

Walpole-Nornalup

National Park

celebrating 100 years



From a small park proclaimed in 1910, Walpole-Nornalup National Park has grown to a reserve of national significance.

It features iconic attractions including the Tree Top Walk in the Valley of the Giants and is part of the magnificent Walpole Wilderness.

by Christie Mahony and Bron Anderson



Department of
Environment and Conservation



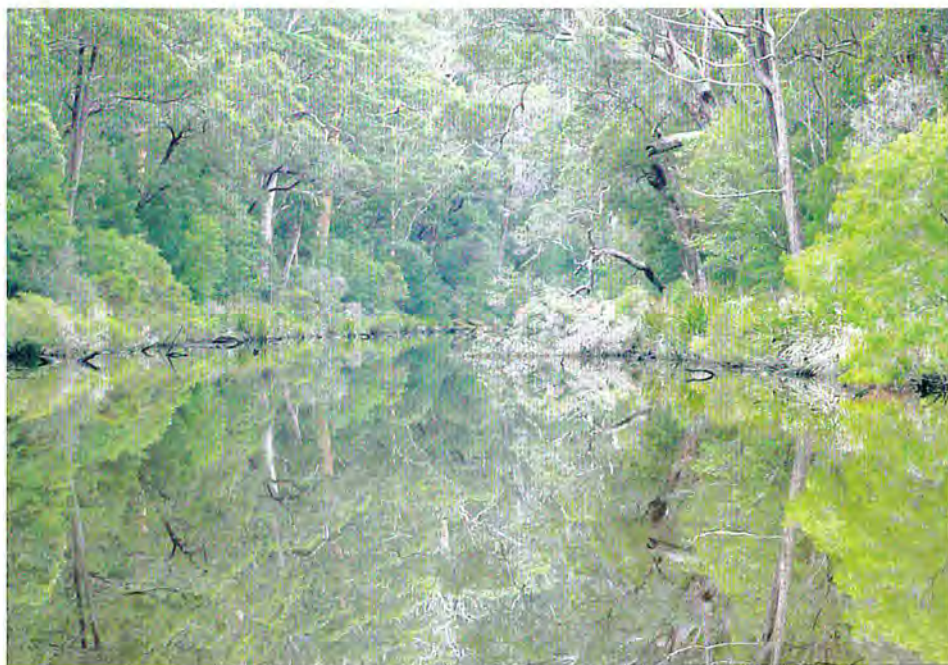
Looking out over the Frankland River at Monastery Landing, deep within Walpole-Nornalup National Park, it is possible to imagine what the first Europeans to see the area were thinking. Gliding up the tranquil river, the tall, impenetrable forest on either side must have seemed both beautiful and imposing.

William Nairne Clark, who visited the south coast area in 1841, wrote in his diary:

"The sail up was truly delightful. The river actually appeared to be embosomed amongst lofty wooded hills, with tall eucalypt trees close to the water's edge, and crowning the summits of these high hills thus casting a deep gloom over the water and making the scenery the most romantic I ever witnessed in the other quarters of the globe."

(See 'Walpole Wilderness', *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 2008.)

Well before European settlement in Australia, the tall forests, coastal heathlands, rivers, inlets and ocean in this area were home to the Murrumbidgee Aboriginal people. This area provided all the natural resources they needed to live. The Murrumbidgee hunted and collected an extensive variety of plants and animals to be used as food or medicine and to make tools, clothes and shelter.



European exploration

It's believed the first European sighting of the area was by those aboard the *Gulden Zeepaert* (Golden Seahorse), a Dutch East India ship which passed the southern coastline in 1627. French and British explorers followed nearly a century later and, in 1791, Captain George Vancouver, commanding the *Discovery*, made a closer inspection of the coastline. At a glance, the coastline appeared unappealing compared to the green and fertile shores of their European homelands. However, this view was to change half a century later when the area was explored more extensively on foot.

William Nairne Clark was a feisty young Scotsman who came to the Swan River Settlement in 1831. In 1841, he was one of the first Europeans to explore the forest, rivers and inlets of the south coast. He was enthusiastic and heavily involved in the opening up of new land in the south-west. After hearing stories of rivers and inlets on the south coast, he was determined to explore this new area. One of the places that impressed him most was the Frankland River.

The Bellanger family were the first Europeans to settle in the area permanently. Arriving at the mouth of Nornalup Inlet in March 1910 aboard the *Grace Darling*, they travelled up the Frankland River in small boats containing all their possessions as well as supplies and building materials. They settled on the bank of the Frankland River and, until the homestead was built in 1914, lived in huts and tents. They later opened their home as a guesthouse and became famous for their hospitality, playing host to many influential people.

Previous page

Main Nornalup Inlet.

Photo – Brett Dennis/Lochman

Transparencies

Inset Boating on the Frankland River.

Photo – Bert Saw, courtesy Walpole Nornalup and Districts Historical Society

Above Monastery Landing, Frankland River.

Photo – Bron Anderson/DEC

Left Red flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*).

Photo – Rob Oliver





Right Sir James Mitchell's ministerial party at Bow River in 1910.

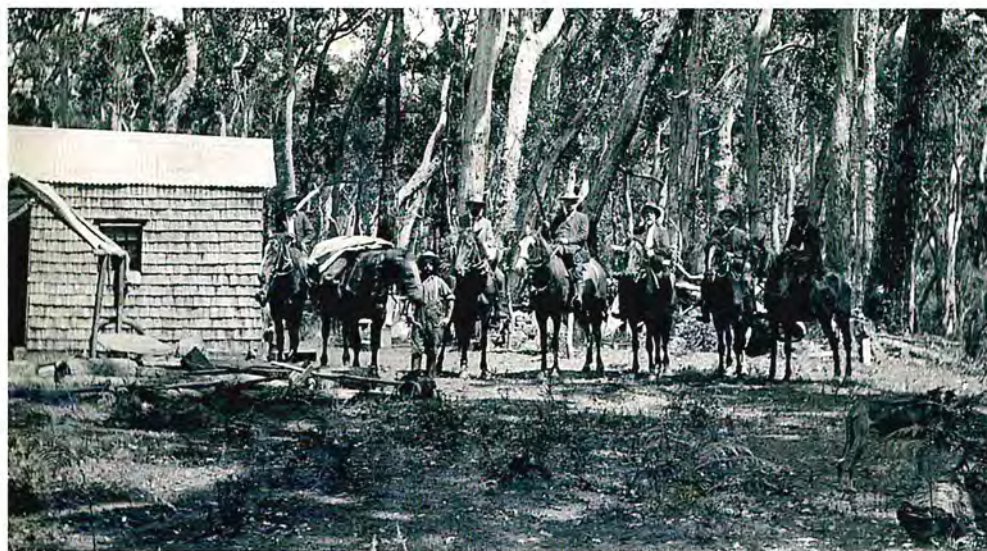
Photo – Bert Saw, courtesy Walpole Nornalup and Districts Historical Society

Proclaimed for conservation

Around this time, Minister for Lands and Agriculture James Mitchell had a 'grand vision for development in the south-west' which included agriculture, timber production and dairying. With this in mind, he visited the Nornalup area and stayed with the Bellanger family with his ministerial party in tow. They were rowed up the Frankland River to Monastery Landing and saw a place of incredible grandeur and solitude.

So impressed was Mitchell by the beauty of the river and the surrounding forest, that he made an on-the-spot decision to set aside the area for conservation. An area of 370 hectares adjacent to the Frankland River was gazetted as a class 'A' reserve—the highest level of protection land could be given. The area reserved was named Nornalup National Park and would later grow to become what is known today as Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

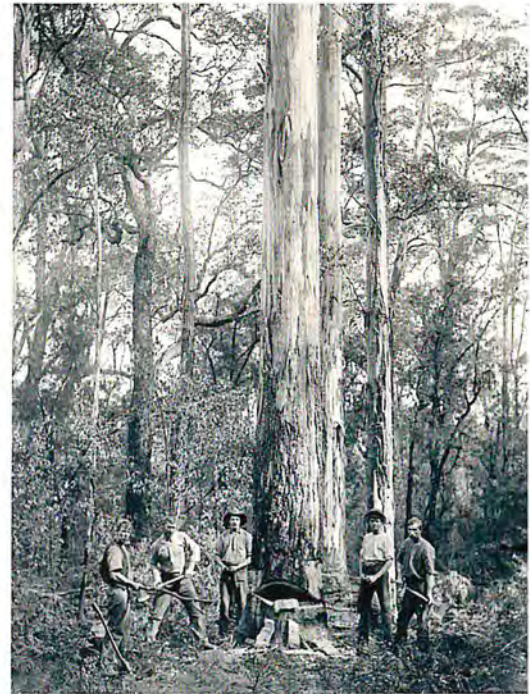
Mitchell wasn't the only visitor to the area to recognise the importance



of conserving the magnificent forests of the south-west. When Baron von Mueller, an eminent botanist and explorer, visited the karri forests in 1877, he wrote these somewhat prophetic words in his diary:

"But as nowhere, not even in the most extensive woodlands can the supply of timber from natural forests be considered inexhaustible, a rational far seeing provision for the maintenance (if not enrichment) of its forest-treasures is needful for Western Australia, however indiminishable these may appear to be at present."

The large karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*) and tingle trees found within the region almost overshadowed a smaller, but equally beautiful tree species. The red flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*), with its spectacular red blossoms, has a restricted habitat stretching from the Irwin Inlet to the mouth of the Shannon River. In 1912, the Albany District Surveyor prompted the creation of a class 'A' reserve for the protection of red flowering gum west of the Irwin Inlet. This small parcel of land later became part of Walpole-Nornalup National Park.



Group settlers

Major changes came to the area in the 1920s as settlers arrived looking for good land for agriculture. The Group Settlement Scheme was set up by James Mitchell and was intended to create a flourishing agricultural community that would provide livelihoods for migrant men and their families. Group 116 at Tingledale was one of the first such establishments in the area. Twenty-three families arrived in 1924 to start the mammoth task of clearing the huge karri trees to farm the land. Group 138 at Hazelvale followed in 1927.

In 1926, Newdegate Island and the unnamed island at the mouth of the Frankland River were declared class 'A' reserves and added 15 hectares to Nornalup National Park. In the same year,

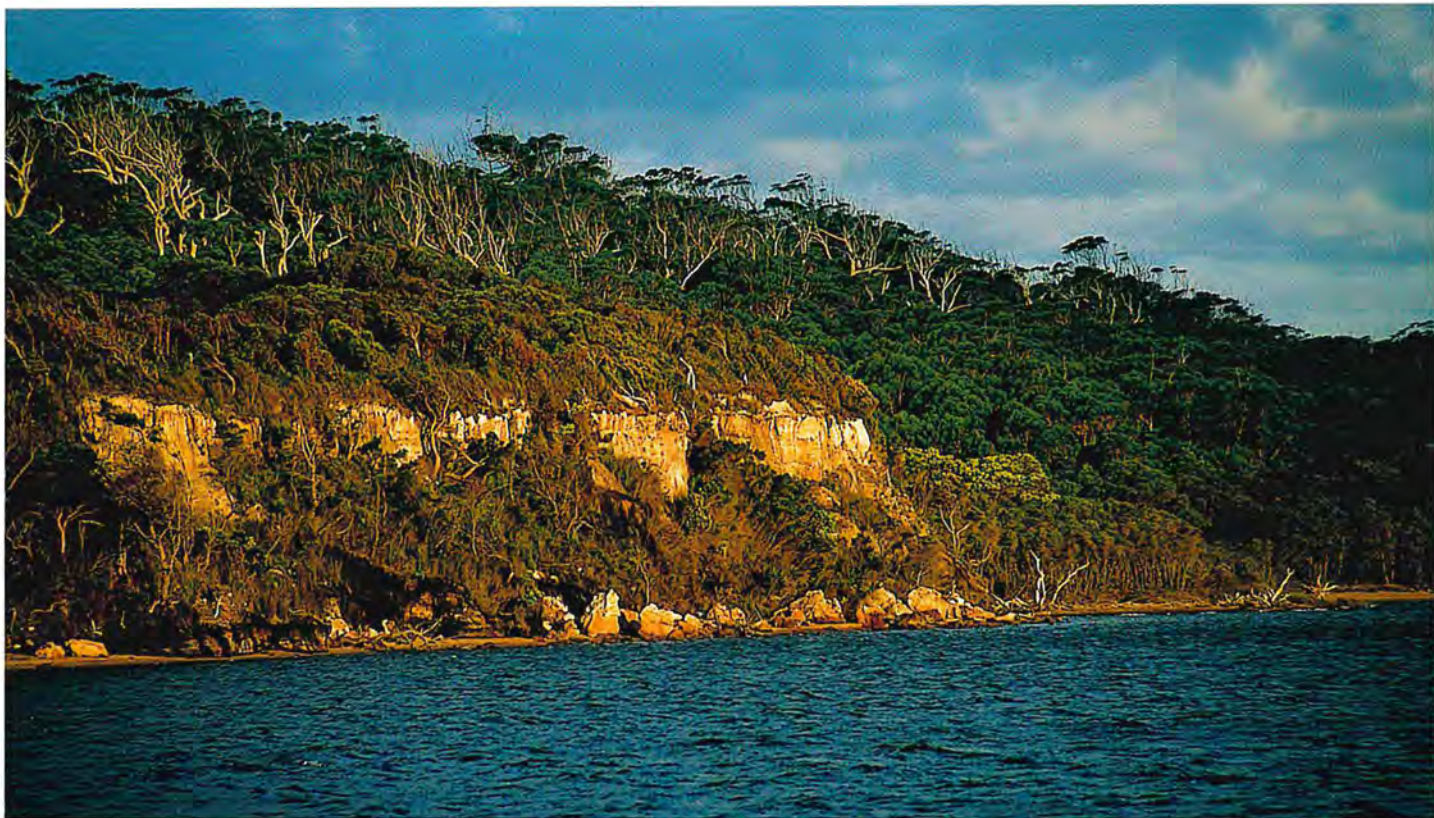


Above Tree felling.

Top left Settlers outside their tent.
Photos – Bert Saw, courtesy Denmark Historical Society

Centre left Original settlers camp on the Frankland River.
Photo – Courtesy Helen Pierce

Left Early tourism in the forest. Before its collapse in 1990, people used to drive their cars into this giant tingle tree.
Photo – Courtesy Walpole Nornalup and Districts Historical Society



Tom Swarbrick was granted land at Rest Point on the western shore of the Walpole Inlet. The original camping area at this point was called 'The Rendezvous'.

Early tourism

The following year, Tom Swarbrick was appointed as the first ranger to Nornalup National Park on a part-time basis. Tom was reported to be a man of considerable strength of character and integrity. These traits proved essential in finding a balance between running a successful tourism business and ensuring the protection of national park values.

Tourism really took off in the area in the late 1920s with more and more people coming to experience the magnificent forests and the beautiful scenery of the inlets and coastline, as well as try their hand at fishing. As the locals came to rely on income from tourists, preserving the land in national parks for all to experience became increasingly important. Additional guesthouses were opened by the Thompson, McIntosh, Swarbrick and Burnside families.

Hard labour and fire

In 1930, as part of the continuing Group Settlement Scheme, unemployed married men were moved from Perth to establish a settlement on the bank of the Walpole Inlet. The settlement was originally called Nornalup but the name was changed to Walpole in 1934. It had inauspicious beginnings with the settlers living in bush pole shanties at the

main camp while blocks of 120 acres of forested land were allocated to each family by ballot. Then began the backbreaking task of clearing the land for agriculture.

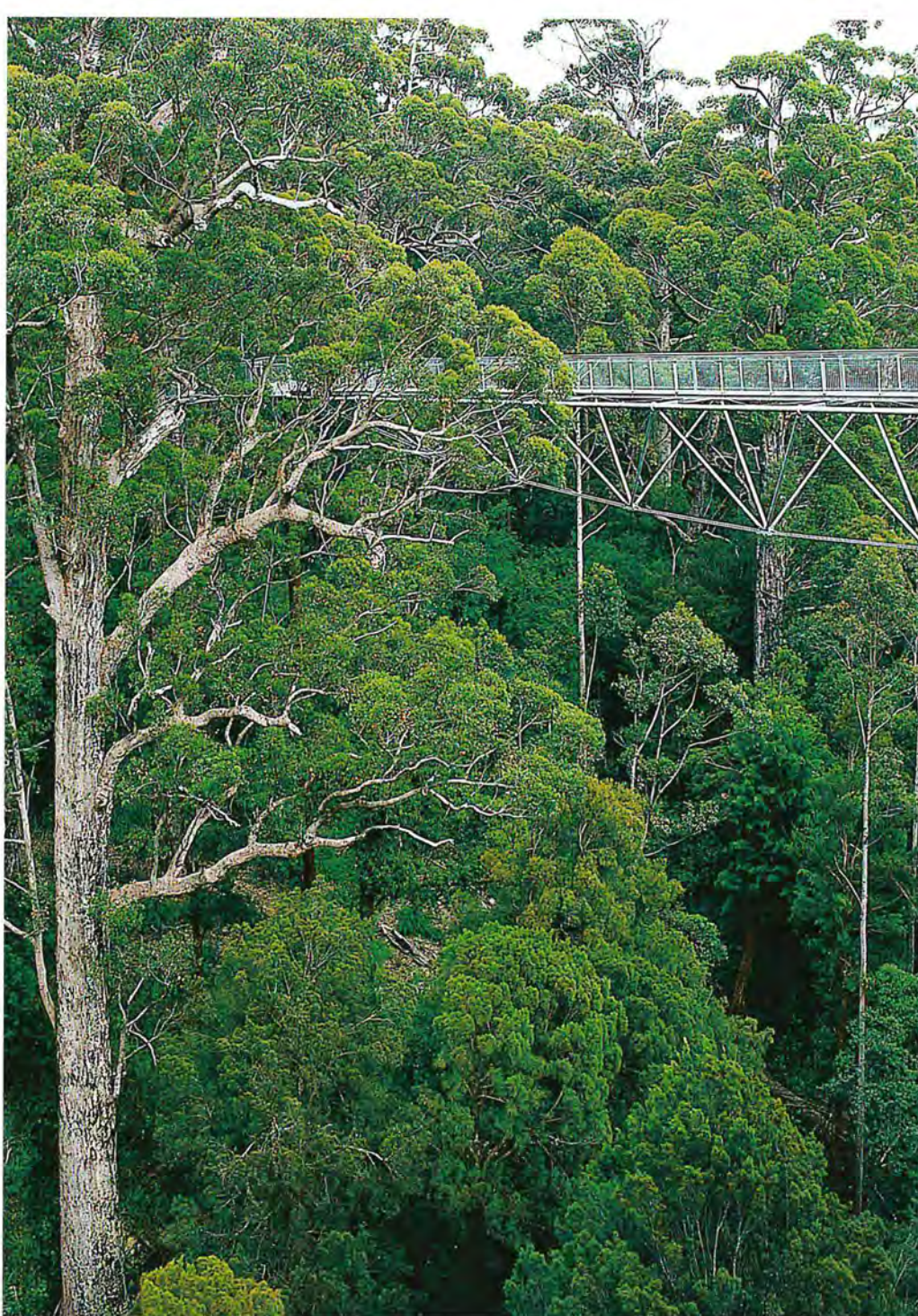
Not only did the settlers have to clear the huge trees from their land, they also had to erect fences for stock and build themselves homes. The task of clearing the land of its giant trees, combined with the infertile soils, lack



Above Late afternoon light, Nornalup Inlet.

Right View from Mount Frankland—one of three sites which make up the Walpole Wilderness Discovery Centre.

Photos – Rob Oliver



Top Giant tingle tree in Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Photo – Rob Olver

Above *Chorizema retrorsum* at Horseyard Hill in Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Photo – Bron Anderson/DEC

Left The Tree Top Walk.

Photo – Gordon Roberts/DEC

of farming skills and the hardships of the 1930s depression were too much for most to bear. Only a third of the original families stayed on and eked out a living from dairy or beef cattle.

The forests of Nornalup National Park were devastated by fire in 1937 in what became known as Black Wednesday. Tinder-dry forests combined with intense northerly winds were a disaster waiting to happen when lightning struck the forest near Northcliffe. The blaze spread rapidly southwards, consuming everything in its path. By the time the fire reached Nornalup National Park, the crown fire was 12 kilometres ahead of the ground fire and showed no signs of abating.

The settlers fought hard to save their possessions and property but many lost everything. This was the last straw for many families who retreated to the city. Stark reminders of the fire can still be seen today in the dead 'stags' of karri trees that tower over the forest.

Conservation management and growth

The 1950s brought a new era of forest management to the Walpole area with the appointment of the district's first resident forester, John Rate. In addition to his duties as a forester, Rate was appointed Honorary Ranger of Nornalup National Park. It was thanks to him that the park got its first full-time

ranger, Lionel Gunson, who was also the first full-time ranger to be appointed in Western Australia. The Nornalup Advisory Committee was formed to provide local input into management, resulting in a more strategic approach to conservation management in the park.

In 1972, the park experienced a huge expansion from 385 hectares to 15,865 hectares. Much of the land from Long Point in the west to Conspicuous Cliff in the east was now protected. At this time, Nornalup National Park changed its identity and became Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Tourism took over as Walpole's main source of income in 1995 with the closure of the timber mill and the downturn of the logging industry in the area. The lure of the big trees was strong and more and more tourists were visiting the area to see the majesty of the karris and tingles.



Above Nornalup Inlet.

Photo – Rob Oliver

Right Circular Pool on the Frankland River has become a popular recreation site.

Photo – Gordon Roberts/DEC

Below right Wildflowers at Horseyard Hill, Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Photo – Bron Anderson/DEC

Bottom right A scenic view of the Frankland River.

Photo – Bert Saw, courtesy Denmark Historical Society

The Tree Top Walk

Walpole was thrust onto the international stage with the construction of the Tree Top Walk at the Valley of the Giants in 1996. This popular attraction provides visitors with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the forest canopy and get a completely different perspective of these giant trees. In 2002, the parcel of land that contained the Valley of the Giants was transferred from State forest to Walpole-Nornalup National Park, bringing the total land area under reservation to 19,000 hectares.

Conservation around Walpole was taken to even greater heights in 2004, with the creation of the Walpole Wilderness. The Walpole Wilderness protects more than 363,000 hectares and embraces the very essence of WA's southern forests and coasts. Old majestic jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*), tingle and karri forests surround imposing granite peaks, peaceful rivers, wetlands and tranquil inlets, and overlook picturesque sandy beaches, sheer coastal cliffs and the Southern Ocean. The Walpole Wilderness is a significant portion of a massive conservation reserve network stretching between Augusta and Denmark, encompassing seven national parks including Walpole-Nornalup.



Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park

Complementing the suite of terrestrial national parks is the recently gazetted Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park (see 'Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2009). This marine park not only protects the Walpole and Nornalup inlets, but also extends deep into the heart of Walpole-Nornalup National Park along the Walpole, Frankland and Deep rivers. Together, these parks protect precious plants and animals, above and below the waterline.

James Mitchell could never have foreseen that his humble act of reserving the beautiful and pristine forest around Monastery Landing back in 1910 would have led to the creation of such an extensive network of conserved land and waters. The magnificent beauty and tranquillity of Walpole-Nornalup National Park has inspired many people throughout the past century and will continue to do so well into the future.



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A large, gnarled tree trunk in the foreground, with a dense canopy of green leaves above. In the background, a body of water reflects the surrounding trees and a small structure on the shore.