

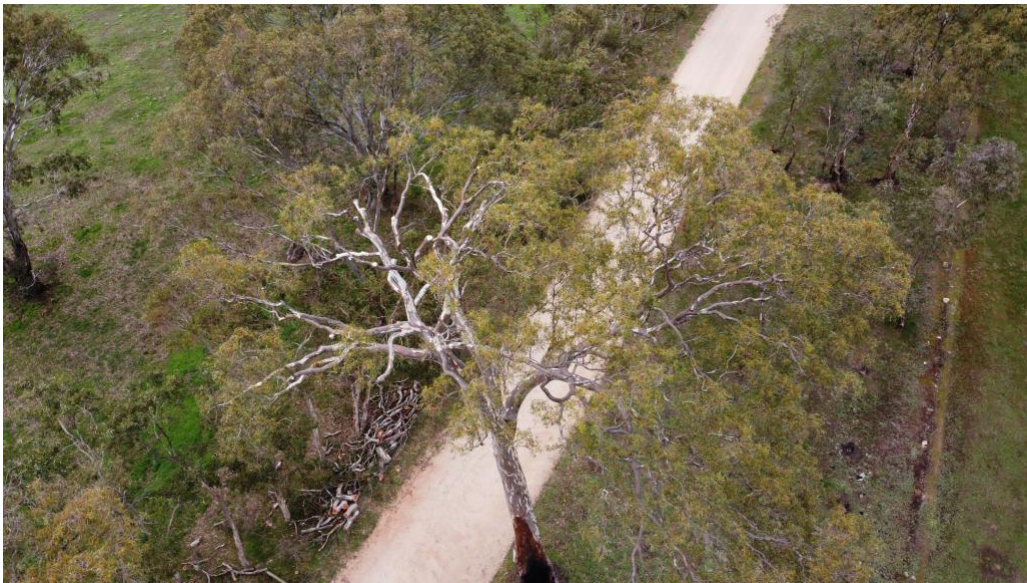


Veteran Pruning Management After Bushfires

Written by Tiago Miranda

Since the last decade, we have been facing climate catastrophes, political conflicts, economic falls, refugee crisis and bushfires, most recently in Australia. Among other states, South Australia and New South Wales have emerged on the papers worldwide as one of the worst bushfires since Black Saturday.

To talk about fires, we will need more time and words, and eventually focus only on that, which swerve a bit from the subject I would like to discuss – tree management during and after its occurrence.



Crown reduction on the east side / Source: T. Miranda 2020

We have seen in the field different post-fire situations since last burn-out months ago. Most affected trees are located in pasture lands and some woodland previously logged. Majority of species are adapted to fire some way or another, such as *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Redgum) and *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* (SA Blue gum), both lignotubers and stem resprouters, showing signs of epicormic growth within their trunk and branches aftermath. Canopy lush is a sign of vigorous adaptation to fire despite the high temperature due to the lack of land management often discussed as one of the main causes.



Overextending limb to be reduced / Source: T. Miranda 2020

That said, it is considered a total nonsense on behalf of the indigenous people. According to **Neville Bonney**, “a standard cultural practice carried out on a cyclic pattern” could’ve prevented a really hot fire to occur. Bonney endorses through his book “*Adnyamathanha and beyond*” that their relationship with fire is millennial and eventually the bushfire could have been stopped if more thorough and methodical land approach had been a priority from the start.

I guess we lost our connection to the actual bush not just before colonization, but also during whilst settlers weren’t using land accordingly to what local people had done for a long time. The rise of animal domestication and hard work brought farmers to a merging point of complete dependence and financial burden with no way back, increasing even more conflicts within indigenous people.

According to **Don Watson**, writer of “*The Bush*”, quotes another man and speaks about that no land could be settled “*if there were no kills*”, including humans.

Along the fence line and land proximity, large Redgums and SA Blue gums were upstanding heavily affected by the fires where we were working at the time. Some of them were more than 100 years old. Thanks to Mt Barker Council in Adelaide, a veteran pruning management project initiates a long, but important revitalizing attitude towards those giants, regarding their habitat and carbon sequestration importance.



Even though veteran tree management is a term associated to European arboricultural practices, we can still find large veteran trees in Australia, most likely in Adelaide and Melbourne regions. One of the reasons is due to its significance as part of the colony settlement history and other environmental factors.

The remnant large trees on pasture lands, from an environmental perspective, have to be preserved as a symbol of historical perseverance and wildlife importance. This may improve the fauna life in areas that were most affected by deforestation through hollow habitat, food sources and other forms of animal shelter. Our main goal as arborists is to maintain the tree's natural structure and rebalance the canopy by pruning unnecessary heavy limbs that could compromise a structural tilt or wind sailing effect.



Final pruning cut / Source: T. Miranda 2020

Most of the basal areas were burned and already possessing large cavities, increasing the chances to catch on fire from inside-out. This could, more likely, destroy xylem and phloem tissues, leaving only cambium layers and a small portion of wood cells to support its weight.

Stamped by its mass and resilience, species such as SA Blue and River Redgums have evolved to support such severe, sometimes drastic situations, living for much longer with these heavyweight consequences on their foothold.



ARB DEBATE

Promoting our practices, we can show that not just removal or abatement are the only options available, but also pruning heavily could improve the tree's life expectancy as well. Our work is just one of several others that are concern about our history and heritage values to increase our biodiversity and develop better ecosystems for animals and humans, contributing as well to climate change. Species variation and geographic location are important attributes to consider before embarking such a project.

Although some individuals still think is *'just a gum'*, we instead should understand the whole picture that down the tunnel, the light is not just green, but also bright and helpful to future generations, making our work even more meaningful.



Source: T. Miranda 2020