**Essays on Mount Crosby - Hoop Pine, King of the Trees**

I think the hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) must be the king of local trees. I say that even though arguments can be made for the strength of the ironbark, the grandeur of the blue gum and the solid virtues of a hundred other species we are lucky enough to have nearby.

Hoop pines make a big statement, whether towering above the dry sclerophyll forest on our hillsides or providing height to the urban landscape like those in the old school grounds or at the top of the Works Hill. Those latter ones, often have me wondering, "were you planted here, or are you from before all that?" Whichever way, they must now be nearing 125 years old. Those in the school grounds, I'm convinced, were planted during an early Arbor Day in which the children collected local seedlings and transferred them to the grounds - and it's nice they collected the hoops because they can go on reminding us of that day for hundreds of years.

In 1928, the curator of the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane recommended that the water board's land between Mount Crosby and Kholo (2894 acres) should be reafforested with silky oak and hoop pine, and the task was commenced by the men reporting to Jack Dann. For one reason or another they never got too far from the station (suggesting those employed planting were also employed in jobs at the works). Still, numerous pines went in above the weir, and they were added to in the 1950s, creating something of a little forest in that protected world known as the "topside" to many locals.

In the forest it is possible to see how the hoop pine got its name. Older trees have hoop-like bark conspicuous enough to invoke the name, but they have another trick that improves the impression. When a mature tree falls and begins to decay away, the hard shiny bark far outlasts the soft inner pine. Rather than forming a hollow tube, the bark usually breaks into hoops or rings that stack up against each other on the forest floor. I solemnly hope no such hoops are ever witnessed at the top of the hill or in the old school grounds.

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