

## **Top Bar Hives – Don McLean, May 2020**

In 2012 I completed a beekeeping course at GippsTAFE.

On the second night a guest instructor brought along a top bar hive. He talked of the benefits of this form of beekeeping.

I was contemplating beekeeping and did not have a hive at this time. The next day I sent off an email to a friend with bees, writing "had a chap speak on the top bar hive at the second training session and he says the top bar hive is the best one for the hobbyist if you do not want to move hives around - he had one at the session and we talked through every aspect we could think of - he has three and, while popular overseas, not many in this country yet"

As a woodworker I was hooked on the construction aspect of the hive and despite advice this was not the best way to get into beekeeping it was the direction I took.

A number of email exchanges followed with "Guest Instructor" and Club Member Keith Grey.

From there I proceeded with the great advice received from Keith to construct my first top bar hive (image below) using Cypress and recycled cedar. Have since changed the design and happy to provide comments in a further article on top bar beekeeping.

### **To Keith 31 August 2012**

Really enjoyed your session Tuesday night Keith helping Howard, there was heaps of info for students - the interview approach was great.

Am going to build a top bar hive and have info on construction - is there a specific site you have found best - I have downloaded the Chandler - How to Build pdf file.

I have ordered "The Barefoot Beekeeper"  
regards Don

### **From Keith 31 August 2012**

Hi Don,

I am glad you enjoyed the night...Howard & I certainly did.

My first TBH was made by a guy in return for me giving him beekeeping instruction and some bees. We are now good friends and he is going to make a Warre hive - another DIY hive worth looking at.

He made my hive from the Phil Chandler design. The guy who made it for me wasn't a beekeeper and made it out of marine ply. The bees I put in there went AWOL after three weeks - we think it was because of the chemicals in the marine ply. Beekeeping is about failures as well as successes. Then again what isn't!

However, I took this hive to the mens shed with the book, Barefoot Beekeeper, plus the other two articles above and we nussed out the design you saw on Wednesday Night.

Mark 1 of our design was about 1100mm long and had holes on both ends as well as on the side and had screws on the top bar as spaces. We decided to use untreated pine & waterproof it with as natural a finish as possible (75% linseed oil with 25 % beeswax).

Some people thought mark 1 was too long & bulky so we reduced it down to about 950mm. Mark 2. Mark 3 has a viewing window. The viewing window is an optional extra!

But in hindsight I wouldn't go shorter than 1100mm unless you take the honey out on a regular basis. Insufficient room = unnecessary swarming!

Last year we put some bees from a feral hive into my friends TBH and requeened it. Over several months, I had an enjoyable time inspecting this TBH and was amazed how docile the bees were!

Unfortunately, my friend who lives a very busy life did not check it regularly and the hive was attacked by black ants that finally killed the hive. The legs should be placed in a dish with an oil solution to stop black ants from annoying the small colony...once the hive is large enough ants don't seem to be a problem. Black ants are a major threat to young hives in Gippsland.

I hope the above is of some help.

Keep in Touch  
Regards  
Keith Grey

### **To Keith 3 September 2012**

Thanks for the info Keith - I am set to proceed in next few weeks and think cypress that I will machine to 19/20mm and construct an 1100mm model as you recommend.

Will chase down more info from the net and when my copy of The Barefoot Beekeeper arrives I will read from cover to cover.

Thanks again for your help  
Regards Don

### **From Keith 3 September 2012**

Thanks Don,

Cypress pine sounds good

Regards  
Keith

**To Keith 4 September 2012**

g'day Keith

The top bar model you brought along last week had a viewing section with Perspex on the inside of the unit and a door cover

Has there been any discussion on lining the insides of units with Perspex and having a viewing area with perhaps the additional benefit of making it easier to clear the sides when attending to the needs of the hive.

Regards Don

**From Keith 7 September 2012**

Hi Don,

Not that I know of. We put the viewing window in as a request from a customer.

There are mixed opinions re viewing windows...some people say they are just a gimmick. As long as the material is non toxic I think the idea is an added bonus.

The Warre TBH has a viewing window as part of part of its design.

Sorry I can't be of more help.

Regards Keith

**To Keith 7 September 2012**

Thanks for that Keith - I will do some searching to see if I can find anything further - if some have a viewing window I suspect the material is non toxic and could be used as a liner - I have enough to do the job

Regards Don

