

TIMBER – A HISTORY

By the start of the 20th century timber harvesting and milling of native hardwood timber was an important industry throughout the district and until the 1939 bushfires, timber mills and camps had existed throughout the forest.

From 1916 onwards approximately 37 camps and timber mills were established in the Taggerty, Buxton, Marysville, Cambarville and Narbethong district alone. Timber was harvested out of the Blue and Black Ranges, Mount Margaret, Big River, and the Acheron Fall. However, many mills were lost in the 1939 bushfires and by 1995 most had ceased to operate.

Timber salvage operations continued for about 10 years and with new reserves being opened, the timber mills continued to provide much employment.

In 1979 the J.L. Gould Sawmills, which operated near Marysville and Buxton, expanded their operations and purchased the mill in Alexandra. When the '*green gold*' - the mountain ash regrowth from the 1939 bushfires - was ready for harvest some 40 years later, its value as a resource was recognised and it offered an exciting growth opportunity for the Victorian timber industry.

By now J.L. Gould Sawmills was operating green sawmills in both Marysville and Alexandra and a kiln dried process plant in Alexandra as well. At its height the J.L. Gould's Marysville sawmill employed some 50 people, but closed its operations in the late 1990's.

Between 1990 and 2002, the J.L. Gould Sawmills invested in new equipment and technology and were the largest employer in Alexandra, with some 90 people employed at the sawmill and another 100 employed in their forest operations.

In 2006 the J.L. Gould Sawmill was purchased by ITC Timber, which in turn sold it to Gunns Timber Products in 2009.

The 2009 the 'Black Saturday' bushfire destroyed the Bennett's Pine Mill in Narbethong as well as the Narbethong Timber Mill. Salvage logging of high value timber after the 2009 bushfires provided work for timber harvesting contractors and sawmills, with the timber being sent to Alexandra, Woodend, Orbost and Heyfield for processing. However, many jobs were lost when Gunns closed their Alexandra plant in December 2010, with the timber stored there taken to Heyfield for processing instead.

Timber harvesting still continues in the district to this day from both native and plantation forests.

(Source: Murrindindi Magic, Summer 2012)