

The Bush

AUTHOR: DON WATSON

5 myths about the bush examined by Don Watson

- 'No man likes to lose a good mate, for mateship is more than a mere term in Australia,' wrote Henry Lawson's mate. Many others, including modern politicians, have said the same, even though it leaves us wondering if they believe that men in other countries either don't have mates or don't mind losing them.
- Asked the origins of *their* character, Americans might give half a dozen or more answers – the Puritan forefathers, the constitution, the Civil War, the unrestrained marketplace, immigration, liberty, the absence of an established Church, the frontier. But Australians have really only ever had one answer: the bush is where it came from.
- The Bush legend and the Anzac legend have been intertwined ever since the first reports came in from Gallipoli. Indeed, the co-author of the official history of Australians in the First World War also wrote one of the classic tracts of the bush legend: Charles Bean, in his 1910 *On the Wool Track*.
- European ideology might have shaped the bush rather more than the bush shaped Europeans. The gospels of hard work, persistence, willingness to endure, and personal sacrifice were Victorian virtues confirmed on frontiers all over the empire and beyond.
- The less joined we are to the bush in reality, the less stake we have in it; and the less knowledge of and feeling for it we have, the stronger the myth must be.

