

Bunya Pine

Bunya Pine can grow to massive proportions and long dead stumps can supply nutrients to intertwined root systems of other nearby trees. Some Bunyas at the Bunya Mountains are 3mtrs ++ in diameter. Trees like this were originally growing elsewhere such as the Mary Valley and North Arm, Eumundi/Tewantin and up and down the Sunshine Coast Hinterland as far north as Maryborough and scatterings further north. Also, groves of Bunya trees have always been found near creeks and waterholes etc. These are believed to originate from indigenous camp sites after the Bunya gatherings (annual gathering of S.E. Qld. Nations at the time of Bunya nut harvest). Indigenous men would climb giant (& prickly) boles (trunk) to harvest cones before they drop to ensure a sweet and succulent nut. On the way back from the festival they would bury nuts at camp sites for later use, some of which would germinate and hence a Bunya grove was born. There are many of these isolated groves up and down the Sunshine Coast Hinterland.

After European settlement, Queensland Pine (Bunya & Hoop) was felled for cladding floors and roof framing and "butter boxes". Some restraint was attempted, when, on April 14, 1842 the Bunya tree was declared off limits to white man due to its importance to the indigenous people. However, this was largely ignored and in 1860 revoked by the first Government of Queensland. (Quote 1: Issued on behalf of Governor Gipp of New South Wales. It, having been represented to the Governor that a district exists in the northward Moreton Bay in which a fruit bearing tree abounds, called the Bunya or Banya Bunya and that the Aboriginies from considerable distances resort at certain times of the year to this district for the purpose of eating the fruit of the said tree. His Excellency is pleased to direct that no licences be granted for the occupation of any lands within the said district in which the Bunya or Banya Bunya tree is found and notice is hereby given that the several Crown Commissioners in the New England and Moreton Bay districts have been instructed to remove any person who may be in the unauthorised occupation of land whereon the said Bunya or Banya Bunya are to be found. His Excellency has also directed that no licences to cut timber be granted within the said districts. Unquote).

The natural stocks of Queensland Pine (mostly from S.E.Qld.) were decimated by the 1940's but this was anticipated by brilliant foresters like Swain and later W.D. Francis and others. With the help of returned soldiers from World War One, the Mary Valley timber plantations were born. After several experiments in the Cooloola and Mary Valley forestry areas, Hoop and Bunya were planted extensively; Bunya in the gully's because young Hoop Pine is frost sensitive. The original plantings of Bunya largely still exist, some over 80 years old. "Thank Goodness" because minimum age on select trees for the production of soundboards is 75 years. The older the better! Trees thousands of years old still grow in the Bunya Mountains, however, this is a sacred area to indigenous people and the Bunya tree on these mountains are totally protected. Even dead trees must be left to decay and no salvage is allowed.

Quarter sawn Bunya Pine has proved an excellent tonewood for soundboards and it is anticipated that its use will be worldwide and very popular. Indeed, in the last twelve or so years, Bunya soundboards have gone from unused to mainstream use in high quality stringed instruments and demand overseas grows. At this stage we don't export raw soundboards but as plantations achieve the required age and size, much more material will become available and requests from overseas guitar manufacturers can be fulfilled. In the meantime, local production is maintained and not threatened. Much lobbying by us has been done to Forestry and State Government to ensure this outcome. It is an ongoing battle as Hoop can not be grown in the gully's where mulching of young seedlings seems to eliminate frost damage and Hoop is more desirable to Forestry for marketing reasons and some difficulties with processing Bunya Pine exist in production at sawmills and planing sheds.

As I've mentioned, Bunya Pine has great importance to indigenous people. Bunya nuts were an important food source eaten mainly at Bunya gatherings. The Bunya tree belongs to an ancient group of trees of the Araucariaceae family of which Hoop, Norfolk Island Pine and Woolamai Pine are all part of. At one time this group of trees were dominant over the whole east coast and centre of Australia. Araucaria's existed and dominated up to 70 million years ago. About 30 million years ago a drastic climate cooling occurred, forcing the Araucaria's north. The next drastic change to forest cover occurs with the advent of fire, enhanced later by indigenous people and now Eucalypt reigns supreme in Australia. All Araucaria's are fire sensitive as are most rainforest species. Even with all these disadvantages, Araucaria's still managed to dominate much of the S.E. Qld. Dryer type rainforests. Along comes European settlement and true to form, white man decimated the forests for Queensland Pine (Araucaria). If it wasn't for enlightened men like E.H.Swain and W.D.Francis who planted large areas, we would now find Queensland Pine as rare as Red Cedar. However, there was a price to pay and that was the clearing of large tracts of S.E.Qld. To rainforests to plant (mainly in monoculture) Araucaria.

Note: Bunya Festival still takes place in S.E.Qld annually, usually around the time of a Bunya nut harvest, early in the year.

Queensland Maple

In the 1920's E.H. Swain (conservative of Qld. Forestry), realizing that Red Cedar had been largely cut out and plantations of this species was disastrous, due to tip moth infestation, set out to find a suitable replacement.

All the Flindersia species have proven to be quality timber and Maple (Flindersia Brayleyana) was chosen and marketed. Plantation trials proved successful and a planting of one Maple to two Hoop Pine trees in some areas of the Mary Valley was initiated. Also, some pure stand Maple plantations were planted. Parliament House used some of this resource and regrowth was continual and the best of these stands is very productive. Now, 50 years ++ has passed and harvesting of the 1:20 pots is occurring and it's these two resources that provides the sawlogs used for guitar making in Australia. In good sites these trees have been very successful, however, poorer south or southwest facing or stony sites have been a dismal failure, both from lack of light and rain shadow problems. On the whole, Queensland Maple prefers a northeast facing slope with good soil and plenty of moisture. Good growth rates can then be achieved either in mixed plots or pure stands. Maple in pure stands turns into a thicket of stems, however, this is typical of Queensland rainforests where the strongest trees dominate and the others "wait their chance". This "chance" can be helped by selective harvesting every few years. The mixed plantings are clear felled with the dominant Hoop Pines after approximately 50 years. On a good site Maple trees have achieved 700mm diameter in this time. Plenty big enough for the radial cut backs of guitars. Necks and sides can come from trees 400mm ++ diameter and Kirby Fine Timber have secured this resource to maintain supply of necks, backs and sides for Australian manufacturers and no interruption to supply is anticipated in the foreseeable future.

Queensland Maples strength to weight ratio, bending qualities and tonewood properties make it highly suitable for instrument making and demand overseas for raw product is high and largely ignored so the Australian market demand can be met. Unlike Bunya, it is unlikely that this will be exported due to the resource only being enough for the Australian market with no real change in sight.

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Queensland Maples natural growing range is from about Mackay north. However, plantations west of Gympie, which is several hundred kilometers south of its natural range, now supply most of demand in the musical instrument industry. Maple trees supply excellent sawlogs with cuts “sound”, almost adjacent to pith with sapwood and transition wood not susceptible to Lyctus borers. If God invented a sawlog, it was surely from a Maple tree.

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