



Timber Industry On Fraser Island

Andrew Petrie, a former superintendent of public works in the Brisbane penal colony, explored Fraser Island in 1842 and returned to Brisbane with glowing reports about the abundance and quality of timber that Fraser Island had to offer. At that time the Queensland timber industry was still in its infancy.

In 1860 Fraser Island was gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve, but this was revoked two years later when valuable timber reserves were identified by William Pettigrew, operator of Brisbane's first steam mill. After hearing Petrie's accounts of the Fraser Island timber Pettigrew surveyed the area with Petrie's son Tom.

William Pettigrew, in partnership with the Sims family, constructed a saw mill in Maryborough. Logging operations started on the island near Wanggoolba Creek in 1863 when John Yankee Jack Piggot, a brash, red-haired American timber cutter, harvested kauri pines. These pines were rafted up the Mary River to the Maryborough mill.

Timber getting and European settlement caused many conflicts with the Aboriginal people. The consequence of this was the tragic clubbing to death of John Piggot in 1864, which halted logging on the island until 1868 when the first bullocks were brought in to haul logs. Logging gradually spread across the rainforest pockets.

The first reforestation scheme in Queensland occurred on Fraser Island during 1883-84. This involved the planting of 28,000 kauri pine seedlings among heavy scrub. However, kauri pines are not shade tolerant and this planting was unsuccessful. Early silviculture practices were directed towards increasing the amount of softwood timbers.

In 1905 the first steam tramway was laid from Urang Creek to Poyungan and Bogimbah Scrub to haul logs to the coast. Tramways were laid on a south-east, north-west alignment to avoid crossing the sand dunes. The tracks were regularly shifted to where logging was most common at that time. Sparks from chimney stacks of the steam locomotives often caused bush fires.

In 1906 two of Maryborough's largest saw millers jointly purchased the right to log 4,300ha of Fraser Island. Tallowwood and blackbutt were the most highly sought after timber species. During 1908 the central part of Fraser Island was declared a Forestry Reserve and came under the control of the State Forest Service.

In 1913 the first State Government Forestry Camp was set up at Bogimbah Creek by Forest Ranger Walter Petrie. In 1915 the tramway was moved south from Bogimbah to Wanggoolba Creek and the forestry camp followed in 1916. Denser hardwoods were harvested and as these could not be floated to the mainland, the logs were punted on barges to the mills.



In 1918, NSW timber merchant Mr H. McKenzie, of Sydney, bought the rights to log 4000 hectares of land for 10 years and immediately began building the first and only timber mill on Fraser Island at the McKenzie's Jetty site, just south of Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village. McKenzie Ltd. was responsible for this mill, a jetty and a number of steam locomotives and tracks servicing its logging areas.

In 1920 the Forestry Camp was moved from the mouth of Wanggoolba Creek to Central Station where a busy community developed, with forestry workers living in tents, bark huts and houses. Vegetable gardens and fruit trees were planted, a school was built for the children and machinery sheds, stables and plant nurseries were established.

Prior to 1925, satinay trees had not been popular as they were regarded as too soft for hardwood and too hard for softwood; however the timber was found to be resistant to white ant, borer and fire, became popular for cabinet making. The close texture of the satinay produced a beautiful lustre when polished.

By 1925 most of the island was set aside as state forest and when the McKenzie operation was no longer economically viable, McKenzie sold out and the State Forest Service bought at auction a steam locomotive, tramlines and the jetty. The State Forest Service continued to operate the steam tramways until 1935.

The State Forest Service promoted the quality and regeneration of timbers through selective logging and the saving of superior seed trees. Trial plantings of various species and experiments regarding regeneration, burning, clearing and soil enrichment techniques were carried out with varying degrees of success.

During the 1980s the State Government came under increasing pressure from conservation groups to halt logging on Fraser Island. In 1990 a Commission of Inquiry was established to provide recommendations on the future use, conservation and management of Fraser Island. Mr Gerald E. (Tony) Fitzgerald was appointed Chairman of the Commission.

Commonly Logged Trees included:

Kauri Pine (*Agathis robusta*). A tall native pine, the kauri was heavily logged on Fraser Island and few examples of mature stands exist today. Kauri pine was used in panelling and furniture at the beginning of the 1900s.

Blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*). This native hardwood species is widespread on the island and is found growing on the fringe of rainforest areas and in places such as Lake McKenzie, north of Eli Creek and around Allom Lake. Blackbutt was used in general construction.

Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninhamii*). A pine native in the northern part of the island, the Hoop pine was introduced as plantations in the south and can be seen around Central Station. It was primarily used in panelling, plywood and for furniture.



Tallowood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*). A native hardwood species, the Tallowood is a rainforest eucalypt, used in house building for floor boards and exposed beams.

Satinay (*Syncarpia hillii*). The Satinay is easily recognisable on Fraser Island for its tall, straight stem with heavily fissured bark. The Satinay is best seen at Pile Valley and was used in cabinet marking and housing.