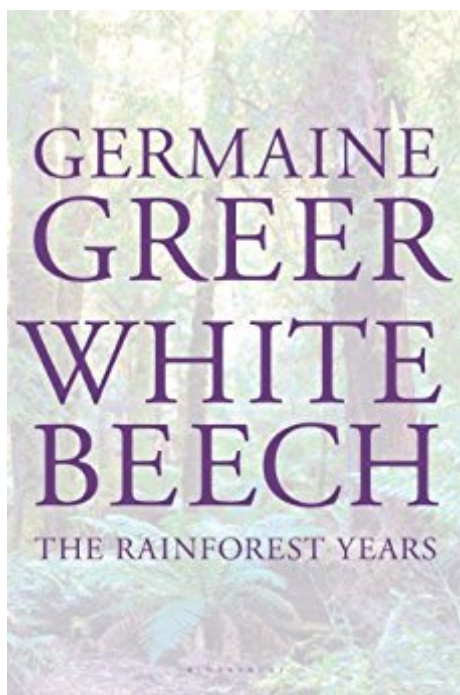


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# White Beech: The Rainforest Years



## Synopsis

For years I had wandered Australia with an aching heart. Everywhere I had ever travelled across the vast expanse of the fabulous country where I was born I had seen devastation, denuded hills, eroded slopes, weeds from all over the world, feral animals, open-cut mines as big as cities, salt rivers, salt earth, abandoned townships, whole beaches made of beer cans...One bright day in December 2001, sixty-two-year-old Germaine Greer found herself confronted by an irresistible challenge in the shape of sixty hectares of dairy farm, one of many in southeast Queensland that, after a century of logging, clearing, and downright devastation, had been abandoned to their fate. She didn't think for a minute that by restoring the land she was saving the world. She was in search of heart's ease. Beyond the acres of exotic pasture grass and soft weed and the impenetrable curtains of tangled Lantana canes there were Macadamias dangling their strings of unripe nuts, and Black Beans with red and yellow pea flowers growing on their branches and the few remaining White Beeches, stupendous trees up to 120 feet in height, logged out within forty years of the arrival of the first white settlers. To have turned down even a faint chance of bringing them back to their old haunts would have been to succumb to despair. Once the process of rehabilitation had begun, the chance proved to be a dead certainty. When the first replanting shot up to make a forest and rare caterpillars turned up to feed on the leaves of the new young trees, she knew beyond a doubt that at least here biodepletion could be reversed. Greer describes herself as an old dog who succeeded in learning a load of new tricks, inspired and rejuvenated by her passionate love of Australia and of Earth, the most exuberant of small planets.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Having never read any of Germaine Greer's books before I was truly amazed at her passionate story. The story of *White Beech* is historically enthralling (the research is impeccable). The story is spiced with lots of local politics (does life ever change!!), charged with a stark environmental reality message (I couldn't believe that one of the chemicals of agent orange was sprayed on our forest floor) and filled with lots of confronting true stories (one story quoted "destruction of the forest was the best entertainment going") Even though the story is very specific to the Numinbah Valley and South East Queensland (with interesting connections to lots of other regions) I urge all to read it as it challenges our attitudes past and present to all the ecosystems that we have destroyed and are trying to rebuild. My main criticism of the book was that the scientific jargon was overwhelming (okay if you are a botanist) but it really interrupted the flow of the story and made many chapters very hard going

When Germaine Greer arrived at Sydney University to take up an appointment in the Department of English, I was graduating to a respectable profession and conventional life style. Although we had friends and acquaintances in common, we did not meet. This was perhaps just as well - callow youth that I was, she would have scared the pants off me. Her dramatic and distinguished career is well known. She has a string of books to her credit, mostly in one way or another affirming the feminist cause. "*White Beech*" is different in theme, though not without feminist polemic here and there. Moved by man's degradation of the environment and determined to do something about it Greer sought an Australian rural property that she could rehabilitate. Over a decade ago, she acquired Cave Creek, in the hinterland of South East Queensland, devoting money and time to her project. She has now capped her generosity by transferring the title to an English charitable trust, the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, with a view to soon transferring it to a similar Australian charity. This book describes the story. I wondered if I might find myself reading something like the account of the restoration of a medieval French cottage ("*The Normandy House*" by Patricia M Page), which I reviewed for . Patsy Page, who is a friend since University days, there charmingly

describes the progress of the work and her interactions with workers and neighbours, and members of her family. Greer tackles things differently, documenting not only the flora and fauna of Cave Creek, but the settlement of the region and the attempts of settlers to raise dairy cattle, or bananas, or sugar, and eventually the indigenous macadamia nut. Her research is detailed, to the point where there is almost too much information about the etymology of Aboriginal languages or the genealogy of the Nixon family, the first settlers at Cave Creek. She does not get bogged down, however, and the book is clear and readable. The efforts of the workers on the project are generously credited, but there is scant account of human interaction, other than with Greer's younger sister, a professional botanist, with whom there is sisterly affection. She provided some of the detailed botanical information: I should have liked even more of this, especially on orchids and other epiphytes. The sisters sometimes disagree, notably about the status of the eminent nineteenth century botanist Ferdinand von Mueller. Germaine Greer does not think much of him, and contemptuously omits the honorific "von" when referring to him. Greer's support for both Aboriginal and feminist causes emerges clearly in her account of a striking rock formation, the Natural Bridge. She convincingly defends the concept of secret women's business, referring to a notorious court case in South Australia. She thinks that the Natural Bridge was sacred to women, and sees powerful sexual symbolism in the landscape. (Those prone to see landscape in such ways might like to view the 1862 painting "Waterfall, Strath Creek" by Eugene von Guérard in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, or on that Gallery's website). The book "White Beech" contains no illustrations, but it refers to photos and videos of plants and animals taken by Greer and her sister. These are available on the Cave Creek section of the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest website; the video of the Spiny Blue Crayfish is particularly charming. Here also is a brief account of the Cave Creek project, in which Germaine Greer is referred to only by the term the Foundress - a word that is fresh, powerful and evocative, like the woman herself. I thoroughly recommend this enjoyable and informative book. Jim Friend Sydney, November 2013

Germaine Greer continues to do challenging and important things, and her project, with many others, to restore the rainforest is admirable and so labor-intensive I am amazed that she has that much energy at this stage in her life. She is able to continue to learn new and complex things and apply what she learns with determination and joy. She is simply amazing!

I was disappointed in this book. I'd heard some of the radio 4 condensed version and can only say it needs a good editor to reshape the book into a readable form. I gave up about halfway through. Too

many latin names that weren't needed. Hopeless flow. The facts and people should make for a fascinating tale and one that needs telling but it just flops in a disorganised and boring heap. And she's a prof of English literature!

Having never read previous publications by Germaine and not overly supportive of some of her public opinions, i didn't let this get in the way and im glad too. Its so well written and inspiring for someone like myself who has great interest in site rehabilitation. Its an inspiring and informative piece and hard to put down.

Contrary to my expectations, I find it a hard slog through territory that I had hoped would be a pleasant and informative stroll. There seems to be too much technical information, perhaps as a kind of deference to Greer's sister's expertise.

Oh boy, this was a tough read.....so tough I took it to the used book store before I was 100 pages in. Reads like a scientific journal," just the facts mam"

This book was gift from someone who knows I love New South Wales and Queensland (as a visitor). I was looking forward to learning how part of the rainforest was being returned to something like its natural flora and fauna. What a disappointment! The narrative is disjointed - there is no 'story'. It reads more like the notes for a thesis. Long sections on the history of settlers and of the byzantine intricacies of plant naming and land ownership destroy any sense of what must have been a carefully sequenced restoration and make some chapters, as another reviewer has said, practically unreadable. Ms Greer is a greatly respected writer, so she clearly intended the book to be the way it is, but I just wonder who she was writing for.

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