Barossa Bushgardens

Place Plants People

**Government
of South Australia**

Northern and Yorke
Landscape Board

The Old Gum Tree

TheBarossaCouncil

In 2001, the Barossa Bushgardens (BBG) site was just a paddock with one single old gum tree. The circa 400 year old giant was in very bad shape, as stock, resting and grazing underneath, was effectively poisoning the tree with their droppings.

The area around the tree was then fenced off to protect the magnificent tree from any more damage and native vegetation planted underneath. The plantings were undertaken by children from schools around the Barossa, that are now adults and visit the BBG with their own children.

River Red Gums History

Eucalyptus camaldulensis

The wide distribution of the River Red Gum species is matched by the impressive size and shape of individual trees. Red gums may grow to a great age, as much as a thousand years old.

In 1832 Frederick Dehnhardt gave the name Eucalyptus camaldulensis to a forty foot Red Gum, he tended as head gardener, in the famous Italian garden of Francesco Ricciardi, Count of Camaldoli. Scientific precedence thus gave this distinctively Australian tree an Italian epithet, while botanists debated over its early appearance in that since vanished garden.

River Red Gums have been used, possibly for thousands of years, by Aboriginal and then European inhabitants. For example, they learned how to strip intact large sheets of bark and shape them while still green; Aboriginal families propping up the bark as the walls of wurleys or using them as shields and canoes.

Europeans fixed it in place as roofing. Many pioneers took shelter within the living walls of large old fire-hollowed trees and some adapted them as primitive houses for the initial years devoted to land clearing, farming or sheep herding.

'Herbig's tree', near Springton in South Australia, is preserved as the first home of the Silesian immigrant farmers Johann Herbig and his wife and two children from 1855 to 1860.

Red gums are perfectly adapted to the seasonal flood and trickle, typical of many Australian creeks and rivers.

The language of the original people of the Adelaide Plains, the Kaurna, reflect that major landscape feature - karra (red gum), karrawirra (red gum forest), karrauwirraparri(river of the red gum forest, which was renamed the River Torrens) and karraundo, a locality that is now Hindmarch, next to the Torrens.

Red gums continued to be felled and cut as railway sleepers until the early 1980s, when regulations over land clearence under the Planning Act of 1982 were introduced, followed by the Native Vegetation Act of 1985 (Susan Marsden, Historical introduction, John Dallwitz, Susan Marsden and Lyn Collins, Red Gum: crafts of necessity Jam Factory, Adelaide, 1989, pp 1-5).

River Red Gums Today

Today most communities view the surviving big Red Gums as a precious asset and there is an outcry when even one of them is felled. Remnant areas of red gums with native vegetation underneath are of high priority when protecting or revegetating, but even scattered trees in paddocks, should not be dismissed.

They are precious habitat and important stepping stones for wildlife to move across cleared landscapes. Linking remnants where possible with intact woodland or revegetation to connect stands of scattered trees is very important.

E. camaldulensis are some of the most valuable trees for providing habitat for a host of bird species, mammals and even reptiles. The base of Red Gums with their invariable smaller patches of shedding bark, host insects, beetles and spiders. Small white flowers, which mostly occur in summer, produce abundant pollen and nectar and are much sought after by different bird species and bees.