

Lahey's Tramway, Canungra

Location

The tunnel is on the south western side and immediately below the road leading from Canungra to the Gold Coast; the northern entrance is close to a road junction on the outskirts of Canungra, just before the top of the climb. A gravelled road also leads from the town to a point above the southern entrance. GPS 28 deg 1 min 23 sec S 153 deg 10 min 15 sec E tunnel north portal and GPS 28 deg 1 min 31 sec S 153 deg 10 min 17 sec E tunnel south portal.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The recommended boundaries are from the northern end of the cutting leading to the northern entrance to the cemented rocks at the southern entrance and a distance of two metres either side of the tunnel wall or cutting side. This may need to be supplemented by protection from disturbance such as quarrying on a larger strip to protect the tunnel's integrity.

History

The Laheys operated at Tambourine in the 1890s. Hugh Mahony is credited with being the first man to seek cedar on Canungra Creek in the 1850s.¹

John Duncan told the Laheys of the valuable Canungra timber and on 2 October 1884 David rode over Tambourine Mountain to commence work on the mill which was to become the terminus of the largest private timber tramway operation in Queensland. Together they established a saw and planing mill on Portion 61, the firm providing small cottages for its workers. The site was leased from Robert Christie, beside what is now Christie Street, although nothing now remains of sawmilling on the site.

The mill burnt down in 1897 and was rebuilt. Near the end of the century it became obvious that the mill needed access to the Coomera Valley to provide long-term log supplies. The high saddle east of the town was a major barrier and in 1900 H.W. Clark was employed to survey a logging tramway.

Machinery for the mill was brought up the Logan by small steamer to near Logan Village and hauled by bullock team. From 1885 production steadily increased. Much of the mill's output was for housing, with the Laheys being directly involved in promoting house building.

Besides the tramway, Laheys invested in aerial ropeway and electrical logging winch and powerhouse, reputedly the first such installation in Australia. This plant on Flying Fox Creek, to bring logs from the Beechmont area, was not regarded as a success and the dynamo and winch were later installed at the mill converted into a travelling gantry for stacking logs.

In January 1906 the mill was again burnt down and rebuilt with modern machinery. Lahey Brothers and Nicklin (Mrs Nicklin being a Lahey) was incorporated as Laheys Limited from 13 January 1908. With still no railway to the upper Albert, as many as 18 bullock teams were carrying sawn timber to Logan Village in 1911.

Tom Lahey went to America to study operations there and ordered an eight foot band mill and steam log turner which made the operations one of the most efficient in Australia and the Laheys multi-mill operation the biggest in Queensland. The railway finally opened to Canungra on 2 July 1914, making it economical to convert the locomotives from wood to coal burning.

By the time the railway arrived log supplies were declining and Laheys decided against further tramline extension and began improving primitive tracks into roads to tap areas of inaccessible timber. This particularly led to opening up the Cainbale area at lower cost.

The War Service Homes Commission, established at the end of World War I, bought Laheys Limited operation taking possession from 1 January 1921 but closed the Canungra operation only three months later, having retained David Lahey as manager there. The Commission sold its operation in 1924 when David Lahey and his sons formed Brisbane Timbers Limited to acquire the operation. The new firm concentrated on road haulage of timber and formed a syndicate with Pattersons Limited, the Standply Timber Company, to take over the Canungra Mill and develop further the Mount Cainbale Road (now the access to O'Reilly's). Land was gradually sold, the tramway ceasing operations and the last of the tramway rails and equipment being sold in 1935. Besides the Canungra-O'Reilly's Road, the tramway tunnel remains the one major landmark of the whole tramway and sawmilling complex.²

The tramway from Canungra across and up the Coomera Valley was surveyed in detail by Mr George Phillips in 1899/1900. He recommended 3 foot 6 inch gauge for compatibility with

Queensland Government Railways, a simple choice since a gauge of at least 3 feet would have been required for handling large logs. Having discarded options of wire-rope and rack railway operation, a 90 metre unlined tunnel of rectangular cross-section was cut through the ridge, the most substantial construction on a timber tramway in Queensland. It was not necessary to line the tunnel, a judgement confirmed by its state nearly a century later.

To reduce costs severe grades were employed including an average grade of 1 in 12 1/2 in a little more than a kilometre climbing to the tunnel. The loads of course were moved down this grade, but this section required great care by locomotive drivers to keep the load under control especially if rails were wet. Because of the grades, Climax and Shay geared locomotives were built, more expensive to buy and maintain but able to handle steep grades at low speed, and in common use in North America in similar operations.³

By 1904 4 1/2 miles of the proposed 10 mile tramline (bridging the Coomera three times) had been completed with rails and the formation for another mile. The 90 metre long tunnel was complete. The line was long enough to tap 18 months supply of timber. By February 1905 the line was complete and the geared Climax locomotive had arrived.⁴

By 1909 Laheys Ltd, 34 years after the families began sawmilling, held the largest tract of privately-owned pine in Australia. The depression of the 1890s had forced the Laheys into stave-shaping and casking to provide income but the surge of economic activity, after the 1902 drought broke, had been very profitable. During the slack time, the Laheys had designed a log hauling machine to make them largely independent of outside labour, it was claimed. Fire had burnt down the mill in 1894 and the sawing section at Canungra in 1906.⁵

The electric logging winch, the first in Australia, and complete with its own powerhouse, was installed in 1913. It proved uneconomical.⁶

When the railway reached Canungra, a connection was finally made between the government and the private systems but Lahey's drivers were not allowed onto the government forkline. QR drivers were allowed to collect wagons from the planing mill. Government locomotives were not allowed over the bridge on Lahey's tramway.⁷

After a period of closure, the Standply Timber Company reopened the Lahey mill by 1933 with Herb Doyle as manager having added a veneer and plywood plant. Mr Brims was the glue-maker, its composition a trade secret. The removal of the siding serving the Standply Timber Company in 1939 indicates an end of operations.⁸

Site Description and Condition

Except for the removal of rails and sleepers the tunnel appears to be substantially in the condition in which it was constructed. The tunnel floor may be somewhat raised by material which has accumulated inside the tunnel. The tunnel is completely unlined and has no portals in the formal sense.

Assessment of Significance

Lahey's timber operations at Canungra were limited by the turn of the century by the relative inaccessibility of the timber in neighbouring valleys needed to augment log supplies. The Coomera Valley was close to Canungra but separated from it by a major ridge and the tramway was the means of extending the life of the sawmill. A tunnel was required to provide practicable grades. Even so steep grades were used to place the tunnel as high as practicable to reduce the length and hence cost of the tunnel. This necessitated the use of geared locomotives. The tunnel was the key to extending the operation of sawmilling into the Coomera Valley from Canungra. It is thus important in determining the pattern of cultural history (Category a). Tunnels are uncommon features of timber tramways which are usually built at minimal capital cost and this is an unusual example, unique in Queensland but not Australia, of a tunnel on a timber tramway. (Category b). It is the best known example of the sawmilling enterprise of the Lahey family and may be considered significant under Criterion h.

Recommendations

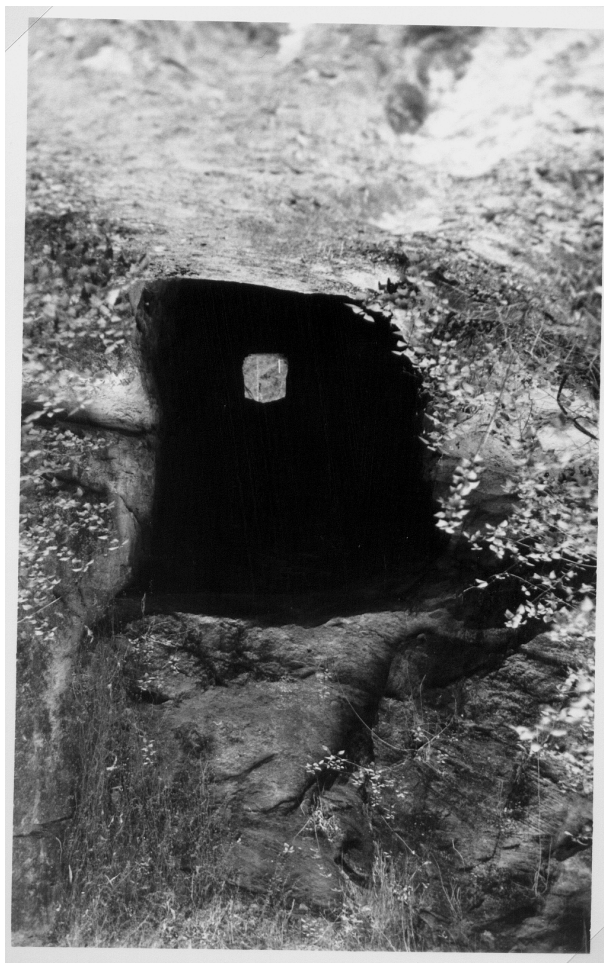
The tunnel was a major factor in the prosperity of Canungra for three decades. In the absence of any visible remains of Lahey's Canungra sawmill, the site should be signed and suitable access provided. Barriers have been provided to prevent vehicular access and although they detract from the formation approaching the tunnel, they are needed and are clearly an addition for that purpose. The formation approaching the tunnel from both sides is still intact for some distance, although on the southern side partly affected by uncontrolled access tracks and beyond these is largely

overgrown. An extended study is recommended so that a worthwhile walking track from the township of Canungra to the next rural residential area in the Coomera Valley might be established.

References

1. M. Curtis, unpagged, Chapter 4.
2. Shirley Lahey, pp. 6, 8, 14-8.
3. R.K. Morgan, "Lahey's Canungra Tramway", *Light Railways* Nos .54, 56, 57 (1976).
4. BC 6 October 1904 p.7; BC 25, 28 February 1905; see AG2 Sheet 145 1905, QSA for map.
5. E.J.T. Barton, p. 346.
6. R.B. Joyce, "Canungra Timber", *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1 No. 4 (May 1966) pp. 3-8.
7. WN 369 of July 1915.
8. M. Curtis, Chapter 4, unpagged; WN 24/39.

Tunnel on Lahey's Tramway, Canungra

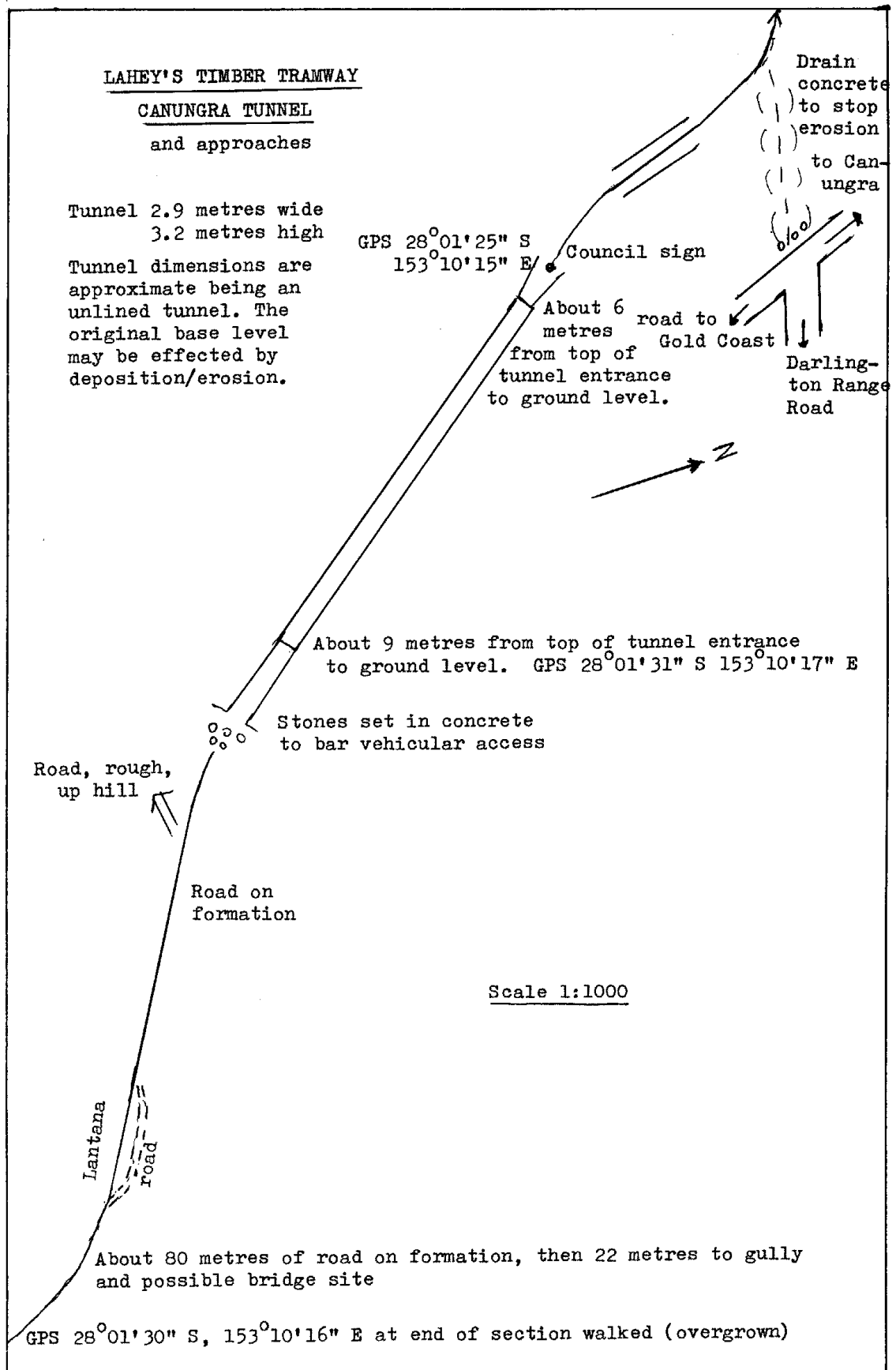


View looking into tunnel
from northern end towards
Coomera Valley



View looking into tunnel
from southern end towards
Canungra

230



Mount Coughal National Park Mill

Location

The sawmill is now inside the Mount Coughal National Park at the end of a short walking track about 400 metres from the car parking area. GPS 28 deg 14 min 29 sec S 153 deg 20 min 56 deg E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The recommended heritage boundaries extended 20 metres in each direction from the sawmill shed in order to cover artefacts and logging remains in close proximity to the mill.

History

The survival of a mill in what is now National Park makes an interesting contrast between the impact of old style and modern logging. The mill at the head of the valley, and now in the Mount Coughal section of Springbrook National Park, operated as a case mill and to break down large logs into flitches. It was established as recently as 1942.

John Joseph Tracey built a sawmill at the head of the Currumbin Creek valley in 1942 and felled timber from scrub land owned by the Dolan family, and now part of the National Park. Tracey mills softwood for banana cases.¹

Hardwood was hauled by road, with hardwood timber felled and later cut into lengths and split into flitches at the mill, being loaded onto motor trucks and supplied to boat building yards.

Tracey applied for a sawmilling license in 1946 and sold out in 1948 to Bunney and Sons of Wynnum. Bunney replaced the original kerosene engine with a V8 engine and larger breaking down saw and bench and cut hardwood.²

Tony Stephens who had worked with Tracey, bought the mill in 1951 and the next year bought a Mack truck to carry timber to Brisbane. The mill closed in early 1954, accelerated by the impact of six months heavy rain starting in late 1953. Among the former mill workers were Les McClymont timber cutter, George Dethick tailer-out, and Ray Box and Les Lee.

Bunney repurchased the mill, for its timber rights, and employed Stephens cutting trees to send to their Wynnum mill. On 23 April 1959 as he was cutting a track around a hill below the mountain, a dry limb fell, hitting him on the head. He lost

control of the tractor which rolled backwards. He jumped as it fell over a cliff and died of a fractured skull.

His son, John, bought the mill from Albert Bunney in the 1970s, removing much of the machinery to his own mill at Burleigh, also now closed. The steel jinker was not sold and with the sawmill shed, and the residual machinery, is now possibly the most visited sawmill in Queensland.³

Site Description and Condition

The principal remains are the sawmill shed, some remnants of the machinery and a timber jinker outside the shed. Some restoration work was undertaken by National Parks to stabilise the structure, and does not appear to have impaired its heritage significance. Only a small amount of the original machinery remains, principally a series of pulleys for belt drives attached to an axle for which the bearings have largely been removed. The remains of a one cylinder oil engine, with pulley and flywheel, which presumably provided the main power for the sawmill, are in one corner of the sawmill shed. A scatter of sawn timber (which may not be original) lies in another corner of the shed. Adjacent to the southern side of the shed is an abandoned timber jinker which carries the wording "Built by A.B. Campbell Gloucester N.S.W. No.337". It is built of steel with steel wheels and a braking mechanism.

Assessment of Significance

The sawmill was one of a large number of small bush sawmills which produced rough sawn timber from small to moderate sized logs. Better quality logs were generally hauled to larger better equipped mills. Because of its location in a National Park, in which it is the only cultural reminder of former settlement, it attracts a steady stream of visitors. It is probably the most visited sawmill in the state. In the absence of interpretation. Visitors are inclined to regard it as typical of all sawmills of past years, which it is not. It is significant as one of a once large class of small bush sawmills (Criterion d). From its site in the National Park, it is better maintained and safer from destruction from most similar examples. It is also valuable as a reminder that there a few areas, even in National Parks, which have not been logged by European settlers.

Recommendations

A plan for regular maintenance is needed if not already in place. A series of interpretative signs to

indicate how the sawmill operated and its place in the timber industry would enhance the value of the site. There may be other remains in the vicinity somewhat covered in undergrowth which would help an understanding of the site and the heritage boundaries may need revision after such investigation.

References

1. *Currumbin Valley State School history* p. 112.
2. Jackie Bettington, unpublished assignment on Mount Cougal Section of Springbrook National Park, University of Queensland, 1997, pp. 23-4.
3. *Currumbin Valley State School history* p. 112.

Mount Cougal National Park Mill



General View of Sawmill from above with log dump and jinker

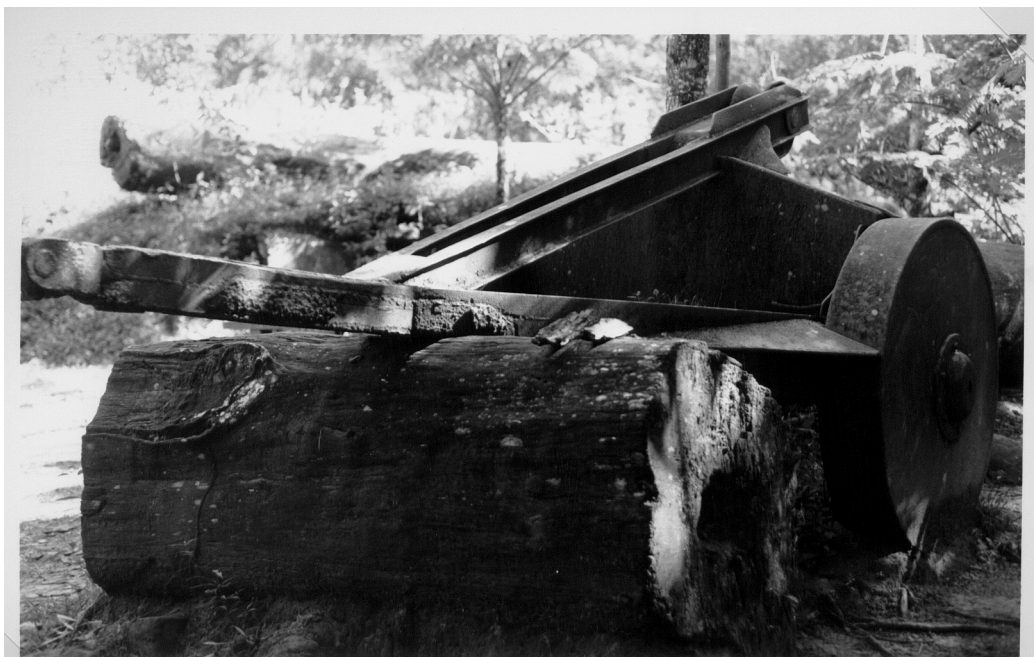


View inside sawmill showing large wheels for belt drive to machinery

Mount Cougal National Park Mill

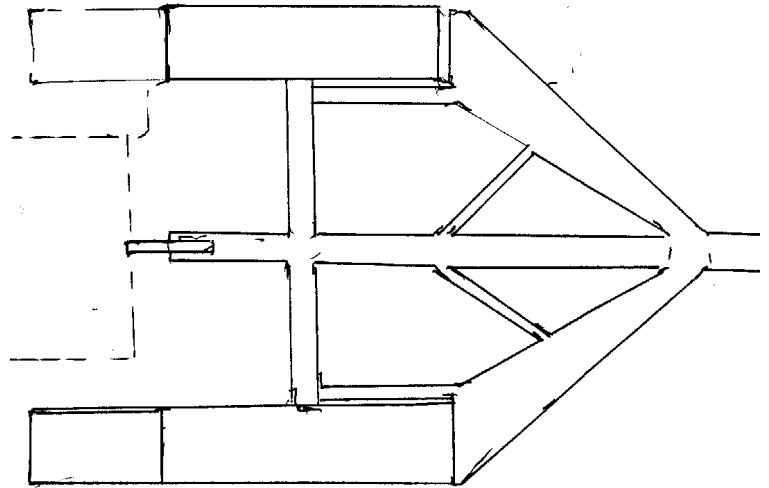


View inside showing limited machinery remaining in shed



View of steel jinker located just above the sawmill shed

PLAN OF
JINKER



Path to
National Park Entrance

lean-to
section

main support &
bearer

flywheel

one cylinder
diesel engine

half of
bearing housing

Axle with
pulleys for
belt drives

bearing
removed

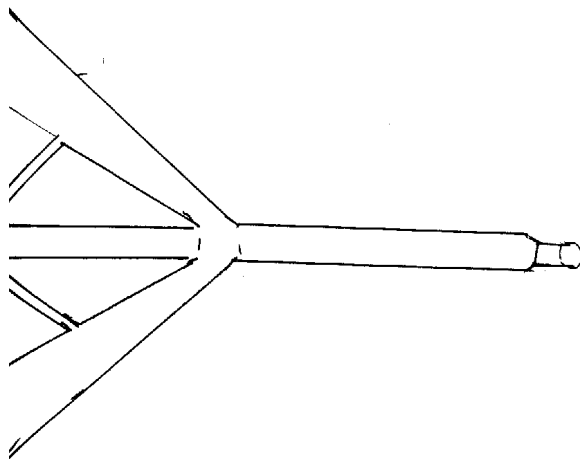
main ridge
of roof

loose sawn
timber

bearing
removed



↓ to Currumbin



CURRUMBIN CREEK -
MOUNT COUGAL NATIONAL PARK
S A W M I L L

