River Dreams: The People and Landscape of the Cooks River by Ian Tyrrell [1]
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Judges' Comments

Ian Tyrrell’s *River Dreams* is a powerful story of the fortunes of the Cooks River in south-west Sydney. It traces the complex physical, social, cultural and economic interactions between the river, its valley and human beings. We see the rise and fall of a Victorian rural gentry who desired an Arcadian landscape, the slow suburbanisation of the locality from the 1850s and creeping industrialisation. Their impacts were disastrous.

The Cooks River became legendary as one of Australia’s most polluted and punished places. While parts of it have been repaired, it is now under threat from a new wave of suburbanisation, this time high-rise. In tracing the river’s constant ‘renovation’ — for better or for worse — Tyrrell’s book is both provocative and evocative. He draws creatively on traditional sources. And we are introduced to the ever-changing smells and sounds of the place over time.


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