

Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage

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The Mount Sabine Fire-watch tower in the early to mid 1980's. I remember the day well, scrambled up the tower and then realised I had locked the keys in the car. Luckily I knew the reservoir keeper at West Barwon Dam and with the help of a coat hanger managed to unlock the car.

Bushfires in the remote Mt Sabine area were an ever-present danger throughout its attempts at settlement: in 1886, one selector lost everything and many others had feared being burned to death; in 1908, two young children were severely burned, one of them fatally; in 1919, at least 100 houses were burned in the surrounding districts; and in 1939, a bushfire destroyed the Mount Sabine post office.

The attempts to farm both Mount Sabine and the surrounding area ultimately failed, with the remoteness of the area hindering development. Many of the areas cleared by the early settlers have reverted to scrub, regenerated as forest or been sown with plantation timber.

Henry's No. 1 Mill was established in 1904 deep in the watershed of the West Barwon River. It was one of the largest sawmills in the area and could cut as much as 23 m³ per day. It was connected by a narrow-gauge timber tramline to the railhead at Forrest, 10 kilometres to the north. The line included about 57 timber bridges and an impressive 960 foot tunnel at Noonday creek. Several steam engines rode the tracks, the first one in 1911 was known as Tom Thumb. The Henry Mill had a permanent population of around 100 people.



