

Forest Education Foundation

# National Forest Learning Centre

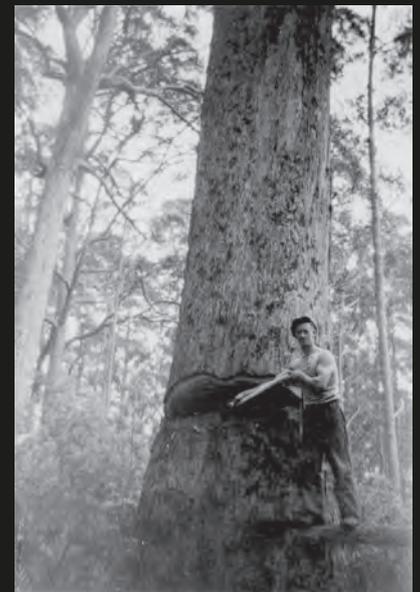
The stories behind our trees

## Hollybank Forest - A brief history



### Hollybank

The Hollybank Forest Reserve is located 21 kilometres from the centre of Launceston just off the Lilydale road. The reserve covers an area of 140 hectares and since July 1977 has been managed by Forestry Tasmania as a recreational reserve. Hollybank's European history dates from the early 1850s when William Tyson and William Grubb first purchased 250 hectares of densely forested land. Since then it was a source of fine timber, was cleared for farming, became the site of a failed ash plantation venture, became a forest reserve and is now the site of a Treetops Adventure tourism experience.



## Hollybank 1854

The history of the Hollybank area is as unclear as the faded copperplate title deeds but it seems the area first belonged to William Tyson and William Dawson Grubb. The grant deed covers 240 hectares purchased on 16 February 1854, making it one of the oldest land grants in the Underwood area. William Tyson (1804-1885) was a carpenter and William Grubb (1819-1879) was a Launceston solicitor with considerable interests in land in northern Tasmania.

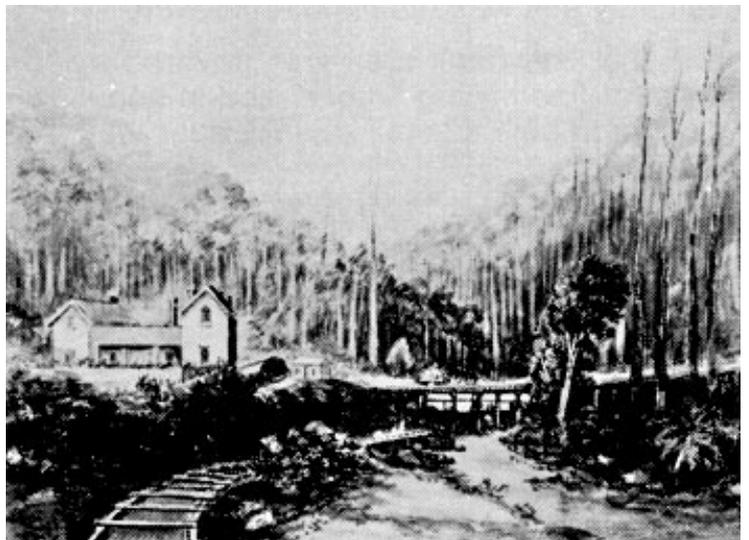
The land in the Hollybank area was covered by 'one dense forest of fine milling timber' and in 1854 Grubb and Tyson built a water-powered sawmill near the Pipers River, the first power-driven mill in northern Tasmania, and one of only three operating in the state. It was one of the largest industrial concerns of its time in Tasmania and the first nucleus of permanent occupation in the huge forested tracts of the region. At this stage the Tasmanian timber industry was booming, fuelled by the Victorian gold rush and its demand for timber.

The free settlers list for 1854 shows James Crabtree (29), his wife Ellen, his uncle William Crabtree (29) and wife Jane arrived in Van Diemen's Land on the ship Juno from England. Both men are described on the passenger list as 'mill sawyer men' and William Crabtree was the first mill manager. It is thought the men brought the American machinery for the mill on the ship with them, along with 20 workmen. William Crabtree is thought to have been the first permanent resident of Underwood, living in a hut near the mill.

The mill prospered and in 1855 an Act of Parliament allowed Grubb and Tyson to build a 'horse drawn tramway' eight miles (13 kilometres) long from Pipers River to Mowbray. The wooden track has disappeared but evidence can still be seen of the tramway and the stone walls. The tram took the timber out of the rough country to market and brought back supplies for mill workers and settlers in the area.

**This image by Fredrick Strange, a well-known convict artist in Van Diemen's Land between 1838 and 1859, supposedly depicts the house near the Grub and Tyson mill. (According to written records, the house was much less grand.) The beginning of the water race carrying water to the mill to drive the water wheel can be seen in the foreground.**

Source: Hollybank 1850s - 1980s, Hollybank Forest Reserve; Forestry Commission, Tasmania



## Waste Lands Acts 1858

In 1858 the government introduced the first of a series of Waste Lands Acts which, in the wake of population losses to the Victorian gold rushes, were designed to encourage the farm settlement of large areas of inaccessible, high rainfall and heavily timbered country, particularly in the north-west and north-east of Tasmania. Free settlers, often poor and with no farming experience, were encouraged to become farmers and clear the forests. The Grub and Tyson tramway provided the first access for settlers into this area.

The mill continued until 1869 when declining timber prices and the fact that accessible surrounding timber had been cut out forced it to close. In addition, much timber was wasted as settlers ringbarked forests to clear the land in order to gain assistance under the Waste Lands Acts which regarded the forests as an impediment to progress.

In 1886 Crabtree sold Hollybank and 61 hectares to William Orr for 20 pounds. Farming continued and a cricket pitch was built to accommodate the main sporting activity of the time. William Orr (34), his wife Elizabeth (30) and children John (6), Elizabeth (4), Thomas (2) and Catherine (few weeks old) had arrived in Victoria as 'unassisted passenger inwards' in December 1886 on the ship Ligoria from London. The Orr family continued to farm the land until William Orr's death in 1901 but his widow Elizabeth was registered as owner/occupier on the 61 hectares valued at 20 pounds in 1903. Orr also raised stock on the land but little evidence of farming remains except stone fences and the imported trees.



**The second Hollybank homestead of William Orr as it was in the 1930s.**

Source: Hollybank 1850s - 1980s, Hollybank Forest Reserve; Forestry Commission, Tasmania



**William and Elizabeth Orr**

Source: Hollybank 1850s - 1980s, Hollybank Forest Reserve; Forestry Commission, Tasmania

## A Grand Plan 1933

The next official mention of Hollybank comes in 1933 when a company called Ash Plantation Limited proposed acquisition of the property containing '170 acres, of which 40 acres, first class land, is under plough, 20 acres grassed and partly cleared, and the balance more heavily timbered, but can be inexpensively cleared and planted. There are two homesteads on the property.' Hollybank was sold to the company for 750 pounds (\$19,500 in today's value).

Ash Plantation Limited was formed in 1933 to supply the Alexander Patent Racquet Company Ltd of Newstead with English ash and cricket bat willow 'to buy, sell, manufacture (sic) and deal in all kinds of articles and things which may be required by persons dealing with the Company'. In reality, this meant tennis racquets and cricket bats. Ash Plantations Ltd produced, for the day, a very glossy prospectus containing several photographs of distinguished gentlemen standing next to giant trees on the Hollybank property to illustrate the growing powers of the site.

Mr Alexander North F.R.A.I.A., the architect of St Johns Church in Launceston, heartily endorsed the prospectus with his opinion (Mr North was a shareholder) 'I consider this property to be almost ideal for the growth of English Ash Trees ... I venture to predict that if ever a plantation is set out the sheltered valleys will grow ash trees of gigantic proportions.' The prospectus also contained detailed estimations of capital and profits for the company. 'Basing our calculations on these actual results, (locally grown trees and current values) EACH ACRE of the plantations would be worth 5600 pounds (\$145,600 in today's values)!'

The venture proceeded and over the next seven years 109,200 ash trees were planted over 78 acres. Eight hundred Corsican pines were also planted in 1935 and experimental plots of larch, Douglas fir, Californian redwood and western hemlock were also planted. These trees form the unique arboretum and copses that can still be seen, along with the imported varieties established by the first, presumably homesick, settlers.

Towards the end of 1940 there was concern expressed over the slow rate of growth of the trees. Various analyses of the soil were made over the next few years and alternative ash species were interplanted in an attempt to supplement growth. These seedlings were obtained from the Perth Nursery. Costs continued to rise and in 1950 it was decided to abandon the project, no racquets were ever made, the venture failing before any timber could be harvested.



## Exotic and native trees 1953

In 1953 an appeal was made to the Forestry Commission to take over the property and in April 1955 the commission purchased it for 2809 pounds (\$22,500 in today's values). In 1958 the remaining buildings were demolished and maintenance continued with thinnings, fence building and further plantings.

During the 1980s the realignment of the main Lilydale road resulted in a section of the reserve being located on the opposite side of the road. A block on the north-eastern end of the property was purchased for the purpose of providing a better buffer for the reserve and the reserve totalled 140 hectares in 1983.

Many infrastructure developments occurred during the 1980s to better enhance the recreational qualities of the reserve. A large chalet was constructed from King Billy pine and celery top. The wood was sourced as salvage wood from Lake Burberry on the west coast of Tasmania. It was transported in pole form and lathed at Salisbury's in Launceston, as the company was the only one in the state that had a lathe large enough to mill the timber. The timber was turned into billets in preparation for shingle splitting for the roof of the chalet.

Council regulations required that the pit toilets be upgraded to a sewerage system and consequently a road was constructed to the closest water source at Butcher's Creek. Water was pumped from there to service the toilets. Other improvements for general beautification included the construction of an archway near the entrance to Hollybank and a bus-parking bay. The avenue was closed and a new ring road was constructed which better suited access to the various sections of the reserve.



# Education, interpretation, industry training and tourism - 1980's to present

In 1987 the University of Tasmania designed and constructed an education centre to present an image of a tranquil place of learning and observation as well as providing some forest interpretation to visitors.



**The chalet and education centre and the store shed constructed in the 1980s**

Source: Forest Education Foundation

In the early 1990's Forestry Tasmania embarked upon a plan to create a 'demonstration forest'. Utilising the native forest surrounding the recreation area and arboretum, smaller coupes were surveyed and sectioned off with specific management practices applied to them. A path was constructed through the coupes to enable visitors to learn about Tasmania's forests, the various forest types including wet and dry sclerophyll forest, species and their reaction to ecological change and harvesting methods. Forestry Tasmania acquired the assistance of unemployed youth through the Tasmanian Government's LEAP scheme to form tracks through the forest.

The Hollybank Forestry Training Centre was constructed with the aim of providing training and certification to people working in the forest industry and related vocations. A heavy vehicle training area also complemented the centre and many forest industry employees gained their credentials from the centre. The introduction of onsite competency-based training in many workplaces resulted in less use of the centre eventually closing in 2004.

In 2007 Forestry Tasmania, in conjunction with Australian Canopy Tours opened the Hollybank Treetops Adventure experience. This experience takes people on a three-hour adventure by flying fox through the treetops and above the Pipers River in the Hollybank reserve.

**Hollybank - a place of continual change, what will we see in another 100 years or so?**

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