

Of people and a forest – some personal reflections Alex Panelli

How often do you think about the forest? If you are like me, for a large part of your life you have probably not thought very much about it. But the forest around us now, or one much like it, has been with us for a long time. We go about our lives, the forest is out there. And when we come to it, our approach to it, what we see in it and expect from it is largely shaped by instinct and by habit – childhood visits, bushfire warnings, picnics, times spent with friends or on school camps. The forest can be a pleasant place, but also dangerous. One can't see far – there is fallen timber, insects and snakes, uneven ground – mostly, we stick together.

This book is about the relationships between a group of people and the once 3 million hectare forest and woodland country of central Victoria, now formally known as “the Box-Ironbark forests”. Since the arrival of Europeans, these forests and open woodlands have suffered much. Ravaged for gold and timber, pushed back for farming, they survive today as broken fragments of what once was. Yet even in this state, with their ongoing blossoming, their tree hollows, their rocky outcrops and their fallen logs, these forests shelter and sustain a rich diversity of life.