

Stories of the Tweed Valley

Cane Farming



Work in the Cane Fields

Sugar cane farmers started to make the change to mechanical harvesting in the 1960s. Using harvesting machines and transporting cane from the farms to the mill by semi-trailers greatly expanded the sugar industry in the Tweed.

1. Look closely at this image of a mechanical harvester at work.



2. Read Ernie Cobb's descriptions of cane cutting by hand.

"The cane was cut off at ground level and topped, then put into rows of heaps, so the farmer could haul in field trucks for us to load – you could load up to three tons per truck per man but when trucks were short it was possible to load four tons. The farmer would then tie the cane down, haul the field trucks out to the main line by horses where a small locomotive would haul them to Crabbes Creek Railway station for loading onto rail trucks and taken to the Condong mill for crushing."

"...so five of us came to the Tweed to help out ...The cutting was the same but loading of the punts [flat bottomed boats] was quite different as we had to use a shin stick, which was a stick about 2 foot 6 inches long. When the farmer brought the cane to the river bank you would put the shin stick under a bundle, what you could carry on your thigh, and walk along a plank to the punt. The plank was only twelve inches wide. If the tide was out you would have to walk along two planks which was fair way with a bundle of cane. The planks were 20 feet in length, so if you lost your balance you'd end up in the mud."

Ernie Cobb, recalled in 2008 - Tweed River Regional Museum Research Collection

3. List three differences between cane harvesting and transportation in the first half of the 20th century and the mechanised harvesting and more sophisticated transportation of today.

Tweed River Regional Museum

Established in 2004, with the uniting of the three local Historical Societies, Tweed River Regional Museum is one museum in three special locations, Tweed Heads, Murwillumbah and Uki. Spanning the Shire from the coast to the mountains, the branches of Tweed River Regional Museum are a unique journey into the history, people and places of majestic Tweed Valley.

Tweed River Regional Museum

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