted and in some areas they will be effective—but they can’t reliably and safely work in a firestorm. 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—and that was down. Well-built dugouts saved lives.



8. Greater investment in public education about the history of fire in Victoria is essential.

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.

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. 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.

We need to embed in our culture a visceral understanding of the potential power of fire. In addition to the development of educational programs in schools, the establishment of a Museum of Bushfire History in one of the fire-affected communities would be a worthwhile and creative investment. It must be more than a memorial; it needs to offer a natural and social history of fire in Australia, especially Victoria, especially in this region; it should not flinch from keeping the recurrent, predictable ferocity of these events before the public mind.

But there are cultural and psychological pressures working against human adaptation. There is a dangerous mismatch between the cyclic nature of fire and the short-term memory of communities, and there is often an emotional need, as people return and rebuild, to deny the 'naturalness' and likely recurrence of the event, and to remain unbowed. There is already an understandable tendency among survivors and commentators to see this fire as 'unique', 'unprecedented', 'unnatural' or 'criminal'—and reaching for these adjectives is the beginning of our forgetting.

Testimony from the 1939 and 2009 fires suggests that there is one thing that we find very hard to accept, and therefore to remember. 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 (Mike Leonard) 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. Learning and remembering the power of fire—rather than explaining it away or pretending that we can beat it—is our greatest challenge.

Tom Griffiths

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SURF LOADING OF TIMBER OFF THE NORTHERN NSW RIVERS

Another body of grey literature of relevance to forest historians is the numerous ‘thematic histories’ prepared for the Community-based Heritage Studies programme for NSW local government areas. Following is a slightly edited extract from the unpublished thematic history of Byron Shire, in northern NSW, prepared by Brett Stubbs in 2006.

The sub-tropical rainforests of northern New South Wales contained an enormous variety of timbers, yet the interest of the earliest timber getters was mostly in only one species. This was the Australian red cedar, *Toona ciliata* (formerly known as *T. australis*). One of the best known sources of red cedar was the large area of rainforest north of the Richmond River, between Lismore, Ballina and Cape Byron, which became known to the district’s nineteenth century settlers as the Big Brush, and later as the Big Scrub. The Big Scrub extended into and occupied the south-western third of Byron Shire. Red cedar also grew within less extensive patches of rainforest in other places, including along the lower reaches of the coastal rivers. There it was most easily accessible and therefore first exploited.

Generally, the cutting of red cedar became the first economic activity in the coastal districts of northern New South Wales.

The first cedar-cutters arrived on the Clarence River around 1838. Export figures show that the Clarence River cedar, which was restricted mainly to narrow bands of brush along the river, was quickly exhausted, and cutters moved northward to the Richmond River in 1842. The first cedar-cutters’ camp on the Brunswick River was established in 1849.

The earliest mention of Brunswick River cedar in the coastal shipping records is the arrival in Sydney on 21 May 1849 of *Midas* carrying 17,000 super. feet of the timber. This was followed by *OPS* on 8 August 1849 (21,000 super. feet) and 20 September 1849 (21,000 super. feet). Shipments of cedar from the Brunswick River appear to have been curtailed after the loss of *Clara*, destroyed while attempting to cross the shallow and hazardous bar on 16 April 1850. When shipments resumed briefly in 1851, loading was probably carried out from the beaches, the logs being dragged through the surf to schooners anchored close offshore. It is probable that ‘surf loading’ became common practice around the Brunswick River and Cape Byron when cedar getting was resumed in earnest in that district around the end of the 1850s after several years of inactivity.

While ‘surf loading’ was developed to overcome the problem of getting vessels across the dangerous Brunswick River bar, towards the southern end of the Byron Shire coast another natural obstacle required another inventive response by the cedar getters. South of the Brunswick River, and particularly south of Cape Byron, the sandy coastal plain is backed by steep hills, and in some places by cliffs. At places where the escarpment was less precipitous, although still very steep, logs were slid from the elevated basaltic plateau where the cedar grew, to the back of the coastal plain from where they were dragged by bullock teams to the coast for loading onto ships. Such places were known as chutes or shutes, a term which has survived, albeit spelled differently, in the names of several Byron Shire localities: Cooper’s Shoot (directly west of Suffolk Park), Skinner’s Shoot (near Hayter’s Hill), McLeod’s Shoot (south of Ewingsdale), and Possum Shoot (near Coorabell).

The historical record is relatively silent about the details of how ‘surf loading’ of cedar was carried out, and of how the shutes were used,



but Carr (1973) provides the following rare descriptive account.

To shoot a log, it was sent over end first, although it sometimes changed course. But with no mechanical aid other than handspikes and cant-hooks, it wasn't always easy to send them end first, so they were rolled over. It was not a good way, because even the best logs have a taper, and so they could veer off to left or right, and get lost or stuck half-way down a mountain-side.

Referring to Cooper's Shoot, Carr said that two men would camp at the foot of the shute where:

their contribution would be to snig the logs to the Bay, swim the bullocks out to where the seamen could get a line on them from the whaleboats, take them to the anchored ship and winch them aboard...This was called 'surfing' the logs.

All went well until the track and snig-road across the marshy neck of the Cape began to cut up and bog, and the bullockies withdrew. J. J. Cooper and his next brother Will were determined not to lose the logs that had cost them so much hard labour. [They] handspiked the logs down to the northern end of Tallow Beach one at a time, got a whaleboat, and towed them one or two at a time out through the surf, round the Cape, and to the schooners under the Julians.

Surf loading may have been common at the Brunswick River for the export of timber from the 1860s, but the technique was certainly not used exclusively. It is clear that many vessels continued to brave the entrance, and this is well illustrated by reference to some of those that were wrecked at the mouth of the river—either entering or leaving—during the first four to five decades of the timber trade there.

Surf loading was expensive. In 1885 the cost of the surf-boat and crew was equal to 2 shillings per 100 super. feet, and the freight to Sydney an additional 5 shillings for the same quantity, leaving a very small profit to the owner of the timber. An alternative then was to use *White Cloud*, a ketch that traded to the Brunswick River in the 1880s and which seemed able to defy the dangerous bar. Her charges, however, were 7 shillings per 100 super. feet of timber to Sydney, a rate which attracted criticism from owners of timber, and probably discouraged many of them from shipping it.

It is clear from shipping records that not all, however, were so discouraged. It was reported in July 1884 that 'large quantities of cedar and pine' were being surfed out in rafts to vessels laying off the Brunswick River bar. The steamer *Brunswick* left the river on 21 January 1886 with a cargo of sixty cedar logs. *White Cloud* carried much smaller loads. For instance, she took 17,000 super. feet of cedar to Sydney from the Brunswick River in January 1885; 16,000 super. feet of unspecified 'timber' in February 1885; and sixteen cedar logs and 1,000 staves in February 1886.

The completion of the first jetty at Byron Bay in mid-1888 was a great boon to the timber industry in the adjoining district, as it greatly simplified the task of loading logs for shipment. Probably in 1887 or early 1888, the brothers William and Harry Flick visited Byron Bay from Lismore to 'ascertain the timber possibilities' which they found to be 'exceedingly bright', despite the fact that Byron Bay and district was 'almost in its primitive state of swamp and marshland surrounded by dense standing scrub' and required 'much pioneering work...in making roads to get timber to the jetty.' The Flicks made arrangements with Owen Wareham, agent for the shipping company servicing Byron Bay, to take delivery of their timber at the jetty. They also purchased from a farmer at Cooper's Shoot all the timber on his 640 acre property. There they found 'one of the best forests of hoop pine possible to see'.

In November 1889, during the governmental inquiry into the proposed Byron Bay breakwater, timber merchant Owen Wareham said that he had shipped 800,000 super. feet of timber from the jetty which had been completed only about eighteen months. The types of timber shipped by Wareham were not specified by him, but it seems reasonable to assume that they were various brushwood species, probably including hoop pine and red cedar. This belief is supported, besides by Flick's comment above about hoop pine, by evidence given a little more than a decade later, in 1901, by John Glasgow at a second inquiry into the proposed Byron Bay breakwater. Glasgow said that the principal types of timber cut by him for export then were '[hoop] pine, [white] beech, [red] cedar,



boligum, and small quantities of rosewood and [black] bean', all brush timbers.

The boat service used initially by the Flicks was discontinued after a short while, but another shipowner, G. W. Nicoll, who was already running two small steamers to the Tweed River, was persuaded to begin calling at Byron Bay. Interestingly, these steamers loaded timber off the beaches at various places between Broken Head and the Tweed, the logs being surfed out to the boat during calm weather.



**UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
 FORESTERS REUNION**

The University of Queensland wishes to invite graduates of its Bachelor of Science Forestry degree (pre-1963) to a reunion of Agricultural Science graduates to be held during the period 29 June to 4 July 2010. Events include tours of the St Lucia and Gatton campuses. For more information, contact:

Dr Martin Playne, mplayne@netspace.net.au,
OR nrvsadvancement@uq.edu.au



**VALE MICHAEL WILLIAMS
 (1935–2009)**

Forest historians will be saddened by the news of the passing last October of Professor Michael Williams, a true champion of our art. Michael was one of the most influential historical geographers, and had a great effect in shaping environmental history as it is currently practised. His early work in Australia and later in North America will remain of great value to members of the AFHS and beyond.

Professor Williams had a life-long research interest in historical geography and the formation of landscapes, and published widely on these themes, in recognition of which he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989. His early work was on land draining and landscape evolution in *The Draining of the Somerset Levels* (1970), and then on initial

settlement and environmental and landscape perception and understanding in the *Making of the South Australian Landscape* (1976). Other works on Australian humanised landscapes appeared in *Australian Space, Australian Time* (1975) with J. M. Powell, and *The Changing Rural Landscape of South Australia* (1977).

Shifting focus to global land-use/land cover transformation and change, especially in North America, he wrote *Americans and their Forests* (1989), followed by *Wetlands: A Threatened Landscape* (1991), and *Planet Management* (1992). Returning to the practice of historical geography in general, he was lead editor of *The Relations of History and Geography: Studies in England, France and the United States* (2001) and co-edited the British Academy's centennial volume *A Century of British Geography* (2003). His latest work was a global account and interpretation of deforestation entitled *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistoric to Global Crisis* (2003).

(For a fuller account of Williams's life and work, see *The Geographical Journal*, 1 March 2010)

*** * STOP PRESS * ***

**The 8th National Conference
 of the Australian Forest
 History Society Inc.**

**will be held in Lismore, NSW,
 from Monday 7 to Friday 11 June
 2010**

at INVERCAULD HOUSE,
 161 Invercauld Road, Goonellabah
 (the conference and function centre of
 Southern Cross University)

If you haven't registered yet, there is still time to do so. Further information, including the programme and registration forms, is available from the AFHS website,
www.foresthistory.org.au.

The conference will commence with a welcome BBQ from 4pm on Monday 7 June, and conclude at 5pm on Friday 11 June. Included in the four-day programme are two half-day field excursions.