

Thompson's Legacy - Serrated Tussock in the Ladevale District

Serrated Tussock comes from South America and is thought to have arrived in Australia in the early 1900s, possibly in saddle packing. Its first official recording was made in Yass, around 24kms away from Ladevale, in 1935 and it was usually referred to as Yass River Tussock.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 February 1937 reported that the Goodradigbee Shire Council weed inspector had surveyed the district for Yass River Tussock which had only recently been identified as *Nassella trichotoma*. The noxious weed inspector, Mr. S.O. Buckmaster said he had found the weed on three different properties covering a total of 230 acres. On this area the weed was very thick, and appeared to have taken possession. It would grow and thrive on flats, but seemed to like poor loose shaley hills. Other than the areas mentioned he had not seen or heard of it anywhere else in the shire. Nor had he seen anyone in the shire who knew anything of the weed further back than, say, 12 or 14 years.

What about closer to home here in Ladevale? Sid Hillier came to live at nearby *Woodlands* in Iron Mines Rd in the early 1930s and has known the area all his life. He remembers the weed from an early age but always knew it as Thompson Tussock – after Yass River Road farmer Bert Thompson who had a bumper crop of it on his property.

The weed increased its hold both locally and in the wider district during the 1940s. In May 1949 the Pastures Protection Board was trying to get a change of name for Yass River Tussock. The Board said it extended far beyond the Yass River district and had become a State wide pest.

It had certainly become a pest in at least some parts of Ladevale by then. Sid says the problem became more severe around 1949 when a Berrebangalo farmer who owned what is now *Yellangalo* and adjoining areas decided to attack moderate infestations of Serrated Tussock by rotary hoeing his property and leaving it for two years. This significantly worsened the problem. Sid, who lived to the west of the seed bank area says his family chipped Serrated Tussock around three times a year. This kept the weed from taking over despite its prevalence elsewhere.

Harold Hazell who has lived at nearby *Chain of Ponds* for 87 years also knew the weed as Thompson Tussock. Harold did not have to deal with the weed until May 1976 when he bought a block near *Yellangalo* which had been part of the Berrebangalo holdings. He and son Tery have been able to keep Serrated Tussock under control by persistent chipping until last year when, due to pressure of other commitments, they resorted to spraying for the first time.

What advice do Harold and Sid have for today's tussock fighters? Both have successfully kept the weed suppressed without chemical help for long periods. The weed never went away but never got the upper hand because persistent chipping was an integral part of their farm management. Harold has always carried a mattock with him, be it on horse, bike or

foot and says “Always chip a tussock when you see it because it won’t be there when you go back next day”.

Sid agrees that regular maintenance chipping is the way go. Like Harold, he also stresses the importance of not allowing mature seed heads to get away. A final point Sid makes is that you must ensure the chipped tussock has all the soil removed from its roots. If the soil is really damp, Sid would bag the tussock and keep it under observation until it is long dead. He has known chipped tussock to get its roots back in the soil and re grow. “Chipping once is OK” said Sid, “but doing it twice is monotonous”.