

MINING TIMBER IN COLLIE DISTRICT

by Roy Button

Last year two million two hundred thousand super feet of mining timber costing approx. £33,500 was used in the Collie coal mines of which 15% was used in the Griffin and 85% was used in the Western collieries.

At the pit heads you will see stacks of timber ready for mine use. Sizes and quantities vary to meet the particular needs of each mine. These stacks will vary in quantity not only because of earth movements in the mines, but also due to the rate of splitting in the bush.

It is the job of the timber contractor to fulfil these requirements. In Collie there are 12 men employed in this work. The supply system is worked on the lines of the tender system.

Before the timber reaches the mine there is little sweat lost by the timber getter. The timber has to be firstly tree marked by a Forest Officer who takes into consideration all the values of the tree, making sure it will produce one or more lengths of mining timber. It has to be fallen, cut, barked and split into required sizes. The tree often yields various items and the cutter utilizes each tree to the fullest extent, what is left - a salvager removes.

A track is then put into each fallen tree and a light truck is taken in where the timber is then loaded and delivered and stacked above the ground at the mine. This work is normally heavy and arduous because of the scattered stumps, thick-wooded, stony country. Trucks are too light and can't stand too much rough treatment, they bog easily, causing areas to be left, due to the unfavourable lie of the land and the scattered trees.

Over recent years there have been mechanical improvements but replacements like crawler tractors, better trucks, are needed to improve the situation as much as in the Eastern States.

Sawn timber and round timber will have to displace split timber as suitable trees are becoming scarcer each year. The split timber life is only estimated for the next seven years in the Collie district.

In the early days, round timber was used untreated, the split timber was used for sleepers. It was not realized that this timber could be suitable mining timber in future years.

Repeated cutting of the straight grained trees on accessible forest areas has resulted in an increasing percentage of tight and windy grain trees, but this has not altered the percentage of good formed trees due to the splitting timber being widely scattered, and average of two trees per acre.

Timber cutters at a later date will be forced further afield, into poorer stands of timber - factors which send up timber costs.

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There are 56,500 acres of State Forest within economic range of the Collie coalfields, but because of the poor quality timber only a third of it is suitable for the production of split mining timber.

The State Forests Department is now trying to introduce treated round mining timber, as there are a great number of high quality round mining timber stands within economical distance of the Collie coalfields.
