

THE SHIFTING PANORAMA OF THE SOUTH WEST FORESTS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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Abstract

The world's forests are obviously in a state of decline, yet it appears difficult to establish precisely how we arrived at this situation. The historic precedents are complex. The example of the forests of the lower southwest of Western Australia demonstrates this variable sequence of human impact on what was pristine forest. The failed steps taken at each point to circumvent the damage being done under pressure from government to pursue inappropriate and poorly planned development of the region have left not only the forest but the society and the economy in turmoil. In this respect, despite the huge wealth generated, the forest itself became an analogue for the exploitation of natural resources and human beings alike, yet offering no clear solution to the current dilemma. It is only perhaps by understanding the sequence of events leading to the present that we may begin to discern the path ahead.

Introduction

The Darling Escarpment aligned north-south and parallel to the ocean demarcates the coastal southwest tip of Western Australia from the inland plains to the east. To the western extremity and parallel with the escarpment is the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge. Both are formed of granite complex formations interspersed with and overlaid by sandstone accretion

formed from ancient coastal sand dunes. More recent loose and shifting sand formations form the modern day Swan Coastal Plain. Between the escarpment and ridge complexes lies the Blackwood Plateau consisting of ancient and degraded lateritic podzol soils variously hosting low-lying swampy nutrient sinks containing loam and organic matter derived from the tall forest cover. (1)

The sandy dune soils of the Swan Coastal Plain and the slopes of the Darling Escarpment were in pre-European times covered by a mosaic of low scrubby to tall woodland consisting of Eucalyptus, Sheoak and Banksia canopy (2) interspersed with reed swamps and extensive coastal wetlands fringed with sedges and Ti-tree, and connected by winter-flowing streams lined with Ti-tree and Peppermint (3). The porous lateritic soils of the escarpment itself and the Blackwood Plateau were by contrast covered by thick and often impenetrable Jarrah, Marri and Blackbutt forest interspersed with tall Karri forest (4) on the one hand and Jarrah/Banksia low woodland on the other (5), to a total extent of some 48,000 square kilometres.

The climate of the region consists of a high-rainfall winter monsoon season followed by fluctuating summer drought conditions. Rainfall is in the nominal range 800-1200 averaging about 1100 mm per annum, with 40% on average falling in the two months June and July, and 83% in the six months April to September (6). During the preliminary rainfall period of April and May each year there is very little runoff since the dry, porous soil and underlying lateritic and sandstone structures, and underground networks of caves on the one hand, and desiccated forest vegetation on the other, take up all the early season water. Once the soils have become saturated and underground cisterns have begun to fill, from about mid-June the small streams and brooks meandering through the forest begin to flow, until by early August each year the rivers are in peak flow tapering off again until by early December they have often stopped running altogether. During the long dry summer, however, water continues to percolate through the subsoil and caves of the range and plateau, emerging finally as small fresh water springs and soaks scattered along the coast.

The Indigenous Perspective

During pre-European times the local *Wardandi* (7) people avoided the tall, dense forest in favour of maintaining a coastal wetland economy seasonally exploiting the sea and the rich seasonal swamps fringing the coast for a variety of fish, turtles, crustaceans, shellfish, birds and small animals. Their way of life consisted of seasonal transhumance according to the varying availability of water, shelter and game. Traditionally they wintered over in the woodlands of the Darling Escarpment to shelter from the fierce winter storms coming up off the southern ocean, in the season they called *Makuru*. When spring or *Kambarang* came, they moved down onto the coastal wetlands to feast on estuarine fish, eggs and waterbirds flocking there to nest in the brimming swamps. By late summer and

autumn of each year the population would traditionally assemble in large numbers around the remaining freshwater springs along the coast, to hunt kangaroos and fatten up on sea salmon caught in traps, and to hold their *Corroborees* before retiring up onto the escarpment for winter. This was the season the people called *Bunuru*, when the region suffered from hot northerly winds and shortage of fresh, clean water.

For them the tall forest was a dark, brooding place frequented by outlaws and miscreants on the one hand, and supernatural sprites, elves, brownies and dwarfs on the other. It must be mentioned here also that the most potent of all the supernatural entities known to the *Nyungar* people is the *Waugal*, or Rainbow Serpent, inhabiting rivers and streams meandering throughout the woodlands and forests. The significance of the *Waugal* can be discerned from the fact that the people were totally dependent on the annual flow of water through the landscape, since it not only guaranteed the arrival of the monsoon every year but also replenished the coastal swamps and wetlands and ensured that there would still be water available from underground springs during summer.

Very large areas of the Margaret River valley are still today avoided by descendents of the original *Wardandi* people because of the *Waugal*. Plainly, since they also practice seasonal harvesting from the sea and regard themselves also under the protection of *Wardan*, the ocean spirit, their religious life was both rich and complex. Only senior elders and “magic men” dared approach either, and as a consequence their fame spread far beyond their clan and tribal boundaries. Young men would travel many hundreds of miles to study under them the complex web of relationships between the *Waugal* and *Wardan*, and through them the nature of the forest as a net contributor to the local economy. As they returned home to their own tribal country their reputation for having dared to encounter such potent spirits would travel far ahead of them and they would gain a new standing in their community.

Obviously the indigenous people lived in an intimate relationship with the natural landscape, its various facets and aspects impinging profoundly on their lives, their livelihood and their sense of themselves as human beings. The rites of passage implicit in their coming of age were wholly focussed on progressive mastery of that landscape, and in terms of the tall forest both familiarity with and mastery of its supernatural aspects. The alternative was to become an outlaw, breaking with protocol and forced to take refuge in the forest away from the rich coastal wetlands and fishing grounds; as a juvenile eloping with a childhood sweetheart and ending in tragedy; as an adult “magic man” (8) either a genius or a madman (9), all such cases entering mythology as dramatic, larger than life characters and a lesson to children not to stray too far into the forest.

European First Impressions

It is no accident that the modern coastline is replete with French names. Cape Leeuwin at the southern extremity is named after the Dutch ship

Leeuwin, captained by the Englishman Brooke on an exploration of the south coast in 1622. The St Alouarn Island group off Cape Leeuwin was named in 1772 for Captain St Alouarn of the ship *Le Gros Venture*, and the Recherche Archipelago and the Port of Esperence to the east after the two vessels commanded by Admiral d'Entrecasteaux during the French scientific expedition of 1791. Hamelin Bay up from Cape Leeuwin, and Cape Naturaliste and Geographe Bay at the northern extremity, are named after Captain Hamelin and his ships *Naturaliste* and *Géographe* carrying Nicholas Baudin's further scientific expedition of 1801. Leschenault Inlet further north, where the Port of Bunbury stands today, was named after Baudin's naturalist Jean-Claude Leschenault de la Tour. The Baudin expedition was followed in the same year by Lieutenant Lewis de Freycinet commanding the vessels *Casuarina* and *Uranie* (10), who gave his name to Cape Freycinet immediately to the north of Hamelin Bay.

Only the English Captain George Vancouver in command of the ships *Discovery* and *Chatham*, who landed at and named King George III Sound in 1791, appears to have been sufficiently impressed by the landscape to take possession of it in the name of his king, although there is some doubt as to whether his government acknowledged the claim (11). Certainly, beyond the coastline deemed inhospitable anyway in European terms, despite the significant indigenous population it supported (12), the tall forest dominating the immediate hinterland presented a daunting prospect. When a British outpost was finally established by the Governor of the Swan River Colony at Flinders Bay in April, 1830, moreover, its purpose was not initially to carve out a settlement but to establish a Residency occupied by then Brevet Major John Molloy, a retired Captain of the Rifle Brigade (13), veteran of the Napoleonic Wars and hero of Waterloo, taking up his post as the first Magistrate and Collector of Customs (14).

It has been generally accepted that the placement of Molloy at Flinders Bay was to oversee the increasing presence of American whaling ships in these waters, although at that time there were bands of violent, piratical sealing crew established on the Recherche Archipelago in particular he appears to have been given orders to disperse. To this point in history the focus of activity in the area remained oriented toward the sea and the coastline, but this was about to change. There were two other establishments at Flinders Bay accompanying that of Molloy. On the one hand the household of a prosperous London merchant trying his hand in the colony, James Woodward Turner, had taken up land on the more open coastal strip to the east of the bay, while that of the four Bussell brothers from Hampshire in England attempted with basic hand tools vainly to fall the trees and establish gardens and pasture for their cattle encroaching upon the tall forest to the north.

Unsuccessful in their attempt, they soon moved to a more favourable tract of land on a bend of the Blackwood River within the forest itself, but failing twice and with no real purpose in being there in any event, by 1834 the Bussells had transferred their land grant and with a number of other families relocated to the open woodlands of the Vasse River on Geographe Bay 90 Km to the north. It takes little imagination to predict the resulting inference between these new settlers and the local Wardandi people for

resources available in the open country and coastal wetlands of the Geographe Bay hinterland. As the settlers took kangaroos and other native fauna to feed themselves so the local people themselves began to take potatoes and other vegetables, and killing cattle themselves for food. Arguing, threats and intimidation between the two disparate groups quickly turned into armed skirmishing that resulted in a series of massacres continuing until 1857, that finally broke the local resistance.

Encroachment of Cattle

In the meantime Governor James Stirling, founder of the Colony, had brought to Western Australia a number of Scottish and Cornish families with farming skills to manage his own estates surrounding Leschenault Inlet a further 35 kilometres up the west coast. There they encountered quite a different type of problem from the Flinder's Bay settlers. The estate managers soon noticed that their livestock were sickening on the poor pasture along the coastal strip, while cattle that strayed up into the hills thrived. The problem was diagnosed as a "coastal disease" which we now know to be due to deficiency of the trace elements selenium, copper and cobalt in the sandy dune soil. This combined with the problem of the local people burning off remnant coastal grasses over summer soon resolved the families to move their horses and cattle in mobs up into the woodlands and forests of the Darling Range and the Blackwood Plateau to summer over, and bring them down again onto the coast before they became crippled in the boggy river valleys during winter.

Long before the country was surveyed and opened up officially under English Land Law, cattle and horses were being run as free range mobs east and south onto the Murray, Preston, Collie, Margaret and Blackwood River Valleys according to Celtic traditional practice (15). From the mid-late 1830s numbers of immigrant Irish and Scottish families were sending their younger sons up into the surrounding hill country to keep the mobs in order. The pattern of landholding and settlement in the South West thus quickly devolved into a pattern of small freehold home farms of about ten acres (2.471 hectares) each along the coastal fringe. There the womenfolk milked cows, made butter and cheese, grew crops of wheat and oats, potatoes, swede turnips and vegetables, and managed general farm business. These home farms became linked to huge cattle runs in the forest of 40-80,000 acres (16-32,000 hectares) and more, from which the Europeans soon practiced their own form of seasonal transhumance with their livestock (16).

Such use for grazing cattle of forest now vested in the British monarch as crown reserve, while practical from an economic point of view, was deemed illegal by the new colonial government which began to legislate for land to be made available for grazing on a more formal basis. Initially, in 1843 "Temporary Occupation Leases for Depasturing on Crown Lands" were authorised. The temporary arrangements were regularised in 1847 by issuing licences to depasture livestock; rents calculated at £10 (17) for 4,000 acres, £20 for 20,000 acres, and so on in decreasing proportion. New

regulations proclaimed in 1851 allowed for Class A leases to be established within three miles of settlement, and Class B leases beyond that, with further provision for tillage leases under the same classifications. This system brought widespread objection as favouring the big landholders already favoured by proximity to their existing grants. It was quickly modified to allow for review of Class A leases every twelve months and Class B leases every eight years, with an option to purchase unimproved portions "at the general minimum price for the time being" and unused portions reverting to the crown (18). In this way, over the next two to three generations as the practice became accepted as commonplace (19), with the trampling of cattle and horsemen moving back and forth the tall forest was eventually tamed.

The changing perception of the forest brought about by this means arose primarily because the boys and young men always out hunting cattle on horseback neglected their formal education. One reason they did so is that by this time both the European and Wardandi children were growing up together, speaking each other's languages and learning each other's stories. Another reason the young men and boys were allowed to be so apparently lazy was simply that in those days of promissory notes, little cash money and no banks, the mobs of cattle running in the tall forest were regarded as the family's bank account. Whereas the work on the home farm fed the family and paid the bills, the work the men were doing tending cattle in the forest and bringing them into market from time to time was to manage and protect their family's savings (20).

The job carried a great deal of prestige (21) though their personal behaviour was often frowned upon. Men would frequently start work everyday in fresh trousers and a clean shirt as if they were going to work in an office; wearing spurs and with their gear all clean and in good repair. Men too lazy to patch their own bridles or keep their saddles in top condition; indifferent to how long their clothing had gone unwashed; or unable to handle their grog, were systematically ridiculed. They and the local Wardandi people in particular would be persistently teased by the others for being untidy (22). Indeed anyone at all around the home farm would be tricked and teased constantly by the stockmen and it was for this further reason as much as any that attempts to civilise them failed.

Generally speaking the boys' education had little to do with learning to read and write but was gained from unrelenting peer pressure and from sitting listening to yarns and tall stories around the cattle camps in the forest. Instead of learning to read and write, they learned about the forest and the complex mythology of the indigenous people, and composed romantic poetry and songs about the Ireland and Scotland they had left behind. In this respect they differed little from men in cattle camps all over Australia; in particular those men spending long years living and working among Aboriginal stockmen and their more traditionally living kinsmen (23).

The Coming of Industry

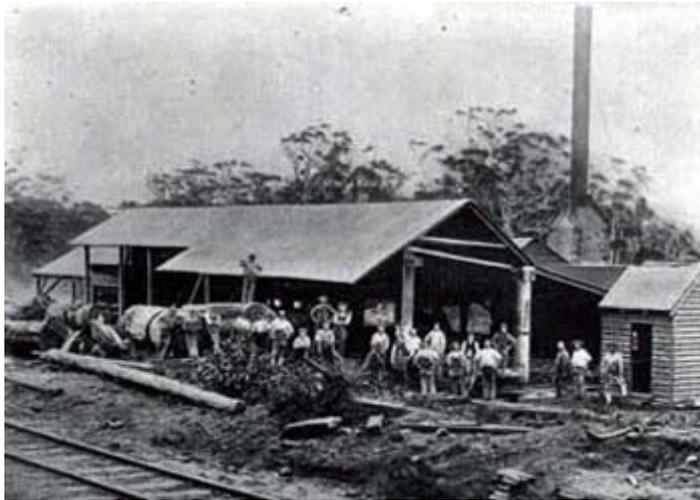
Until the mid-late 1850s the market for locally produced beef, potatoes, butter, cheese, flour and bread had been the visiting American whaling ships on the one hand, and various military regiments stationed in the colony on the other. From 1850, however, the colonial government determined to stimulate the economy by importing English convicts as labourers to carry out a program of public works. Then in 1855, by establishing a reliable supply of Western Australian hardwood Henry Yelverton succeeded in winning a contract for £7,000 to provide Jarrah sleepers to the new railway then being constructed in Ceylon (24). In order for him to meet this contract the colonial government allowed him to employ large numbers of convicts and retain a timber concession on his own account in the southwest forest. In 1856 he relocated his timber mill from the Swan River to the western end of Geographe Bay, and constructed a jetty to load sea-going ships at a place called Quindalup. Within two years his company had begun to lay wooden railway lines into the forest to provide access to teams of men falling the tall trees, and to bring the logs back up to the mill at Quindalup for sawing into sleepers and other building materials.



Falling a Karri Tree,
Margaret River History Research Group Collection No. 0003K



Horse Team,
Margaret River History Research Group Collection No. 0022W



Boranup Saw Mill,
Margaret River History Research Group Collection No. 0005K

Having cleared the area, and with access to both cheap labour and stable markets for timber and timber products, investment in the industry began in earnest. This was the age of empire and industrial expansion, and soon another timber milling syndicate was formed with access to capital from the Victorian mining boom of the 1850s, which won further concessions at Yoganup, ten kilometres east of the Vasse River settlement. There another railway line was laid and a steam engine imported from the eastern states to haul the logs out of the forest to a sawmill and jetty on the Geographe Bay coast at Lockeville to the north. By 1880 by far the largest timber company in the southwest was established at a new settlement at Karridale in the south, by the entrepreneur Maurice Coleman Davies with backing from London investors, with access by railway to another jetty constructed at nearby Hamelin Bay where sawn timber could be loaded onto ships for

export (25).

By 1870 the export value of Western Australian sawn timber had risen to £17,500 (\$AUD3.27 million); the total quantity over the period 1836 to 1927 amounting to 274 million cubic feet with a value of £25.5 million (about \$AUD 4.8 billion) (26). The first people to benefit directly from this fabulous wealth were the original settlers running cattle in the forest. The enormous number of timber workers flooding into the district had to be fed, and a huge market for milk and butter, beef, potatoes and fresh vegetables in particular was quickly established. There was also a considerable market for draught horses and working bullocks used to drag logs from where they had been felled to railway landings constructed in the forest, to be loaded onto flat bed wagons and hauled by steam engine to the timber mills. Accordingly, this created another demand for hay and chaff to feed the animals, and as patches of forest were cleared the land was gradually opened up to more farming, and new opportunities for young families looking for a farm where they could become established on their own account.

With this wealth bringing a new-found class consciousness among the European settlers, and with no land made available for them, the surviving Aboriginal and half-caste people were no longer able to fend for themselves and variously found work as stockmen if they were lucky, but more usually the hardest and lowest paid work as farm labourers and timber mill workers. In their place a new breed of forest dwellers was introduced in the form of gangs of tree fallers under their own supervisor called the Bush Boss. The Bush Boss was responsible for marking trees to be felled, and ensuring that the specified logs arrived at the mill intact, particularly in the case of special orders for timber to be used for bridge building and other public works being undertaken by the government. Under the Bush Boss were the experienced tree fallers, whose job it was to cut the tree down, trim the branches, and prepare it for hauling to the railway landing. Next to them were the engine drivers and railway men, then the bullock drivers called Teamsters, with the rest of the work gangs consisting of navvies and labourers.

Falling trees and working timber in the forest also carried a high level of prestige because it was highly skilled and dangerous work (27). Because the timber concessions were often associated with pastoral leases, obviously the cattle and the timber men frequently worked at their different jobs alongside one another, and their families soon began to intermarry. Here in the colony the English were regarded as gentry and as capitalist entrepreneurs, while the people working for them are usually listed in the colonial records as “labourers” or “servants” when the skills they brought with them had in fact laid the foundations for the colonial economy. While remaining relatively uneducated, they developed their own larrikin dignity and sense of themselves which likewise began to infiltrate the unique joking and story-telling culture that had developed among the boys and men spending their lives in the tall forests, free and resentful of the imposing influence of the British imperial civilisation sponsored by the colonial gentry.

With the passing of the nineteenth century many of these smaller timber companies merged into a single business conglomerate under the name of Millar Brothers, in 1910 representing some sixty percent of the southwest timber industry. In that year the company paid freight charges to the State Government Railways, in today's terms to the order of \$AUD8 million, paid \$63 million in wages to 2,364 men, operated 278 miles (450 Km) of railway on their own account, and worked draught horses consuming 3,300 tons of chaff, 93,000 bushels of oats and 96,000 bushels of bran (28). In the turmoil of the Boer War and the First World War, however, these proud, independent and skilled men went on to form the fighting core of the newly established Australian Army regiments under their own responsible government, that saw such gallant service overseas and sadly left so many of them on the fields of France, Belgium and Germany (29). It was the First World War which thus brought an end to the period, since so many families had lost their sons and in the years following there were not enough of the most highly skilled men left to initiate the process of post-war economic reconstruction after the old order.

By the end of the war investment and other financial support from the home government had stopped and the wealthy, opportunistic capitalist classes had withdrawn from the new Australian Commonwealth struggling to develop its own administrative infrastructure and economy. Under the Western Australian Land Act of 1898 the old timber concessions were replaced by a system of timber leases granted on a rental of £20 (about \$AUD3,500) per square mile. The Royal Commission of 1903 into the state of the timber industry found that the State would be unwise to acquiesce "in the destruction of good timber only because the export trade demands it", which led in turn to the Land Amendment Act of 1904 establishing the principle of charging royalty on logs harvested from the forest under a permit system. This situation did not change until 1918 when the Forests Act was introduced, finally beginning the long drawn-out process of classification and reforestation that eventually changed the face of the timber industry and the prevailing human relationship with the forest (30).

Group Settlement

In the lower south west forest by this time most of the economically viable timber had been exhausted anyway and the old settler families had amalgamated; all related to each other through three generations of intermarriage in any event, but now consolidating their farming and pastoral holdings and maintaining their position. New employment opportunities were becoming available in the newly formed State Departments of Agriculture and Forestry intended to take over from where the imperial laissez-faire capital had left off, and while people were still providing their own food from farming the supplementary income from these new government sources provided sufficient cash flow to prevent the development of a purely subsistence economy.



Group Settlement Farmer,
Margaret River History Research Group Collection No. 0034K



Group Settlement House,
Margaret River History Research Group Collection No. 0021W

The pervasive difficulty still being felt by the Western Australian government was that, with a growing urban population in the post-war economy, even though they had their own local industry established they found that they still needed to import significant quantities of processed

foods, including butter and cheese for example, from the eastern states. Rather than working steadily with their existing constituency to build on established economic foundations, however, the government under the Premiership of Sir James Mitchell, a retired bank manager and wheat farmer from the Avon Valley east of Perth, embarked in 1921 on a major and politically ambitious scheme to make Western Australia “great”; that is, into a significant regional economic power (31). He did this by sponsoring the immigration of large numbers of unemployed British ex-servicemen and industrial workers under the English Imperial Settlement Act, to clear those parts of the south west forest non-classified under the Forests Act (32) and there to develop a major dairying industry.

In the light of prevailing social theories of the day, the project was developed by making available old, long-standing pastoral leases and crown reserves to local groups, with the members of each group working cooperatively to clear the whole parcel of forest made available to them in common using loan capital underwritten by the Federal Government. Once cleared of trees the land was then subdivided into farm blocks and allocated to group members according to ballot (33). The project thus became known as the Group Settlement Scheme. Had this ambitious scheme been developed on already cleared land success would have been a more probable outcome. As it was the new immigrants ran into the very same difficulty as had the original settlers at Flinders Bay ninety years earlier, the tall trees requiring back-breaking work to fall with hand tools long before the soil could be prepared for growing crops. Since the development of the timber industry over the intervening period, highly skilled foresters were now resident in the district but under the Group Settlement rules were unavailable for clearing the new farmland required for its success. Where two teams of skilled and well-equipped foresters took one whole day to fall each tree and prepare it for milling, the settlers had no option but to ringbark each tree and wait for it to die before they stacked the timber by hand and burned it (34). As each slowly tree died the bark and branches would fall to the ground, and settler families had to carry out the constant extra work of “picking up” by hand, month after month, year after year, and stacking the wood into windrows for burning (35).

By 1924 forty two percent of the new settlers had walked off in despair at the sheer hard work they were being required to do (36), and in 1925 a Royal Commission was established to enquire into the workings of the scheme (37). Since the government has invested so much prestige in the project, however, they considered it a loss of face not to continue. Even then a significant proportion of the investment might have been recovered but for the collapse of the US financial market (the Wall Street Crash) in 1929 which sent the prices of rural commodities plummeting worldwide. By 1932 few of the Group Settlers were in a position to maintain their loan repayments.

By this time each family carried an average debt in the range £2,500-3,000 (roughly \$AUD375-450,000), and the State Government transferred the burden of maintaining such credit to the Agricultural Bank of Western Australia which began to impose widespread evictions in order to recover

something of the original investment, before embarking on a recovery program by amalgamating farm blocks into more economically viable farm units (38). Appreciating the situation they were in however the group settlers soon began mass walk-offs, in the depth of the Great Depression simply taking their few belongings and leaving everything else they had worked for behind. Of over 6,000 families brought from England as Group Settlers in 1921 only 300 finally remained on the land as dairy farmers, gradually intermarrying over the next two to three generations with the earlier farming and timber-getting families of the district.

The long-term effect of all this on the forest was two-fold. On the one hand ring-barking had destroyed approximately one third to one half of the Jarrah and Karri tall forest and the valuable timber wasted by burning, while the remainder of the forest had been trashed (39). On the other hand, with so many families left destitute and with no other means of keeping themselves, the boys and young men began systematically to hunt and trap the small fauna of the forest for meat and skins, such that by 1937 such species as quokkas were extinct in the area while others such as bandicoots and possums had become depleted, and the large forest-dwelling kangaroos (40) became a staple food supply (41).

It adds little to this essay to recount in detail the service and sacrifice of these men in turn during the Second World War. It is enough that by this time, with the long years of economic depression and global conflict, governments had come to recognise the risk to their own populations were they to continue to neglect their welfare. The best that can be said for the period of Group Settlement is that the government of the day had taken the opportunity to carry out much needed public works including roads, railways and bridges, and to make available civil infrastructure including local administrative offices and in particular primary schools throughout the entire region so the farm children might gain some benefit from an elementary education (42).

Post-WWII Developments

The obvious difficulty at this time was the singular mistrust of formal schooling among boys and young men in particular, requiring a specific approach to learning compatible with their life in the forest and on the now cleared farmland that might result in their education, and as a result in the general improvement of the district as a whole. Newly-formed associations supported by notable community members thus began in 1945 to intensely lobby the government to start building high schools offering a curriculum compatible with the life experience of their prospective students. Academically gifted students had already available to them by this time a range of bursaries and scholarships enabling them to go away to the city to study, but there had never been any concerted effort to cater for those children who would stay home to work on their family farm (43). Accordingly, joint efforts between the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture were made to introduce a broadly-based education in modern agriculture that would include literacy and book-

keeping as well as developing necessary skills in pasture improvement (44), livestock husbandry, horticulture, mechanics, marketing and farm enterprise development, all in association with the establishment of regional agricultural research stations (45).

Following the Allied victory over the Axis Powers substantial world markets became available for farm produce and the region entered another period of substantial prosperity that brought with it a new trend toward modernisation, and with it mechanisation (46). In 1962 the remaining Roads Boards that had been administering civil infrastructure in rural and remote areas were upgraded and expanded into Shire Councils. Along with development of civil administration, education and agriculture the established timber industry in the region similarly underwent a period of new investment resulting in the gradual replacement of the old steam engines with electric motors and internal combustion engines, including tractors and bulldozers and well as trucks and automobiles. Using the new machinery more farmland than ever was cleared for farming, and the logs sold to timber mills at profit rather than being wasted. The district expanded and families grew, and as time went by more young people started to look for work away from their family farm and found it in the forest falling trees, in timber mills, building and construction, and furniture-making; in dairies, and cheese and butter factories; in garages, and in banks and shops in the small towns, and not least in the new vineyards and wineries quickly becoming established on the local soils shown to be excellent for growing premium wine grapes.

Within a generation also elderly retirees began to move away from the busy cities to find a new lifestyle in the peaceful, quiet in the country. Accompanying them more and more young people started to arrive, spawned by the Baby Boom of the post-war years and inspired by the natural beauty of the coastal and forest landscape, many simply working part-time in the timber mills making enough money to enjoy the surf, but others more seriously seeking to establish themselves as musicians, artists, and craftsmen in the more highly skilled trades of furniture-making and fine woodwork. By the early 1970s the global phenomenon known as the Hippie movement, and by the 1980s New Age and Neo-paganism (47) had further started to make their impact felt; this entire, economically prosperous, post-modern expansion becoming known throughout the region as “lifestyle immigration” in stark contrast with the severity and hardship of the earlier periods.

In parallel with this social phenomenon, on the other hand, new laws were enacted to incorporate remaining areas of forest and coastal heath land vested in crown reserve into national parks, finally after nearly 150 years of established tradition among the old cattle families creating “no-go” areas for the district’s free-ranging herds (48). Then during the 1980s the State Government amalgamated the more recently-created National Parks portfolio with the old Department of Forestry to create the one large Department of Conservation and Land Management (49), while the old Lands Department became the Department of Land Administration principally to administer those remaining crown lands not formally vested in the Department of C.A.L.M., or other such agency as the Education

Department, or in Shire Councils.

The Contemporary Forest

It takes little imagination to appreciate the impact of these new and disparate social influences on the district, and how the tall forest quickly came to be developed politically as an analogue for colonial oppression and the exploitation of both human labour and the natural resource alike. The critical issue that had emerged by this time concerned increasing mechanisation of the timber harvesting process, and because of the cost structure of industrial harvesting in comparison with unstable and uncertain markets globally for timber products, the amalgamation and consolidation over the period of numbers of smaller timber companies into one or two very large corporations carrying diversified investment portfolios; thus positioned to survive fluctuating demand in the midst of international competitive tendering of forest products. On the other hand also, to reduce costs rather than employing skilled foresters to select specific trees for falling, whole blocks of forest were simply being clear-felled with bulldozers and then replanted in the hope of maintaining a resource base over the long term to sustain the industry, the whole administered by an absentee corporate executive deemed locally to be disinterested in other than profit.

By 1985 the volume of logs processed in Western Australia had stabilised to some 800,000 cubic metres with sales to the value of \$AUD330 million per annum, directly employing 6230 people but with the total population dependent on the timber industry for their livelihood numbering in excess of 45,000 people (50). The difficulty with the state of the industry by this time rather concerned the enormous amount of waste it generated; in one trial the tally for logs segregated as having millable potential achieving only a 29-38% recovery rate (51). The remainder was left to rot in the forest, sawn for firewood, or simply burnt as waste. The issue immediately arising from this state of affairs revolved around the fact that the timber recovered was 'A' or 'Select Grade' when a considerable market also existed for furniture (52) made from 'B' and 'C' or 'Feature Grade' timber which highlighted and set off the natural flaws in the timber to decorative effect (53). With international pressure being exerted on Australia to protect and sustain its forests, and with increasing regulation to that effect requiring a significant number of mills to close and timber workers to be made redundant, the core conflict erupting around the issue of mill waste centred on the potential to restructure the industry away from reliance on the market for sawn timber toward the development of fine furniture manufacture benefiting from the parallel growth of the premium wine and tourism industries in the region.

The sheer enormity and complexity of human interaction with the forest, however, exacerbated by the now diverse range of interests established in the region soon added even more complex layers of conflict to the core issue, finally polarised between an extreme conservation lobby inspired by aesthetic and spiritual values to prevent any further human interference

with the forest whatsoever on the one hand, and the large and diversified corporate presence in the timber industry on the other. Few can agree. Persistent attempts by government to negotiate and implement a single Forest Management Plan binding on all parties have only attracted further protest. For the moment heavy subsidisation by the State to maintain employment, social welfare and family support services in the remote timber towns deep in the forest while at once restructuring the economy and attracting new markets for the unique range of fine timbers available in the region, appears to represent a practical, short term solution.

In the longer term it may simply be the extraordinary beauty of the forest itself contributing over more than seven generations to such an interesting social mix, a diverse cultural heritage and a relaxed, laid-back lifestyle; premium wines already receiving international acclaim, outstanding cuisine created from fresh, natural local farm produce, fine art and exquisite hand-made furniture, all inspired by the landscape and continuing to attract in excess of 530,000 visitors each year (54), that will finally position the economy to inherently resolve the dilemma. It seems that left alone the forest will perhaps go on forever, impacting in its own way on human self-perception while these petty cycles of intervention and capitalisation of the resource will continue in their many good and bad ways to wax and wane. Who knows?

Photographic Credits

Acknowledgement and thanks are extended to the Margaret River History Research Group, Margaret River District Library, Margaret River, Western Australia, for permission to reproduce historic images held in their collection.

Endnotes

1. Myers J.S., *Geology of the Albany 1:1,000,000 Sheet*, Geological Survey of Western Australia, Department of Minerals and Energy, Government of Western Australia, Perth WA, 1995.

2. Primarily Tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) and Marri (*Corymbia calophylla*); Sheoak (*Casuarina cristata*, *C. fraserana*); Banksia (*B. attenuata*, *B. menziesii*).

3. Similarly Ti-tree (*Melaleuca spp*); Peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*).

4. Jarrah (*E. marginata*); Marri (*C. calophylla*); Blackbutt (*E. dundasii*); Karri (*E. diversicolor*).

5. Beard J.S., *Swan Vegetation Sheet Series 7*, Interim Council for the Australian Biological Resources Study, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1980.

6. Rainfall data made available by Richard Picket, Manager, Monitoring and Investigations Branch, Bunbury Office, Water and Rivers Commission,

Government of Western Australia.

7. A clan of the Nyungar speaking people occupying the south west of Western Australia (*Wardan* = the Ocean Spirit).

8. It is not unreasonable to suggest both ritual and recreational use by people living in the forest of the hallucinogenic, psychedelic mushrooms (*Psilocybe* and *Ponoleus spp.*) seasonally available throughout the region.

9. In any case contemporary opinion among surviving Wardandi families insists that these were “terrible people” (Vilma Webb, personal communication, Busselton, April 1998).

10. *Western Australia: Yesterday and Today*, Curriculum Branch, Education Department, Government of Western Australia, Perth WA, 1981, p.32.

11. *Western Australia*, *ibid.*, pp.30-31.

12. The generally accepted Nyungar population at the time of European settlement is about 30-35,000 people. See Hallam S.J., *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation in South-Western Australia*, Canberra, 1979, pp.105ff; also Hardwick G.J., ‘The Irish R.M.: Captain John Molloy of the Vasse’, in Reece R.H.W. (ed.), *The Irish in Western Australia, Studies in Western Australian History*, Vol. 20, Centre for Western Australian History, Department of History, University of Western Australia, 2000, p.12.

13. Originally the 95th Regiment of Foot and later the Royal Green Jackets, the regiment earned its name as forward skirmishing battalions of skilled marksman capable of strategically sniping at French officers in the field and throwing their line of command into disarray.

14. Hasluck A., *Portrait with Background*, Revised Edition, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990, Chapters 5 & 6; also Jennings R.J., *Busselton . . . ‘outstation on the Vasse’*, Shire of Busselton, WA, 1983, *passim*.

15. In 16th century Ireland this practice of transhumance into the hills and forests with cattle over summer was known colloquially as booleying (R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, London: Penguin, 1989, p.19), here *bullying* (Australian slang), after the Gaelic *bólach* = cattle (*Collins Pocket Irish Dictionary*, 1997, pp.48,390).

16. Eliza Keenan, unpublished diary of 1878 in the possession of Ray Keenan, Perenjori, WA, *passim*.

17. Roughly equivalent to about \$AUD2,000 per annum by today’s values.

18. J.L. Tyman, 'Surveys and Settlement in Western Australia', *Geowest 9* (Working Papers in the Department of Geography, University of Western Australia: No. 9), November 1976, p.22.

19. F.S. Brockman, *Report on Classification of Country Between Blackwood River and Wilson's Inlet*, Perth: Chief Inspecting Surveyor, 1906, p.6

20. The Gaelic words *táin*, translating literally as cattle-raid, herd wealth, and *creach*, or loot, plunder, spoils, also prey, accurately describe their attitude

toward the mobs of cattle running in the forest; deriving from the ancient propensity for raiding and cattle rustling in Ireland and along the Scottish Borders where these people originated, and where before the shiring of Ireland under the English plantations wealth was reckoned in cattle not land (Foster, *Modern Ireland*, Ch.1).

21. The romantic notion of the cowboy applies here, also Gaelic *buachaill* = boy, boyfriend; *buachaill bó* = cowboy (*Collins Pocket Irish Dictionary*, p.395)

22. Ray Keenan, *The Keenans of Glenone*, Perenjori: unpublished manuscript, 1994, passim; Isabella Keenan, *My Childhood Memories*, unpublished reminiscences of 1955 in the possession of Keith McLeod, Margaret River, WA, green book, passim

23. Bill Harney, *Tales From the Aborigines*, Sydney: Seal Books, 1959:1995, Author's Note and Introduction.

24. The contract was equivalent in current Australian dollar value to about \$AUD1.3 million.

25. To give some idea of the scale and economic importance of these operations, the Yoganup concession held by the Ballarat Syndicate was valued at £650,000 Sterling (roughly \$AUD12 million at today's values), while by the same calculation the author estimates the present-day value of the total M.C. Davies concessions by 1894 to be in the vicinity of \$AUD5-5.5 billion.

26. Colebatch Sir H., *A Story of A Hundred Years: Western Australia 1829-1929*, Perth: Government Printer, 1929, pp.175-77.

27. Skilled foresters and timber workers were often imported directly from Ireland and such places rather than being recruited locally. The Kinsella family long established in the timber industry of the lower SW of Western Australia, for example, were already well known as timber men in the mountains and forests of Co. Wicklow, Ireland, before coming to Australia to continue their craft (Eugene McKenna, personal communication, August 1999).

28. Brittain T., 'Heritage: Forests in our History', Appendix 2, *Report of the Independent Committee of Enquiry into Forest Resources and Values*, Perth, 1986.

29. Olden A.C.N., *Westralian Cavalry in the War: 10th Light Horse AIF*, Melbourne: Alexander McCubbin, 1921:2001

30. Colebatch, *A Hundred Years*, pp.175-76.

31. Gabbedy J.P., *Group Settlement, Part 1: Its Origins, Politics and Administration*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1988

32. Gabbedy, *ibid.*, p.105

33. Blond P.E.M., *A Tribute to the Group Settlers*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1987; also Burton L.C., *Barefoot in the Creek: A Group Settlement Childhood in Margaret River*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1997.

34. To ringbark a tree means to cut through the bark and sapwood with an axe right around the base of the tree trunk to prevent the flow of sap, and thus starve it to death.

35. *No Milk, No Honey*, Documentary film on Group Settlement produced by Andrew Ogilvie and Sharon Connolly for Film Australia and Electric Pictures, 1997

36. Many of these new city people suddenly finding themselves living and working alone in the isolation and indifference of the Australian tall forest went mad, in the local vernacular went “ga-ga” or “bushie”, and had to be rescued by their neighbours; in several cases strapped down onto stretchers and physically carried out so they would not hurt themselves any further, while others again simply committed suicide (Tom Higgins, personal communication, Karridale, April 2002).

37. Gabbedy, *Group Settlement*, pp. 106-114.

38. *No Milk, No Honey*, op. cit.

39. *No Milk, No Honey*, ibid.

40. Quokka, *Setonix brachyurus*, a small robust wallaby weighing about 3 Kg; Southern Brown Bandicoot, *Isodon obesulus*, about 1 Kg; Common Ringtail Possum, *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*, about 1 Kg; Western Grey Kangaroo, *Macropus fuliginosus*, females to about 40 Kg and males to 70 Kg.

41. Jack Rutherford, interview, Dunsborough, June 1996; Peter Smith, personal communication, Dunsborough, June 1996; Bill Nilsson (Rapid Landing, Group 63), interview, Margaret River, August 1998; Cliff Summerfield, personal communication, Margaret River, July 1999; Cedar Armstrong, interview, Busselton, November 1999.

42. Challis D., *Development of Education in the Augusta-Margaret River District*, Unpublished Coursework Assignment, Graylands Teachers' College, 1971, Batty Library PR2041.

43. Mae Wise, interview, Margaret River, September 2001

44. The issue here concerned the depletion of soils formerly replenished by the forest, through the application of artificial fertiliser.

45. Scott N., *Bramley Research Station*, Margaret River History Research Group Files, Margaret River District Library, 1986; Wise M.L., *Historical Outline of Margaret River High School Farm 1955-1984*, Margaret River History Research Group Files, Margaret River District Library, 1998.

46. Clews V., *Cowaramup's Second Wave of Settlers, 1934-1957*, unpublished honours dissertation, History Program, Division of Social Sciences, History and Education, Murdoch University, 2001

47. The region is still known as a source of psychedelic mushrooms, while on a more prosaic level the forest has been used until recently by the surfers and hippies in particular to grow marijuana for their own use until a further influx of big-city crime figures seeking to cash in on the demand attracted a widespread

police presence and clamp-down by the authorities.

48. Bill Ipsen, *Follow That Bell!*, Augusta, WA: self-published, 2000, Preface

49. The risk of vested interest being perceived in this arrangement is obvious.

50. Curo R., Appendix 6, *Report of the Independent Committee of Enquiry*, op. cit.

51. Drake T., Results of Sawmilling Karri Logs Segregated as Having a Millable Potential, Appendix 8, Report of the Independent Committee of Enquiry, *ibid.*

52. The Western Australian Department of Commerce and Trade reported in its January 2000 Newsletter, for example, that the U.S. spends \$USD25 billion per annum on solid wood furniture.

53. Grant Snow, Director, Hardwood Slab Company, interview, Cowaramup, August 2002.

54. Figures released annually by the Margaret River Tourism Association, based on the daily tally of visitors to their Tourist Bureau and Wine Showroom

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