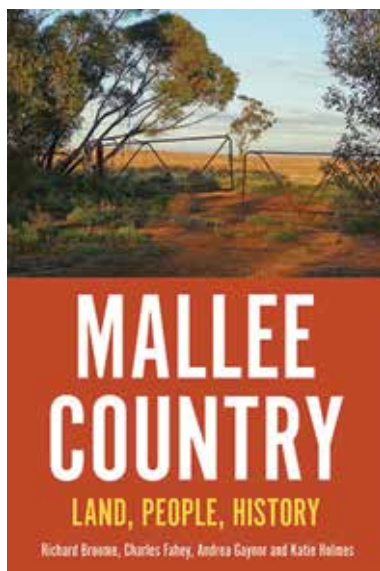


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## Mallee Country: Land, People, History

By Richard Broome, Charles Fahey, Andrea Gaynor and Katie Holmes

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Melbourne

Monash University Publishing

415 pages

Reviewed by Kara Taylor  
Irymple Secondary College

*Mallee Country* is a book about land and the people who worked it over hundreds and thousands of years. For this reader it's personal. When speaking to Professor Broome prior to its release, this reader spoke of Mallee people and our connection to the land. No matter where you travel in the world or how long you are away, when you come back to Mallee country you know you are home. The land, the trees, the sky and even the air are different here, and this book has captured that for all readers.

*Mallee Country* is organised into four parts: Mallee Aborigines and European Intruders to 1880, Transforming the Mallee 1880–1945, The State and Mallee Lands 1945–1983, and Living with the Mallee 1983–Present.

The first part speaks of the ancient times and how the Mallee came to be. It describes the environment and how the local Aboriginal people made the land work for them. The following three parts then inform the way in which the environment was changed over time by farmers' efforts to tame the untamable land about them. It was almost like a challenge that so much land was available but not usable through European farming practices. People had to adapt to new ways of farming, or fail. Many did.

This book's use of primary sources is amazing and would be a great guide

to any student about how to weave primary sources into your narrative about time and place. For example, the family diary of Charles Coote adds a real face to the troubles of surviving Mallee life. This narrative winds its way through different parts of the book, adding life to the data presented.

Spotted throughout the book are a number of photos depicting the life of the Mallee farmer. These carefully selected photos add to the reader's understanding of the types of cropping and tractors used, land drifts and the great Mallee root. These add a richness to the information offered by all four authors.

*Mallee Country* is a valuable addition to a teacher's kit. We often teach the differences between places and people, so it is wonderful to have a book that speaks so much to the heart of the place and what makes us Mallee people tick. The book never speaks with judgement but more quiet reverence to the people who left behind everything they knew to become a slave to the land on which they found themselves.

We often hear the phrase, 'the Mallee breeds em tough.' This book not only supports that but also gives a silent tip of the hat to the men and women over thousands of years who have called the Mallee home. It is a must read for every Australian.