

Yellow-Wood

Flindersia xanthoxyla

It was such a sad sight to see that one of the Yellow Woods in the Waite Arboretum had been vandalised and cut down. What a mindless act!

This is one of the lesser known members of seventeen species of the genus Flindersia, of which there are fourteen native to Australia, all from New South Wales and Queensland. Other species are native to New Guinea, Indonesia and New Caledonia. Of the Australian species all are tropical or sub tropical except for two. The better known of these is Leopard Wood (Flindersia maculata). This brings to mind an interesting story. Some years ago when planning a visit to the United Kingdom, a friend and fellow member of the International Wood Collectors Society asked if I could supply him with some Leopard wood. On further discussion it became apparent that he thought that the wood had interesting spotted figure. Not true – the wood is pale and bland, it is the bark which give the tree its name. This is a dry land tree with some beautiful examples to be seen on the Barrier Highway, between Wilcannia and Cobar.

The Waite Arboretum There has five species of Flindersia. The common Crows Ash (F. australis), Bennetts Ash (F. bennettiana), Bastard Crows Ash (F. collina), Leopard Wood (F. maculata) and Yellow-Wood (F. xanthoxyla).

Derivation of names

Flindersia – honours Captain Matthew Flinders

xanthoxyla – from Greek *xanthos* – meaning yellow and *xylon* – meaning wood, obviously referring to the distinctive yellow wood as per its common name.

Other names include Yellow Jack and Yellow Ash.

The Tree

In its natural environment Yellow-wood is a tall tree attaining a height of more than 40 metres with a clear parallel bole with a diameter up to 900mm. The bark is hard, fine textured and greyish brown. The leaves are up to 300 mm long, having up to 10 pinnate leaflets each up to 120 mm long. These are similar to most species of *Flindersia* and resemble the pinnate leaves of the true Ashes (*Fraxinus spp*), alluding to the common name –Ash - given to many species of *Flindersia*. The flowers are large panicles of small individual yellow flowers. The fruit are typical of most species of *Flindersia*, consisting of usually five boat shaped capsules, the back of which is covered by blunt prickles. They are very similar to those of the Crows Ash but are more delicate and papery in texture. The individual capsules all contain two winged seeds up to 50 mm long.



Habitat

Yellow-wood is confined to the coastal scrubs of sub tropical Australia from the Richmond River (near Ballina) in New South Wales to Gympie in Queensland.

Timber

As the common name suggests the wood is yellow in colour. The heartwood is pale yellow and the sapwood is up to 20 mm wide and not distinguishable from the heartwood. It has a fine to medium texture and often has interlocking grain. The wood is medium density with an average air dried weight of about 680 Kg per cubic metre (c.f. Jarrah - 830 Kg per cubic metre). The wood is easy to dry with small shrinkage rates. The tree which was cut down in the Waite Arboretum gives good evidence of this. Despite that run of 40 plus degree days in February, the amount of checking on the end grain was minimal – one might have thought that it would have developed wide cracks during that extreme hot and dry period. The wood is relatively easy to work. It turns and carves well and is good for steam bending. The attached photo shows a section of figured grain obtained from a crotch in the tree. The Yellowwood that Jimmy Clewes used in his demonstration to make a natural edged vase was supplied from the tree from the Waite Arboretum.



Species

Three of the species of *Flindersia* have been important cabinet making timbers in Australia. The most famous is Queensland Maple (*F. brayleyana*), a very popular furniture timber, especially in the 1960/70's. Maple Silkwood (*F. pimenteliana*) is very similar to Queensland Maple, often with a highly figurative grain, and also sought after because of the beauty of its timber. Another is Silver Ash (*F. bourjotiana*) which as the name suggests has very white wood, giving an impression of silver.



References

- Australian Rain Forest Trees*, W.D.Francis, Australian Government Printing Services, 1981
- Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants – Volume 4*, W. Rodger Elliot, David I. Jones, Lothian, 1992
- Wood in Australia*, Keith R. Bootle, McGraw Hill, 2002
- Forest Trees of Australia*, D. J. Boland and others, CSIRO, 1992

Ron Allen

Addendum

Two weeks ago, returning from Sydney via Broken Hill, I decided to check out my previous sightings of the Leopard wood (*Flindersia maculata*) between Wilcannia and Cobar as referred to in my article. The following images show the graceful form of the Leopard wood tree with its pendant foliage, a clear image of the bark which gives the tree its common name and a close up of the small fruit capsule taken on the bonnet of my car. The specific name *maculosa* also refers to the bark – meaning spotted.

