

THE OTHER SIDE

MOUNT CRAWFORD FOREST - WILLIAMSTOWN

by

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Mount Crawford forest is 5 miles from Williamstown on the south-eastern edge of the Barossa Valley. Twenty-eight thousand acres of *P. radiata* at Cudlee Creek, Kersbrook, Mount Crawford are managed from here.

There is no managed natural forest in the area, in fact the only remaining hardwood forest consists of scattered uncleared or part-cleared areas on private land.

The undulating to hilly country in the Mount Crawford and Kersbrook forests was originally forested with River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*) Blue Gum (*E. leucoxylon*) and Manna Gum (*E. huberiana*) while Cudlee Creek - an area somewhat akin to Nannup in its 35° slopes - supported good stands of Blue Gum and Stringybark (*E. obliqua*).

The 1971 planting area amounted to 800 acres, most of which was planted by hand due to the steepness of the country. All planting is done on wages, and no-one works in the rain, so I leave the costs to your imagination!

I noted with some interest the practice of "ripping". All land for planting in South Australia is ripped to a depth of 18" on lines 8' apart by a large dozer. It is claimed that when the pines are subsequently planted in the rip-rows, the extra water-gathering capabilities combined with the loosened soil around the roots give the plant a considerable advantage over one planted on bare pasture.

Ripping has been practiced for a number of years now, and the local bulldozing contractors while cautious at first, will now rip slopes impossible to walk down. One hillside was pointed out to me where the work was done by two machines - one ripping top to bottom, and the other on top winching him back up! Costs run out at about \$10 per acre.

All land being planted in these areas currently is re-purchased farm land and water catchments. There are several reservoirs in the Adelaide Hills and the authorities are very much aware of the pollution problem created by human habitation and recreation. Consequently land in the catchments is being resumed and planted.

In the Mount Crawford and Kersbrook forest *P. radiata* is grown on a far poorer soil than in Western Australia, and fertilizing is necessary. Super is applied by hand at the rate of 4 - 6 cwt per acre immediately after planting, and a further dose 5 or 6 years later if required. Rainfall in the Adelaide Hills averages about 30".

Policy of the South Australian Woods and Forests Department says no pruning is to be done for clear timber, the reason given being that the returns at present don't justify the expense involved. Some pruning of course is done for access, and for fire control reasons in areas of high risk.

Most of the forest and breaks here are grazed on a lease basis, with a certain amount of damage to trees, 1 to 5 years old, especially if the amount of stock is excessive.

The total annual output from these forests is $11\frac{1}{2}$ million super feet - the unit of measurement in South Australia. This is over 19,000 lds, which is divided between two mills in Williamstown and seventeen other mills and associated plants in the area and in Adelaide - 35 miles away. Allan Shepherdson - a partner in the Williamstown sawmill is a brother to the Manager of the Mill at Wilga - near Grimwade.

Fire Control in the Adelaide Hills in my view leaves a lot to be desired. One tower serves the whole area, being situated in the Mount Crawford Forest; a distance of 6 miles from Kersbrook, and 13 miles from Cudlee Creek forest. The tower is manned from 9.30 a.m. to about 4.00 p.m. on days of (W.A) "High Summer" and Higher. On days equal to Severe and Dangerous, this is supplemented by an aerial patrol for about 6 hours.

I personally felt the inadequacy of the organization in March, when during a dry thunderstorm lightning scored a direct hit on my backyard "thunderbox", reducing it to a heap of ashes before the valiant fire fighters were on the scene. (To add insult to injury, it was a week before the new loo arrived!)

Most South Australian staff are graduate foresters, with a recently instituted two year night school course being run in Mount Gambier by the Adult Education Board in conjunction with the Woods and Forests, supplying an increasing number of Technical Assistants. Most of these men are employed in Working Plans or Research Work of a similar nature to that of their counter-parts in the West.

Foresters are not paid overtime, and receive a Fire Duties Allowance of \$150-\$220 per year, depending on rank. This is paid over 12 months. With a staff of three at Mount Crawford, standby averages 2 weekends on and 1 off through the summer months. Wages employees receive a rate of \$1.10 per hour for standby and time and a half for all fire fighting.

Agriculture is the only other industry in the area, sheep, dairy and beef cattle and of course the wine industry in the Barossa Valley. Like farmers in most places they are in difficulties, the result being no shortage of land being offered to the Department for forestry.

Unfortunately there appears to be little interest in preserving any of the small areas of indigenous forest occurring on most of these properties. This is a pity as a paddock of the smooth barked Blue Gum and River Red Gum is a fine sight and a welcome contrast to the advancing regiments of pine.