

Life Along the Tully River - Other Crops

Citrus

From the arrival of the first European settlers, there were many experimental attempts to grow various crops in the Cardwell district. In the Murray River valley the early pioneers grew mandarins and other citrus fruit which they packed in cases and shipped to southern markets from Cardwell jetty. Today, citrus, including mandarins and limes, are grown as an extra crop to supplement a main crop such as bananas or sugar cane.



Left: Spollens' Chevrolet truck loaded with oranges ready to go from Murray Upper to the jetty at Cardwell to catch the southern steamer (1929).

Rubber

Some rubber was planted in the district, and at one time the Tully River was promoted as an ideal place for rubber plantations. However, the absence of cheap labour and other factors ensured the trees were never tapped. Brice Henry planted trees on his Oakwood property but they were grubbed out some years later in order to plant cane.

Cotton

With the destruction of the beef herds due to the cattle tick plague at the end of the nineteenth century, several settlers tried to grow cotton, and considerable areas of the Murray valley were put under this crop. However, the wet season worked against the harvest and there was little profit to be made. Experiments with growing cotton were also made by the Tully valley settlers, Savage and Dean, along Banyan Creek.

Other Tropical Crops

Coffee was tried at the turn of the century, also on the Murray River, and the bushes thrived but the picking and handling expenses made the experiment unprofitable.

Coconuts were tried, especially at the beaches, and after the banana industry was broken by the conditions during the WW1, but they only sufficed to tide over the settlers until a more profitable existence could be made.

Right: Cutten Plantation, Bingil Bay, 1902



A noted **tobacco** expert came to the Murray River valley to advise on growing tobacco early in the 1900s, and some acres were planted, harvested and the leaves dried and sent south from Cardwell. But the climate proved too unpredictable for the production of tobacco as a commercial crop.

When the first settlers took up blocks on the Banyan, **sweet potatoes** were raised. James Savage grew these to feed his pigs. The venture was not a commercial success, with many pigs not taking to being driven to the butchers, not liking swimming creeks, and generally being lost en route.

Other experiments in the early days of the Tully River settlers at Banyan were **ginger, arrowroot, cassava, potatoes, lucerne, rice**.



French's dry land rice in the early 1920s. The Frenchs were a pioneering family in the Midgenoo- Feluga area, north of the Tully River.

Today, other crops of significance are **pumpkins, watermelons, pawpaws** and **lychees**. Other rare tropical fruit such as **rambutans and dragon fruit**; and **sweet potatoes and taro** are also grown, as supplementary crops.