

Highlights of the Port Sorrell Meeting

Morris Lake

As members rolled in on Monday, 4 October, it was like meeting old friends. Those that arrived early mingled with newcomers and all very quickly settled into the pleasant atmosphere of Camp Banksia—and it was a great venue—and the meals were just right and very healthy. It was a truly joyful atmosphere that was maintained throughout the meeting.

The attendance of 40 included three members from the US, Sally Musseter, Alan Curtis and Skip Dickens who were all good contributors to the meetings success. We also welcomed Graham Trost from New Zealand who will be our host in Christchurch next year. Australian members came from Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, so it was a very diverse gathering and considering the huge distances travelled, the wood and craft donations soon piled up in the auction room and finally added up to 241 items, or collections of items. What a magnificent effort—and this again was in tune with the spirit of the auction which netted around \$3500—the bidding was pretty keen.

The meeting got off to an early start with the bus leaving for Launceston at 8am on Tuesday morning to see the sights of Launceston. First stop, the City Park followed by the Tasmanian Design Centre. Terry Henderson set the mood by trying to take home what was reported to us as being the 'largest' Bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) in Australia. Hey, hang on a minute, this is Tasmania. You can't possibly have the largest Bunya pine in Australia. But then we saw the 'largest' swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), and then the 'largest' cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus deodora*), and then—oh, why go on. But I couldn't establish the origin of the 'large' information, but perhaps it came from our 'enthusiastic leader' Graeme Briton.



No Terry, you can't have it. Put it down.

The beautiful City Park, established in the mid 1800s also had a Japanese macaque monkey enclosure, and the John Hart Conservatory full of tropical orchids in full flower.

We then visited the Design Centre, situated in one corner of the park, which had a stupendous display of furniture and items, all constructed of Tasmanian timbers, and by the most notable Tasmanian crafts-people and artisans.



Display room at the Design Centre.

Our next stop was at the School of Fine Furniture Making where we were told about the work of the school and mingled with the various student groups as they worked on study projects.



No Terry, your too old to be a student.

After a bus-lunch at Basin Reserve we visited Rex Heathcoate's furniture showroom and were shown through his workshop.

The outstanding 'trifecta' of the day was: (a) the extremely high standards of design and craftsmanship, (b) the high quality of the material used, and (c) the training of the next generation who will carry on those fine and now very rare skills—a winning combination rarely witnessed today in the timber industry—all within walking distance of each other.



Rex Heathcoate's furniture showroom.

Blackwood tour

At 8 am on Wednesday we departed under cloudy skies for Smithton on the coast of north western Tasmania where we picked up Sue Jennings and Tony Scott from Forestry Tasmania and headed into the Tarkine Forest, an expansive wet lowland stretching to the west coast. Scattered areas have been progressively harvested, then clearfelled and planted back to stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*). This stringybark is widespread throughout Tasmania to an altitude of 600 metres and varies from small stunted trees on coastal heath to tall trees in the wet sclerophyll forests. However, the current interest is in the high returning specialist blackwood timber.

We entered the recently harvested Togari 024D coupe which was progressively harvested and clearfelled during 2009-2010. We inspected a monitored section where recovery is being documented. This site was clearfelled and burnt in 2010 and aerial seeded with $\frac{1}{2}$ rate *E. obliqua* seed. In this coupe, the blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) regenerates from self seeding, and following fire.



Clearfelled and burned Togari 024D coupe—not a pretty sight.

Seedlings of a third species were very evident—that of dogwood (*Pomaderris apetala*), a naturally seeded primary species which is fast growing and forces the blackwood and the eucalypts to grow longer stems by way of competition for light. We were able to identify the three seedling types in the marshy soil. Each coupe is fenced to keep out grazing animals.



Growth after 3-5 years.

We then entered Togari 021B, a 20 year old fenced coupe, where at 15 years of age it was thinned to contain 1000 blackwood and 2000 eucalypts per hectare.

On this site a trial run by Sue Jennings is to establish the best conditions for blackwood development from this stage on. In this area of the coupe the eucalypts were thinned at four levels: 2000, 1500, 1000 and 100 stems per hectare. The aim is to establish faster growth of the blackwoods, through less



Sue shows us her trial to establish the best eucalypt/blackwood density for best blackwood production.

competition from the eucalypts and then relate this to the quality and productivity of the resulting blackwood harvested at around 60-70 years at a density of 100 eucalypts and 200 blackwood per hectare.

Dismal Swamp

After lunch we entered Dismal Swamp, a 600 hectare 'polje' or sinkhole, formed through the collapse of the surface as a result of underground caves and streams formed as the natural dolomite rock was dissolved by acidic water over thousands of years. The swamp is at the bottom of the sinkhole—and so are magnificent specimens of many unique Tasmanian trees and plant species—including blackwood. It has no river flowing in or out of it, thus the continuous acidity created by organic decomposition is not removed.

Blackwood usually requires fire to initiate germination, so should not be present, because of the absence of fire. However in this swamp are burrowing crayfish that continually churn the damp soil to provide ideal growing conditions—so its secret is in the company it keeps. Blackwood seed can remain viable for up to a century.

Blackwood was harvested here from the 1930s to 1975 when it became part of the State Forest and in 1978, 100 acres were declared a Nature Reserve.

5.

The species we observed in Dismal Swamp included: stringybark (*E. obliqua*), myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*); sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*), native plum (*Cenarrhenes nitida*), native laurel (*Ariopterus glandulosus*), swamp paper bark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) musk (*Olearia argophylla*), Brooker's gum (*E. brookeriana*)—and, blackwood—the largest in the world—of course.



This 200 year old blackwood has a stem diameter of 1 metre and is 25 metres to the first branch with a total height of 41 metres.

These sinkhole blackwoods have had no nurse trees, except perhaps myrtle, which has good shading, but there are no eucalypts where they grow in the bottom of the sinkhole. Nurse trees are essential in developing good height to first branching. The sinkhole also occasionally floods to a depth of two metres.

This visit was enchanting and is well worth a more relaxed visit in the future, just to drink in all the different features that have gone into its creation, and that of the species that are found here.

Marketing Tasmanian Timbers

Thursday saw us again on the bus to Smithton, but this time to meet Stuart Swanson who was running a 'one man show' at Smithton for Tasmanian Forestry's Island Specialty Timbers.



Smithton's Tasmanian Forestry's Island Specialty Timbers.

Then it was on to Britton Bros timber and veneer slicing mills. After lunch we visited Wild Wood Gallery and Timber Warehouse at Forest, south of Stanley, which displayed a wide range of timber in craft quantities as well as finished work. Their main emphasis is on Huon pine and I believe they do have stands at the Working With Wood Shows. We then visited Cockatoo Timbers just south of Stanley.

A bit of business

Friday was mostly taken up by the Annual General Meeting and the first half of the enormous Wood Auction, but a highlight for me was the handing over ceremony for the change-over of the AustralAsian Regional Trustee's position from Ian McLaughlin to Brian Davis. Ian has been a wonderful ambassador for IWCS in this region and membership grew under his leadership. Thanks Ian.

In accepting the Batton, Brian indicated that he is interested in visiting as many areas and meeting as many members as he possibly can during his three years as Trustee.

One point I have not made mention of is that on several evenings we had a speaker address us on interesting topics. We heard about guitar making from Paul Mineur on Tuesday, Murray Jessup from Forestry on the Timber Chain of Custody on Thursday. Dr Kathy Allen from Monash University at the CSIRO's faculty at the University of Tasmania spoke to us on Dendrochronology on Friday, and IWCS Trevor Semmens held us captivated with his hobby of collecting wood planes on Saturday—properly called Rhykenology.



A friendly shake and transfer of the Batton for the Trustees change-over.

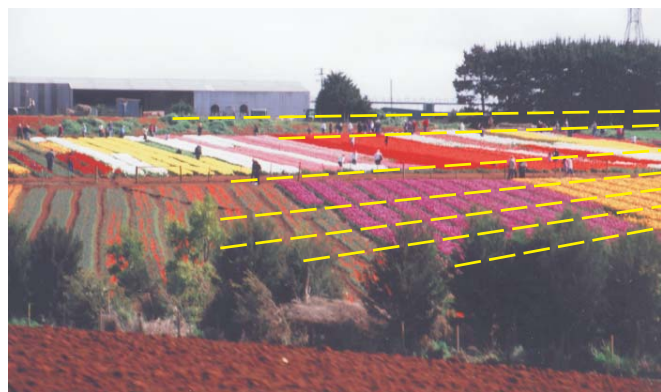
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In a field of tulips

Saturday was a special day as we boarded the bus for the last time to visit firstly the Ulverstone Woodworkers Guild Exhibition, then lunch at Wynyard where the locals were celebrating the Wynyard Tulip Festival. However before going into the fields we took time to visit the Wynyard Motor Museum, with its famous exhibition of old cars.

Now the tulip fields. I would have to say that this was one of the highlights of our trip and to have this as the last stop on our last outing day was the icing on the cake—literally. To see commercial tulips in such a profusion of floral colour was eye-opening.

It's hard to describe without colour, but I will have to ask you to imagine that all the different tones of black and white that you see on the page below and to the right, all represent different colours—how many can you count? Well, in real colour I lost count somewhere around 48. Who said all the tulips are in Amsterdam?



And it's only a short drive to the Table Cape Lighthouse and it got me thinking. Hey! if they turned that light around they could have a great *Phantom of the Flowers* night show here—drinking Champers from the open top of a double-decker London bus.

Thanks very much to the organisers for running a topical and interesting meeting held on such an amazing island—see you all next year on an equally amazing island, New Zealand—be there.



Christmas Reading suggestions

from Morris Lake

Here are some recommendations for Christmas presents. The first two are from Keith Towe. Thanks Keith.

- **100 Woods (2006) by Peter Bishop. Crowood Press. ISBN 1861268471 \$76.** Mostly non-Australian species, well laid out, good sized colour photos of each timber. Very helpful for new IWCS members.
- **Wood in Australia (2005) Second Edition. Keith Bootle, 452 pages. McGraw Hill ISBN 0 074 71312 4. now \$101.50.** Some might say getting too expensive, but it is hard to surpass a good reference book in any discipline.

The remainder have a distinctive Tasmanian flavour which is probably topical right now and could be useful to supply just a little more information to your newly collected species.

- **Into the Woods, the battle for Tasmania's forests (New Oct 2010) Anna Krien. 302 pages. Black Inc. Vic. ISBN 9781863954877. \$30.** An easy and compelling read which covers, in a personal way, all

the interest groups of the Tasmanian timber industry. Its VERY revealing and having read it immediately prior to being in Tasmania. I could detect the industry 'play' for myself. I couldn't believe this possible in Australia.

- **A Guide to Flowers and Plants of Tasmania, Fourth Edition (2008). Launceston Field Naturalists Club. 176 pages. Reed New Holland. ISBN 9781877069475. \$30.** Beautifully photographed and presented and well indexed. Each species has a photograph and are grouped by vegetation type, e.g. montane, rainforest, etc. Then starting with trees, then shrubs, etc, so its very easy to find what you want. If you are in the rainforest then you only have to look in that section, for example. One of the best.
- **The Huon Pine story (2004). Kerr, Garry J. and Harry McDermott. 299 pages. Mainsail Books, Portland. ISBN 0 95779170 4. AU\$60.** A fascinating history of Tasmania's Huon pine and industry written by pinner descendants. A truly wonderful read.