

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN TIMBERS.

No. 3. The Tuart.

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Those of you who have visited the Vasse District will have noticed, near Capel or Ludlow, forests of light grey-barked trees growing out of the peppermint undergrowth. These trees frequently attain a height of one hundred feet or more, though the trunks seldom attain more than forty feet to the first branch. These are the famous tuart trees, and this district the prime tuart forest. Apart from the Vasse forests there are no areas of tuart sufficiently extensive to be worthy of mention. Nor have the lesser forests the imposing aspect of the Vasse forests with its tall trees and willow undergrowth.

Tuart occurs, though somewhat sparsely, all along the limestone coastal area between Perth and Bunbury. In certain localities, especially round Perth, the tuart is known as white gum, and White Gum Valley takes its name from this tree. If you are not already familiar with the tuart, you will recognise it from the following general description. The bark is persistent and rough, the roughness extending right up to the twigs. The bark is not shed like that of smooth-barked trees. The foliage is glossy and dark green in colour. The leaves are fairly large and long. They are irregularly veined and hang vertically. Moreover, the smaller twigs are not round but angled. The tree flowers irregularly, and a period of four years usually elapses before the young buds develop into fruits. The flowers of the tree are white and are much sought after by bees; hence the tuart tree is of considerable value to the bee farmer. This tree can be confused only with the coastal white gum and the flooded gum; but the shape of the buds renders it easily distinguishable from either. Let us therefore examine carefully the buds and fruit of the tuart tree. You will notice, in the first place, that the buds, flowers and fruits have not each a separate stalk, but are joined together in

clusters on a common foot-stalk which is broad, flat and wedge-shaped. The calyx tube is rather long. The most surprising feature of all is the large bud-cup, which is wider than the tube of the calyx. This large bud to some extent resembles the end of a bolt, and it is from this characteristic that the tuart derives its scientific name of *gomphocephala*, from two Greek words meaning "bolt-headed." Even when the buds are very young the foot-stalk is broad and flat; but it is broadest when the fruits are developed. Notice, also, the characteristic shape of the fruits.

The timber of the tuart is yellow, hard and dense, with an interlocked grain. It is consequently very strong, and is used for work requiring special strength. It is used for the construction of wheels, railway waggons and trucks. Even the branches are sawn up and utilized in the construction of small articles requiring great strength. Practically no tuart is cut from Crown lands except what is required for Government purposes.
