

SAGAS OF EARLY DAYS

BY WINDSOR LANG.

“THE COMING OF THE CEDAR-GETTERS”

IN his reminiscences, the late Mr. James Ainsworth stated that as late as 1847, the river from Ballina upwards was just as nature had planted it. Forest and scrub crowded unbrokenly to the water's edges on each side, offering a foliage that was unsurpassed in its semi-tropical beauty. The more open country where Lismore now stands on the North Arm of the river was then a "squattage" occupied by Mr. William Wilson, who had arrived there in February, 1844, by way of the Richmond crossing. Tomki station, owned by Mr. Clark Irving, extended down over and below the arm on the left bank of the river. (Mr. Ainsworth evidently indicated the South Arm).

From this East Ballina settlement sallied forth the first cedar-getters on this river. The cedar trees growing beside the banks of North Creek first attracted attention, and I understand that the first cedar tree cut for timber was felled at Prospect, North Creek. Soon the sound of the axe rang through the scrub, and out over the waters of North Creek, and accompanied by the sibilant swish and buzz of the cross-cut saw, eating its way into the rich red timber, awoke fresh echoes in the bush—and a campaign was

the bush—and a campaign was launched that continued down to the late “eighties” or early “nineties”.

In course of time great trees skilfully directed by expert axe-men leaned over and fell to the ground, tearing others down in their fall, and spraying the ground with beautiful vines, stag-horn ferns, and orchids.

Transport of the logs to the depot at Shaw's Bay was an easy matter compared with the transport difficulties encountered in later years when the cutters had to go further afield and away from river bank frontages, and resource-challenging difficulties did crop up in increasing numbers as the years progressed.

The branches were cut away—many of these, however, were so well developed that they were dealt with for their timber-content—the log was trimmed, and allowed to lie until it was fit for transport by being floated in the creek waters. At the appropriate time the logs were rolled over into the creek water, and guided down to East Ballina. A saw-pit was set up there at the spot occupied in later years by the houses used by the families of the crew of the pilot boat. Within a short period six such saw-pits were operating at this spot. A saw-pit was constructed thus. A pit was dug, and a platform consisting of two stout logs was placed over it.

Of two stout logs was placed over it. On to it the cedar log to be trimmed was rolled and levered. Two men were required to operate the cross-cut saw.

The pit was deep enough to permit of one man being able to work comfortably beneath the log stage, whilst another stood on the timber log on the platform. One man at each end of a long cross-cut saw worked it vertically between the two. A semi-

circular flitch was sawn from each of four sides leaving the desired squared log.

The first timber shipped from the river was cut into convenient flitches to permit of compact fitting and stowing into the necessarily cramped holds of the small sea-going craft. Previously I stated that two were needed for the manipulation of the cross-cut saw at the saw-pit. In each of two cases cited by the late Mr. James Ainsworth this necessity was disregarded, and the saw was worked by one man.

Mr. Tommy Chilcott, working alone at a saw-pit at Emigrant Creek, by brute strength levered a cumbersome log onto the platform, attached heavy iron wedges to the lower end of the saw and effectively worked the saw from the top. In a somewhat similar situation, Mr. George Cooper, at Bexhill, performed a parallel feat. In his

... performed a parallel feat. In his case he harnessed two boys to the bottom of the saw and allowed their weight to counter his push and draw of the saw.

Conditions forced the cedar-getters to develop initiative. During the first five years Steve King, Joe McGuire, Tommy Chilcott, Sandy Golding, Tom Wood, Bill Jarvis, Joe White, John Skennar, Thomas and James Ainsworth were amongst the names mentioned by Mr. James Ainsworth of men settled at East Ballina. He has left no account of the women folk who were there, beyond indicating that he, as a boy five years of age, arrived with his father and his family in 1847. Other women folk were there, but unfortunately I have no record from which I can list the names.

Axes, saws, maul and wedges as tools of their calling called for careful attention by the cutters. Whet-stones and grind-stones were in constant use. Developing a keen cutting-edge on the axe, and correct setting and sharpening of the cross-cut saw demanded the skill of a craftsman. As time went by, although each cutter succeeded in displaying some ability in the care of tools, a natural division of labour developed within the community, and the tool-sharpener and smith became specialists.

Mr. Thomas Ainsworth and his sons were the best-building crafts-

sons were the boat-building craftsmen, as well as the carpenters in that little community. As time progressed they were fully occupied in coping with the increasing demand for craft for use on the river waters traversed by the cedar-getters. Some of these boats were utilised as temporary living quarters by the cutters whilst they were working away from their home base.

Incidentally, in 1843, Mr. William Yabsley and his family settled at Ballina after overlanding from the Clarence. The Yabsley family played a leading role in the subsequent progress and development of Richmond River. Mr. Yabsley remained at Ballina for five years, after which he moved to Coraki. Whilst at Ballina he built the schooner "Pelican."

During the first few days of their labour the cedar-getters had been able to return to their homeroofs each night. As the tree-finds lured them further afield, the distance between home and the field of their labour meant that too much time would be wasted if they returned to their homes each night. So gradually the cutters drifted into staying away on the job for a week or longer. Later, these expeditions called for months of ab-

conditions called for months of absence on their part. Housewives, from the provision of snacks for the lunches of the first days, progressed to the work--and art--of making up rations that would carry their men over much longer periods.

During the months of roving absence of a later period, the cutters were obliged to depend on resources, other than their homes, for supplies to their commissariat department.

As the cedar trees on the banks of North Creek were thinned out, other centres of settlement sprang up. These were more moving camp areas than centres of established dwelling places. Such a settlement took place at Emigrant Creek. Henry Williams and Tom Brandon fixed their camps at Cumbarlun. In later years this locality was free-selected by Mr. George Topfer.

In quick succession camps were established at Duck Creek, Teven and Tintenbar. In 1851 Tintenbar ranked second only to Ballina. Charles Jarrett, John Skennar, Charles O'Neill, Dick Glascott, John Holmes, Phillins, James Ainsworth, Dick King, Steve King, Boyd McCurdy and Will Smith were among the settlers there. At Teven

Joe McGuire, Billy Rose, the Johnstons, and McCanns were camped. At Duck Creek were Billy Woollett, Manny Davis, P. Simpson, John Barnes, and Frank Morrish. Teven derived its name from the aboriginal word given to the Stinging-nettle tree.

Mention of the stinging tree reminds me that the irritating sting inflicted by the nettles on the leaves of this tree was but one of the many things from Nature's storehouse calculated to add to the cutter's burden. Blood-sucking leeches, scrub ticks, mosquitoes, ants of various varieties, snakes, other reptiles, as well as varied types of thorn-bushes conspired to discommode and harass the bush-timber-seekers.

Fortunately the cedar-workers discovered that the juice of the wild conjevoi lily, which lily always grew in close proximity to the stinging-nettle trees, proved to be the surest antidote to the irritating stings of the stinging nettles. Were he so unwise as to put the juicy conjevoi lily leaves into his mouth, the user would find himself suffering from a painful affliction to mouth, tongue and throat.

Whilst this work was proceeding at Duck Creek, Teven and Tintenbar, other cutters exploited the cedar growth lining the banks on

cedar growth lining the banks on the upper reaches of the river. At about the time that the cedar men had established their camps in the Emigrant Creek area, a camp was also established at Boat-harbour, beyond Lismore. Up to this time the cedar-getters had confined their efforts to working the cedar growths along the banks of the river and the creeks that provided, at all times, a flow of water sufficient to permit of the transport of logs by floating. When the most desired of the timber had been cut out of these areas the seekers had to explore and exploit the cedar yield of the "Big Scrub."

Now begins what I will term the second phase of the cedar-getting campaign. . . .

(To be continued).