

Uninnocent Landscapes with Ian Terry

A cultural landscape learning and a garden history journey.

The Tasmanian Garden History enthusiasts ventured to the Central Plateau region to enjoy a special visit which encompassed botanics, indigenous history, geology and local knowledge.

The journey commenced at Ratho Farm where offerings were made of the most delicious scones, jam and cream.

And with expert interpretation, Ian Terry educated our party on the land grant system in Van Diemen's Land, George Augustus Robinson, The Bigge Enquiry and the frontier conflict with the indigenous people.

Bothwell was bathed in morning sunshine as our group motored north towards the Abyssinian Hills where we imagined the large indigenous parklands, newly stocked with sheep which were herded by nervous stockkeepers. It was open eucalypt basalt country, prime hunting land for wallaby.

Our group travelled past the rolling hills near old Sherwood and Montacute while absorbed in stories about early landowner complaints to The Aboriginal Committee 1831.

And Ian Terry had numerous stories.

One story included the surveyor, Meehan. He was pegging a specific area of land for a grant at Pelham. Apparently, a family group of angry Palawa approached him and pulled out the survey sticks. We asked ourselves the intention of the survey on Palawa land. Or should we consider the Palawa homeland and hunting grounds in this incident. Was there a justified bewilderment when the intruder placed pegs in the Palawa garden landscape?

Similarly, we enjoyed stories from John Fowler, who shared his extensive local knowledge with our enthusiastic group.

As the altitude changed so did the landscape and thus the journey with A.G. Robinson and his party. As we motored along, we were gathering elevation and we left the basalt flows, we travelled westwards towards the River Derwent higher rainfall areas.



John Fowler mused “rain doesn’t like to get its feet wet and therefore won’t cross the River Derwent”. He is the keeper of so many interesting local tales. Similarly, “as one travels east after crossing The Derwent, the rainfall is said to decrease “an inch a mile”.

As the journey continued, we were treated with Ian Terry tales about indigenous family life including the Aboriginal village which was found with art work inside, stone artefacts and emu bones.

And on through the *Eucalyptus viminalis* and the hydro towns. Pipelines and lakes. Past “the old road to the west coast”. And on to Cockatoo Hills.

Cockatoo Hills is truly amazing.

The owners and manager of Cockatoo Hills (in cooperation with various organizations and researchers) have undertaken a program for the land which includes cultural awareness, science and land management. Thus, restoration of the indigenous landscape.

The landscape includes rolling hill grasslands, and copses of *Eucalyptus delegatensis*. subspecies *tasmaniensis* or Stringybark gums. The copses are dotted through the landscape and the *E. delegatensis* are huge. Ian Terry assured us that the trees would have been present as A.G. Robinson wandered through the area.

The present landscape at Cockatoo Hills is one of the best places in Tasmania to gain an understanding of the island’s landscape prior to colonization.

Leaving the grasslands, Ian Terry’s group noted The Five Rivers Reserve. It was in this area that the last 26 survivors of The Big River and Oyster Bay people allowed Robinson to meet them on 31 December 1831.

And onwards with fondly told stories of The Skittleball Plains, snow drifts 15 feet deep, rabbits, tussock country and accommodation paddocks for droving mobs of livestock. Not to forget Arthur Neal, a local living on The Skittleball Plain, and Miena and Murderers Hill, and the mayflies at The Shannon Rise.

All the while, the most interesting discussion circled around The Wayalinah. The Miena cider gum *E. gunnii* subsp. *divaricata*.

Wayalinah is an ancient tree and is culturally significant to the indigenous people. It has been called “the elder in the landscape”.

It’s a large and beautiful weeping eucalypt. Majestic and magnificent.



Found up to 1050m above sea level, at exposed edges of treeless flats or frozen hollows, the cider gum grows. It likes cold feet, frost prone soil and cold highland winds. Wayalinah is a tree which supports an impressive degree of biodiversity and plant life. It is a fringe dweller which can withstand harsh brutal conditions. And yet this tree has warmed many Aboriginal hearts by producing an intoxicating syrup. There were large gatherings over thousands of years in the environs of these trees.

The Steppes is an apt name as one travels in steps off The Central Plateau and through areas forested with *Eucalyptus rodwayi*, stepping down Bakers Tier and again down The Shannon Tier before passing The Weasel Plains where Robinson noted “gum trees dying off”.

The Clyde Hotel proved a poignant finale as we all paused to imagine a final indigenous corroboree, January 5 1832. Members of the remaining tribes in cultural unison immediately prior to The First Nations peoples being exiled to offshore detention.

Footnote. Cattle ramp clamps AGHS anthophiles *
Alas it was true.