# The Bush

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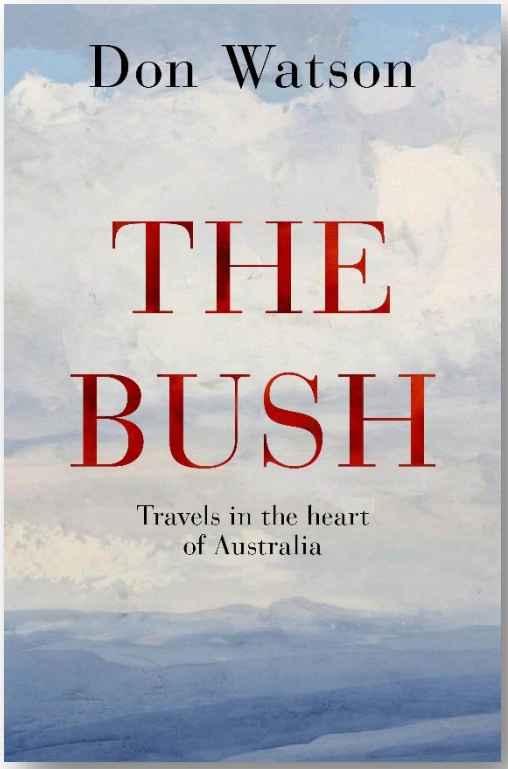


## 5 powerful observations in The Bush

- For Australians remote from it, the bush holds some of the same Homeric power as its near relation, Anzac. Anzac is part fact, part fable: the story's meaning depends not only on what happened and with what motives and reasons, but on what it has suited Australians to make of it. With Anzac the sacrifice and comradeship of the Australian Imperial Forces have been made over into an ideal Australian. The bush speaks of similar admirable qualities. Much as Christians do with the resurrection, Australians relive the Anzac story once a year. The bush serves as the Church, keeping it alive in the off-season, while every drought, flood and fire makes a moral drama to renew and authenticate the foundations of faith.
- Given the profound importance of trees to humanity – which is far greater than that of, say, sheep, cattle, dogs or horses – it might be that clearing them en masse is not without effect on the minds of those who do it. To fell, ringbark, poison, root out or in some other way bring about the death of trees may not be an act of genocide, but nor is it, surely, an act with no more implications than sweeping the veranda. It might be a little like war, brutalising or traumatising depending on the personality and the circumstances. Who knows what mental scars are left on the people who, for whatever reason, destroyed them.
- Should anyone (including scientists) not resident in the bush since birth tell farmers that the expense to nature is too great, even for their own good, chances are they will be instantly written off as city ignoramuses untutored in the real ways of Australia's natural world. The stand-off between book learning and bush lore likely began very soon after the first European pitched his tent out of sight of his associates and noticed a disjunction between what he was seeing with his own eyes and the received wisdom guiding the main party. The row is related to the elemental tension between freedom and authority. It also overlaps with nativist or anti-British sentiment, and even more so with the mixture of resentment and insecurity that the city has always incited in country people.
- The Australian bush is made of the effort to create and the effort to destroy. When people speak of Aborigines 'living in harmony' with their environment they mean these two forces were in some way reconciled. They neither sowed nor reaped, and had neither 'storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them' – but God fed them only after their considerable manipulation of the land by elaborate and strict regimes of conservation, by substantial and ingenious building of weirs, fish traps, canals and aqueducts, by various forms of cultivation, planting, gardening and harvesting, and by relying on a storehouse of knowledge about the behaviour and properties of plants and animals. They lived in harmony with the environment, but only after bending it to suit their purposes.
- To the extent that Australians think the bush defines them, they therefore lack self-knowledge. That Australia is a First World country heavily dependent on primary industry makes the deficiency all the more curious. But the frontier was ever a place for practical people – also, very often, for uneducated people, and people without the means to make good the promise of the land, much less to farm it sustainably, even had they known how. Scholarship and intellectual skills, being as useless as tits on a bull (as they say in the country), attract disdain or sullen rural reserve. As it did in the United States, this anti-intellectualism easily outlived the closing of the frontier and put a permanent stamp on the national cast of mind.