

REVEGETATION

THE GREAT NAMBLING SALT FLAT WHEELBARROW MUSTER

Barrie Oldfield



FOUR years ago Men of the Trees (MOTT) set their sights on doing something about dry land salinity. We wanted to take on a severely degraded piece of land, the kind that most people would regard as being well beyond economic recovery, and see if we could learn by actually applying treatments and processes and observing the outcomes. The land selected is at Nambling, 5 km west of Dowerin on the Goomalling road. It covers about 11 ha.

The first thought was drainage. Parts of this land are scalded bare and in winter some inundation occurs. Two piezometers at the eastern end show the water table to be within 20-40 cm of the surface. We settled for "microdrainage" - raising the planting sites above the water table by putting in a series of raised beds, varying in height from 30-70cm. This had the effect not only of giving us a little more depth to water table but also aerating the soil which, over a period of several years, had become quite anaerobic.

The next idea was to incorporate organic material, not just compost but material that would persist in a dry soil through a succession of long arid summers. (Gilles Lemieux, of Laval University, Canada, has written about this; ref: <http://forestgeomat.for.ulaval.ca/>

brf). For three years we have received loads of mulch from various sources, which a dedicated team of volunteers has spread over the mounds.

Into beds so prepared and top dressed we planted our trees, selected for their tolerance to saline soils. One source of seed is right there at Nambling; *Eucalyptus sargentii* and *E. spathulata* trees growing as healthy sentinels all around the back of the site. We also planted *Melaleuca cuticularis*, *Casuarina obesa* and several other known salt tolerant species. In growing our seedlings at St. Barbe Grove Nursery we also took heed of the mycorrhiza work done by Inez Tommerup at CSIRO. Top soil scrapings were taken from under flourishing trees around the site, and even a few puffballs were made into slurry to inoculate the pots.

Details of this trial are being recorded. However, probably our major enemy at the moment is the consistent low rainfall. Its not just the farmers who are having a hard time!

*Barrie Oldfield is President of MOTT. Contact MOTT Nursery on: 9250 1888.
Photo: M. Brooker*

SALT ANYONE...?

ELEVEN ha of grey-white salt, pitted with stubby greenish growth, was the stark unwelcoming outlook for about 250 volunteers who converged on the 'Great Nambling Salt Flat Wheelbarrow Muster' in June last year. Once again Men of the Trees was doing something a bit different, spreading mulch over planting mounds in a salt flat.

The volunteers were armed with shovels, rakes and wheelbarrows plus a strong desire to help nature restore the major nutrients so vital for the future growth of trees and perennials reclaiming their rightful place on the now embattled terrain of this area. This happy gathering of people young and old included myself and my wife Pam, who, I may add, did not come to any harm in this project as she did last year on a similar outing, and only because she was placed in a 'protective bubble' throughout the working day; allowed out only for sustenance and physical relief. Well, that was the theory!

Five years ago about 1000 trees were planted in the same salt-infested area. Today, they proudly stand vigorously spreading their leafy arms to heaven, and this one hectare has been dedicated as a 'Tree Park Memorial'.

Vic Ferreira

(It will be interesting to find out whether this costly and labour-intensive process does lead to a high establishment rate ... in other words, is it worth the effort? Keep an eye out, as you drive past the site. Ed.)