

wood for the Burnie mill, with high quality logs harvested for local sawmills.

Surrey Hills consisted of a mixture of unevenly aged eucalypt, some with a forest floor of 'white grass' (*Poa* sp.), and areas of temperate rainforest. These forests are now represented in reserves that have been voluntarily set aside. Extensive stock grazing occurred on the grasslands and cattle from the black and red angus stud bred by the company farm won many awards at agricultural shows.

Considerable attention was given to the natural regeneration of eucalypts, but the cold climate of Surrey Hills often impeded success. Planting trials with coniferous species were carried out and planting of *Pinus radiata* commenced in 1950. This species contains long fibre, which is used to supplement the short-fibred eucalypt pulp in paper production. The company sought to ensure it had maximum use of its forest resource with little waste. It invested in sawmills, two hardboard mills, a plywood mill, and later a particle board mill. This diversity encouraged the company to form an afforestation company called Associated Forest Holdings (AFH) in 1957. Its plantation superintendent, Dirk de Bocr, experimented with several eucalypt species, namely *E. delegatensis*, *E. globulus* and *E. nitens*, with the last-named surviving best in the cold climate.

In 1975 regular plantings of *E. nitens* began with *E. globulus* at the lower elevations and the development of what is now known as the Surrey Hills Tree Farm Estate. During the 1980s eucalypt plantations increased from 2000 ha to 4000 ha a year during the 1990s. The last two decades saw North Broken Hill (NBH, now North Ltd) acquire APPM and AFH, with the establishment of a research centre and forest nursery expansion

at Ridgley. The projects complemented each other with AFH becoming the world leaders in genetically modifying *E. nitens* to improve cold tolerance and pulp fibre yield.

In 1988 the company proposed establishing a world-class pulpmill in northern Tasmania, but as agreement regarding acceptable operating guidelines could not be achieved, the project was abandoned. NBH later divested itself of its interests in the papermaking and merchant arm of APPM, and AFH became known as North Forest Products (NFP). In the absence of domestic markets for pulpwood and with plantations coming online for harvesting, an export hardwood woodchip business was developed in 1995 at Hampshire. The company also invested \$5 million in building a nursery at Somerset capable of producing 11 million seedlings a year.

The company provides direct employment for some 500 people with 1000 others indirectly benefiting. You may

IF they are classed as a crop what are they doing in the ground

describe Ridgley as a sea of plantations, but NFP views it as a fibre wonderland underpinning the economy of Burnie over the last 60 years. NFP's forest management expertise and its commitment to protect significant environmental and community values will continue to contribute to the prosperity of Burnie for many years to come. 40

North Forests Burnie administration office at Ridgley, 10 km south of Burnie

MARK SEATON



Harvesting timber from Surrey Hills during the 1950s with St Valentines Peak in the background

COURTESY OF THE ADVOCATE