

Preserving  
East London Daily Dispatch  
19/5/1959

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To the Editor, Daily Dispatch.

Sir.—In your issue of May 15 SAPA reports an appeal in Parliament by Mr. C. Miles Warren, M.P. for King William's Town, in which he seeks to prevent certain forests being placed under the Department of Native Affairs because, as Mr. Warren is quoted as saying, "If you have ever seen what a Native woman with an axe and a box of matches can do, you will realise what is going to happen to this forest if it is handed over to Natives."

Mr. Warren is probably quite right, but it is not only a Native woman with an axe and matches who is to be feared. East Londoners will remember that a large slice of their beautiful forest at Fort Grey was destroyed to make way for pineapple research plots which should surely have been established on typical pineapple soil among pineapple farmers. I doubt very much whether sheep farmers would see much sense in clearing the Pirie Forest in order to do grazing experiments on merino sheep!

The City of East London was done a shot in the eye when its lovely forest was despoiled. It may not have been strictly under their jurisdiction but they should surely have had a say. Forests take thousands of years to develop and need thousands of years to recover. Because of this I earnestly ask the people of East London never to allow this afforested area to suffer from further whittling away—no matter what the motive.

Apart from its natural beauty, it contains among its varied species, the attractive flowering Umtisa tree which occurs nowhere else in the world than in the Fort Grey forests on the very outskirts of East London—not even elsewhere in South Africa. That surely is enough to save its life as well as the trees in whose community it must necessarily exist.

And there is something else. In August, 1958, the Buffalo Pass was a most beautiful sight when all the sneezewood trees were in flower, both at the roadside and scattered throughout the forest. Very few people know this tree to be one of some beauty, the reason being that most of the sneezewoods in South African forests were cut out in the early days for use as fence poles, a purpose for which they are unexcelled. I doubt whether there is another place in South Africa where this tree can be seen in anything like the profusion of numbers or size of growth, and the Forestry Department must take great credit for having preserved them. These flowering sneezewoods, therefore, provide a unique sight which East Londoners should religiously preserve as a tourist attraction — if for nothing else. Even if they grow just beyond the municipal bound-

By way of comparison, the large Australian city of Perth has preserved a park of natural vegetation in its very midst. Brochures of the town very sensibly make the most of this attraction. The inhabitants are proud of it. Port Elizabeth is developing its Settlers' Park where the natural vegetation of the locality can be seen by the citizens and by visitors with a minimum of effort. But for sheer beauty, uniqueness and interest, Settlers' Park cannot hold a candle to your East London forests. How many cities in the world can boast a primeval forest on their doorsteps? Don't be lulled into thinking that Queen's Park is sufficient. It is a little gem on its own as far as the trees are concerned, but a forest needs to be displayed in some size.

However, my purpose in this letter is not only to ask East Londoners to see that they are not denied their unique door-step beauty but to emphasise that it is dangerous to think that it is only "a Native woman with an axe and a box of matches" who is destroying our South African forests already pathetically meagre compared with what they once were. The white man is equally to blame, perhaps more so because he ought to know better, and I ask Mr. Warren to use the power of his position to see that no more of our truly Eastern Cape forests are destroyed by responsible bodies, whoever they may be.—I am, etc.,

C. J. SKEAD.

4 Maitland Road,  
King William's Town.

Mr. C. Miles Warren, M.P. had  
no contract for removing  
the forest as did very well  
out of it, especially  
with Boxwood!!

Here the letter that would  
have reached his consequence.