

08-98576045 *June*  
20 August 03

I am Daniel Drage RMB 513 - Mt Barker 6324. WA.

My great grandparents arrived in Mt Barker WA district in 1842, and since then, the descendants have farmed in this district.

In the 18th and early 19th century, up to about 1940's, they with many other farmers, ran stock all through the bush, between Tentarden and coast, and from Hay river in the East, to the Kent river in the West.

They shepherded sheep, run horses and cattle in large numbers all through this area. Plus in the summer months, they would take their cattle to the coast, for the summer, bring them back about April-May, then continue to run them in the virgin Bush.

There was very little cleared pasture areas, which they used only for hay crops to cut chaff for the working horses, and some areas for orchards.

The bush was that open, on picnic days they would <sup>have</sup> horse & buggy races through the virgin bush for fun.

In the late 1800's, the Muir family were at Forest Hill, they used to drive their cattle along with other farmers to Parry's inlet and Quarrum coast, for the summer months, followed by a chuck wagon pulled by two or more horses, straight through the bush. Which shows how open the bush was in those days.

In the 1940's bulldozers came and things changed, more clearing, less stock out in the bush. Also at this time was broke out taking men out of the area.

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Since then we have buggered it-up, we as a community, have neglected the bush, its got thicker to the stage, that the once open flats, which were burnt every three years, so stock would feed on them, and keep them open, along with wild life, big + small to feed, and dry out after heavy rains. The high ground was patch burnt about every six to seven years. Now since this practise has finished, the flats have got that thick, there is very little baronia and other plants, like orchids and butter cups, just to mention a few. Our daughter Jay Wilson of Tas. is sending a letter about flower picking she had done in this area. I believe the cause of this is the bush was just left, so we had wild fires. One that springs to mind was in 1961, in January a fire escaped from development fire at Redmond, and travelled in 110 to 114 degrees for about two weeks, ~~the~~ till farmers and brigades heached the fire off on some two year old bush, south off Rocky gully. The fire travelled about 10 miles on the north side, and burnt to near the farms down south. The fire burnt all the under growth and up to the tops of the tallest trees, it burnt that clean, you could play marbles any where in the bush, and was the start of the decline of the bush. There is <sup>evidence</sup> ~~evidence~~ of this damage of dead tops at the Walpole Tree top walk. There were many such fires over the next 20 years burning in the same-month, all too hot, you fly over this area, you can still see the damage done by the 1961 fire, by all the dead tree tops.

In about 1970 - Bill Frost, past Plantagenet Shire President, fought hard and long with people like Frank Cambell, to get prescribed burning plans for this area, they succeeded, which was a relief for all concerned. They call it DBK burning system, the area was from Narrabup in the east, Nornabup Rocky Gully road in the west, Muis Highway to the north and farms along coastal fringe in the south. This works very well with farmers brigades and Bush Fire Board and Calm all working together, till Calm had more reel tape thrown at them and less staff. What staff was left, had one hand tied behind their back with reel tape, for instance they have to do, about 40 different checks before lighting a fire, which ties the officer up. People working through the reel tape, instead of getting on with controlled burnes, we need some guide lines but, not forty.

Now we've got to the stage, that the bush is not burnt often enough, and we are back to having wild fires, so we have done a full circle.

Every one points the finger & blames Calm, because this is easy and shifts the blame off the rest of us. But I see this as a community problem, so to overcome it, we should all pull out bloody heads in, help Calm do the job, they have been given. Because they are the only ones with the experience and with more staff and money and less reel tape the problem will disappear.

I believe, we have to change the way we burn the bush, and try to thin the bush out, by burning of a right time and a little bit drier. I know it will be harder, and more expensive but if we don't the big trees will all die from lack of water, because the under growth is using all the 'rainfall' before it can soak into the roots of the big trees. We are trying to have a rain forest, without the rain. I believe our rainfall, can only service about 50 mature trees, to the acre, now we have, about, 100 mature plus 500 small trees plus the undergrowth. The bush is changing from garrak to Redgum, so in about 50 years time, we will have a Redgum Forest, which has very little value, 10% are good, the rest has too much gum and no commercial value.

Another example, is Blue Lake, in about 1930, it was a dry year. Farmers used it, for watering stock, it was, the only permanent water left in the area. Then in early 1950's Denbarker War services Settlement, started clearing blocks, and they carted water for the settlement, the only reliable, and abundant of fresh water around. Now since 1985, the Blue Lake has been dry, more times than has had <sup>water</sup> in over summer. All because of the bush is getting thicker, and stopping run off.

I believe it takes about 50 years to change the bush. The first 100 years were all right, the next 50 years, it got thicker, through having wild fires we had in the 1970s this is what has destroyed our

bush. Kangaroos and Emus come out onto farms for feed and the small animals, that Calm are fluttering in this area are struggling, -this would be easy if the bush was as open, as it was back in the 1930s. Back in the depression years many families, made a living out of catching possums and kangaroos for their skins. The practise was to burn patches and set snares around the edge of the burn and catch them, as they came out to feed.

Not only is the thick bush a disadvantage for the wild life, the Denmark River is deteriorating, at an alarming rate. Back in the sixties and seventies, there were about 3 or 4 fresh water springs in the river from top to bottom. Now the salt water has risen and the river is full of salt water, in the summer months. If we don't get water flowing down it again, Denmark will be out of water, Wilson Inlet will be a bog hole. Governments will cut a channel through the sand hills to clean up the Inlet, which will destroy this marvelous fishing area for tourists.

There is lots of money for land care, but it is only for farming land, it should be looking at places like Denmark River and clean it up, its a waste of time cleaning up farming land and letting the Denmark river destroy itself.

There is more to manage this bush than just prescribed burning, we have to manage the water reserves as well.

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I believe we should have Calm officers educate kids at schools, about prescribed burning, so they understand, why the bush has to be controlled burnt, and they may take it-up as a career. Have trainee burns like the one that was in conjunction with Calm Walpole and young brigade members in 1991-92 five seasons all present at this course changed their ways and could, see Calm's way, was better than cooking the bush. Today, a lot of brigade members still-think, to have a hot fire and rip the guts out of the bush they think, they have done their job and made it safe, not knowing they are destroying the bush and every thing in it.

There are some blokes in Calm like-Peter Bidwell and Greg Mair that have the respect of the public, and are ideal people for this job, they are good people communicators. Plus-Meto Smith Calm use him as a trainer for their blokes plus John Evans both these last two blokes know their jobs and have retired, because of frustrations of not being able to do the job that is required, and they know so well.

There are three ways, we can take action, to solve this problem.

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- ① Leave the bush to get thicker, with no burning, and get a fire <sup>like</sup> dwelling up in 1961 and burn all the towns and farms out like the fire in Canberra did, and this, will happen.
- ② Help get Calm back on track, and get us all working together, stop pointing the finger, and blaming everyone else. Use a bit of common sense, plus using the experience of Calm personnel, to prevent a disaster.
- ③ If all else fails, we can all drop down on our knees, and look beyond the clouds, and ask the -man, if he can get all the arsonists and lightning strikes, in the middle of winter, where they cannot do any harm.