

2007 Australasian Region Annual Meeting

by Morris Lake #7634

Australian members gathered at Neerim South, in the picturesque Gippsland region of Victoria, from 14-17 Nov, to celebrate the *Forests and History of West Gippsland*—and what a celebration.

After four wonderful days we departed with regret at having to leave friends old and new, but with the realisation that the meeting will be remembered for its warmth and generosity. Eugene received a \$1,500 Community Events Grant from the Baw Baw Shire Council, and it was great to have their input.

The organising Committee, led by Eugene and Mary Dimitriadis, gave everything they had and then some, and those attending shared their woody passions.

Meeting highlights

Open Day

Eugene, in his Publicity Officer role, was very successful in getting the message out to the locals that we were coming to town, and invited their participation. On the first morning, numerous locals—including school children, visited to see the displays and to talk about wood—the display area was buzzing and was a great advertisement for the Society. We also received follow-up reporting of the event in the local media.



Above: Ian McLaughlin demonstrates wood fluorescence to a visitor.

Left: Some of the members items on display.

Right: Doug Stevenson displays his collection of yesterday's wood cutters tools.



Auctions

Members were encouraged to donate *quality, not quantity* for the wood auction on Wednesday afternoon. This resulted in one of the highest quality wood auctions that I believe we have ever experienced—and the auction reflected this, netting \$3,455. The late Colin Ward's book collection was offered to members in a Silent Auction which received much attention, netting \$1,600. Col's collection was donated to IWCS by his family who felt that this was the best way to make use of the books. Our thanks to the Ward family for their thoughtful gesture and the opportunity for Col's memory to remain with us.



Members line up to be 'shot' at the Toorong Falls entrance.



Anton and Keith casting discerning eyes over some of the 300 auction pieces.



The Noojee Trestle Bridge

One of the local attractions was the 102 m long Noojee Trestle Bridge was built in 1919 as part of the Warragul rail system to get timber out of the area. It was last used in 1954 when road transport took over from rail. The 21 m high bridge contains 19 tressels. The buried poles were of various box woods for durability. They do not grow in the area and had to be bought in, e.g., yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), grey box (probably *Eucalyptus microcarpa*), and white box (*Eucalyptus albens*). Grey gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) and yellow stringybark (*Eucalyptus muellerana*) were often used for the structure.

It was destroyed on Black Friday 1939—as seen in the photo, when 1.4 million hectares of Victoria's forest was destroyed, but rebuilt soon afterwards. It was spared in the 1984 Ash Wednesday fires which destroyed 350,000 hectares, including the entire timber township of Noojee.

The bridge is presently being restored. 3½ tons of old stell bolts have been replaced up to mid November, and work continues.

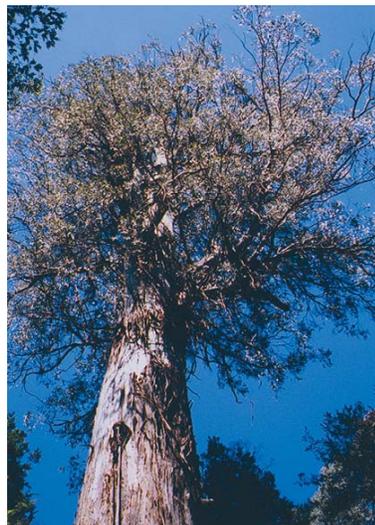
The giant Ada tree

The Ada tree is the largest and oldest remnant of the pre 1900 mountain ash forest. Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the tallest flowering plant in the world. Named by Werner and Joseph Merschallck in 1986, the Ada tree is the largest and oldest remnant tree, estimated to be 270-300 years old. It is 76 metres (247 feet) high, but before it 'lost its crown' it was the tallest living tree in the world. It was estimated to have been 120 metres (390 feet) high. It has a girth of 15.07 metres at breast height and contains 197 cubic metres of wood, enough to build 15 average sized houses.

Wally Nottman, Forest Manager for the area gave a very good summary of the conditions under which mountain ash grow. They grow



Members on, and climbing up to, the Noojee trestle bridge.



A 1939 photo showing the destruction caused in the Black Friday fires.

only above 800 m in the high country on the southern tip of the Great Dividing Range and generally occur in even-aged stands—as discussed in Australian Woods No 7 in this issue. Mountain ash dies out unless fire periodically sweeps the forest.

The 1939 fires destroyed all the mountain ash. The sawmills were predominantly in the forest and were decimated by the fire.

It takes a major fire to stimulate germination. In the Noojee area, forester A.H. Beetham established that nearly 2½ million seedlings per hectare of mountain ash had germinated after the 1939 fire.

Following the 1984 fires the huge volume of effected trees were quickly harvested and the logs processed by mills set up outside the forest, but when the timber petered out many of these mills closed down. All of the trees currently being harvested are 1939 regrowth, and sawmills to harvest them started to come back into action in the late 1980s.

The origin of the name

To the British settlers, the timber from mountain ash bore a superficial and hopeful resemblance to English ash, and so its common name of mountain ash.

Following the fires of the 1984 when 40,000 hectares were burnt, large volumes of timber had to be sold. It was marketed as Victorian ash which included mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), alpine ash or woollybutt (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*), shining gum (*Eucalyptus nitens*), and messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*). Not to be confused with Tasmanian oak, a similar generic product also based on *Eucalyptus regnans*.

A composite of the 270-300 year-old Ada tree.