

NOTES ON PRESERVING MARRI FENCE-POSTS BY THE SAP REPLACEMENT METHOD.

by G. S. McCutcheon

Vol. 3, No. 4 of "Forest Notes" carried an article in which preserved round Marri fence-posts were given favourable cost comparison, from a user's view point, with the traditional split Jarrah posts; though slightly more expensive initially, because of their expected greater service life, the Marri posts should prove more economical on an annual charge per post basis in certain districts. It was also pointed out that from the forester's point of view, a tree split to posts gives a lesser royalty return than would probably accrue from milling it, and from the State and National viewpoint is wastefully utilised while an equally suitable forest product (viz. the round post) is not being utilised at all.

As part of a demonstration of the practicability of the preserved round post a section of fence has been erected along the Bussell Highway near Ludlow H.Q. using Marri posts prepared by the Kirup Division. Appropriate signs will be erected and it is hoped that this will lead to increasing interest and inquiries regarding preserved round posts.

This method of cutting and treating posts is well suited to a farmer who has not learnt the art of splitting posts or one who has a quantity of Marri saplings available on his property. It could be a useful fill-in job to prepare a reserve of posts which can be stored till actually required.

Method of Preparation.

Saplings were felled and docked in the bush by chain-saw, de-barked with an axe, mainly by slaving away by you at that time, and transported to H.Q. where pointed was most conveniently done by two men. One supported the post on a block while the other wielded the axe. The square top and pointed end are necessary to facilitate driving in of the posts.

The posts were then placed upright in the preserving solution, butt down for 4 days and top down for 3 days, after which they were stacked butt down until transported away. The preservative was a $\frac{31}{2}\%$ W/W solution of Tanalith "C" (copper, chrome, arsenic) purchased as dry crystals from Hickson's Timber Impregnation Co. in Bunbury.

Precautions

The powder and solution should be stored out of reach of children and if spilled on the skin should be immediately rinsed off. Particular care is necessary to remove dust from under finger nails following weighing out of quantities. Accidental swallowing of the poison necessitates calling a Doctor and first-aid treatment to induce vomiting, instructions for which were provided on the container by Hicksons, and can also be found in first-aid manuals.

Cost

The overall cost of departmental production was 86 cents per post, which is very much higher than the estimate quoted in the article cited. Various reasons for

this can be advanced viz:-

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1. Addition of charges for overheads and administration in departmental costing.
2. High cost and low capacity of the transport used (a gang truck with fire-fighting equipment aboard).
3. Inefficient working, operations often having to be in 2 hour stretches between other jobs at that time of year.
4. The fact that the operation was in the nature of a trial run.
5. It was done in mid summer - the worst time of the year for barking.

As 45 cents of the per post cost was for wages alone it is expected to considerably reduce that cost by more efficient cutting and carting operations in the winter months, and by paying on a piece-work basis.

Standard of Impregnation

On one post rejected after preservation and later cross-cut at 1' intervals, depth of impregnation was measured on diameters arbitrarily selected. Ten depth estimates on five diameters gave an average depth of impregnation (as judged by colour) of 0.75 inch. However as the greatest depths were measured on knobbly irregularities it is suspected that a regularly formed post would produce an average slightly lower.

In order to keep the solution out of reach of children and animals the trial was most conveniently conducted in a garage with only a barred window opening providing for air circulation. A covered out-door location safe guarded by a netting enclosure is to be used for winter operations in order to obtain maximum evaporation.

Transport Costs

A point worth noting is that the 200 posts, 12 strainers and 6 struts formed a part truck-load which would have weighed about 2.4 tons, while the same number in split jarrah would have weighed in the region of 6 tons. The saving on transport costs on these figures is 60%.
