

POWDERBARK vs. COPTOTERMES

by P.N. Hewett

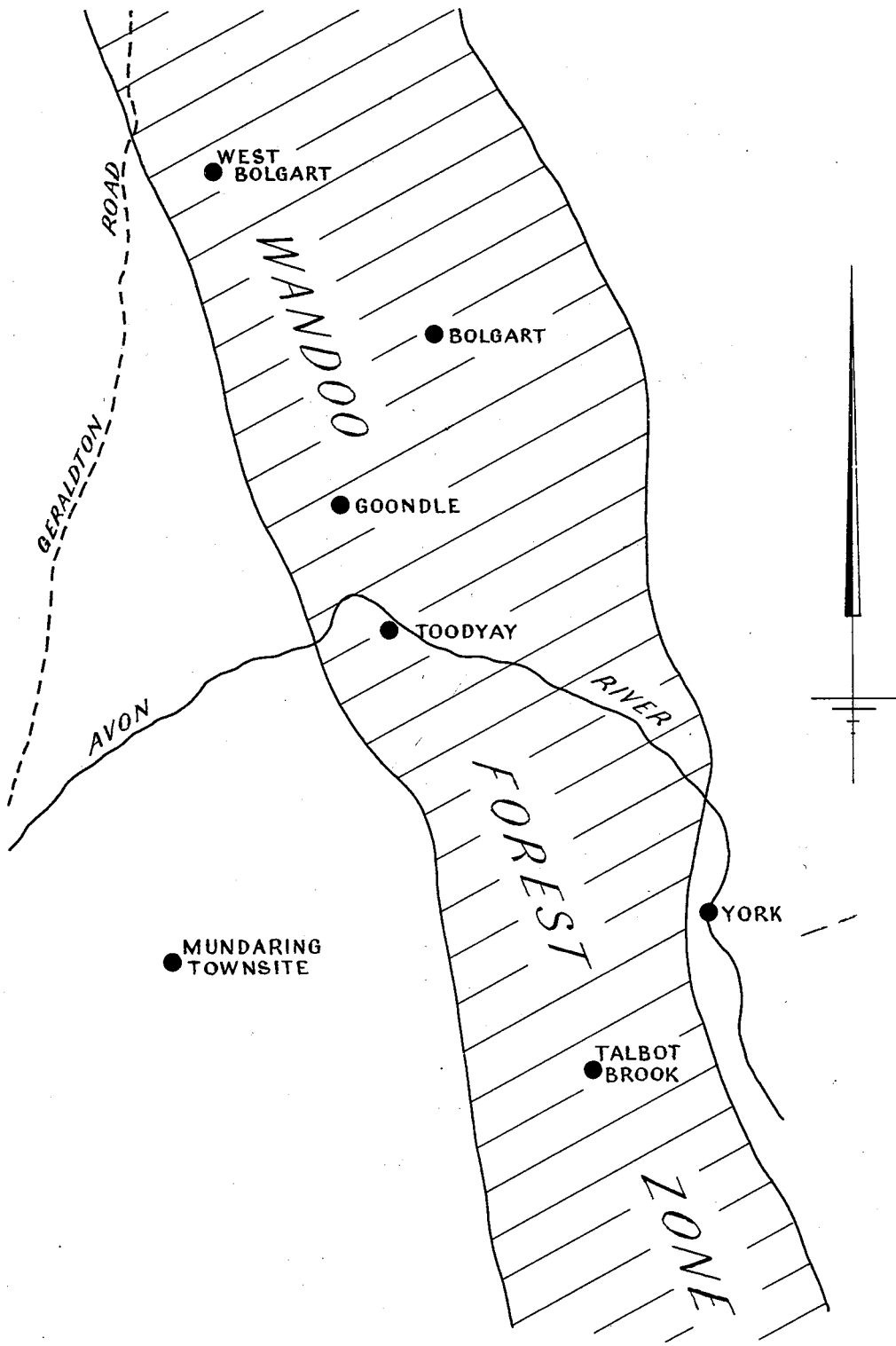
A few months ago I inadvertently passed the remark to a Senior Officer that "Of course Powderbark isn't durable in the ground!" As might be expected, said Senior Officer asked how I knew this, and where did I get my information. Only a few reasons could be recalled, among them being "THEY say that Powderbark lasts only a few weeks in the ground", or "THEY say that white ants LOVE Powderbark". My main reason was the refusal by the P.M.G. Department to accept Powderbark telephone poles. Of course the P.M.G. use a lot of Powderbark poles, because pole cutters remove the bark but, in theory at least, the P.M.G. does not trust Powderbark in the ground.

The evidence seemed more than somewhat inconclusive and in response to suggestions that a search be made for more evidence, I made some enquiries in the farming areas adjoining Wandoo-Powderbark forest near Mundaring and near the Julimar State Forest.

In particular the areas investigated were Talbot Brook, Coondle and West Bolgart, situated as shown on the accompanying plan.

TALBOT BROOK:

Three farmers were interviewed in this area and all three wholeheartedly supported the use of Powderbark as sawn fence posts, split fence posts, strainers and poles. One was able to show me a fence still in service, in which split Powderbark posts were used 45 years ago, also some 13 years old posts split from over 50" GBH trees and 10 years old posts unsapped. All were in fair condition and certainly as good as Wandoo posts. Another farmer quoted the use of Powderbark poles used in the supper room of the Talbot Brook Hall in 1931, and claimed that even the sapwood of these poles is still not damaged, whereas Wandoo poles used at the same time have seriously deteriorated. (This is too good a story to refute, so I have not checked the Hall personally). This same neighbour and adjoining farmer both have boundless faith in Powderbark whether split or sawn, particularly when mature trees are used. The third witness has 12 years old unsapped Powderbark strainers which have still not lost their sapwood.



Scale : abt. 12 miles to an inch

COONDLE:

Five settlers in this area use Wandoo as posts but have not tried Powderbark, since there is none on their own land. However, all five are also beekeepers and unusually observant. They claim that fallen Powderbark trees in State Forest decay no faster than Wandoo, and one farmer has since built a section of fence with Powderbark to test the product.

BOLGART:

Two settlers were interviewed here, and both threw up their hands in horror at the mention of Powderbark fence posts. "Completely useless"; "Won't last 6 weeks"; "May last 3 months if put in upside down!". These were some of the comments from the two men concerned, and on questioning them, I discovered:-

- a) Neither had ever tried Powderbark posts,
- b) Neither had ever seen Powderbark used,
- c) Neither knew anyone who had tried it.

Just how the prejudice in this area arose, I have no idea, but on psychological grounds, Coptotermes is well in front in the Bolgart district. However, the evidence in the other areas has convinced me that Powderbark (*Euc. accedens*) is every bit as durable as Wandoo, and may be even better as a fence post.

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